

Newsletter 2000/01

Introduction

Welcome to the 2000/01 Local and Regional Government Research Programme Annual Newsletter. The Programme contributes research-based information for policy development and evaluation on the major elements of local government and regional governance such as the role and structure of local and regional government, democratic renewal, service delivery, management and finance. The programme has continued to expand since its start in 1988/89. The budget for 2000/01 is £1.25m.

This newsletter provides details of new projects to be commissioned in 2000/01 and an update on current projects and recent research findings. It also outlines a programme of longer-term research projects to be set up over the next 3-5 years.

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 opposite. This year, we will be reviewing 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

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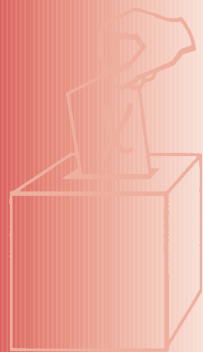
New projects for 2000/01 include:

- New approaches to participation and decision-making, service delivery and local strategic partnership
- Overall evaluation of the beacons councils initiative
- Developing learning from international experience of local government
- Evaluation of a sample of authorities adopting new political management arrangements and new ethical frameworks
- Review of Best Value 'User satisfaction performance indicators'
- Cross-cutting/well-being/community strategy performance indicators for the Best Value regime
- Measuring the impact of Best Value through: a PSA basket or baskets of national BVPIs; efficiency and unit costs; and, the scope and method for disaggregating Best Value PIs
- Long-term evaluation of the implementation of the Best Value regime
- New and innovative approaches to service delivery
- Evaluation of the Capital Challenge Scheme
- Citizens' perceptions of and understanding of council tax banding levels
- Links between the finance and non-finance elements of the local government modernisation agenda
- A new type of financial manager/director

continued overleaf



Service Quality



Participation



Finance



Management



Regions

New projects for 2000/01 include *(continued)*:

- Short and medium-term effects on expenditure of growth and decline in client populations
- Forecasting and managing capital and revenue funding streams
- Evaluation of the process by which asset management plans and corporate capital strategies are developed and implemented
- Analytical framework and data for an evaluation of reforms to local government capital and revenue finance systems
- Mapping of (sub)regional research activity
- Governance relationships at the regional and sub-regional level
- Overseas lessons for regional government
- Review of RDA evaluation and performance monitoring frameworks
- Mapping the availability, and use, of regional intelligence data

Medium and long term projects (3-5 years)

- Cohorts of individuals and businesses to provide longitudinal data on attitudes towards and understanding of local government
- National baseline surveys of aspects of local government policies
- Impact of central government upon the ability of local government to implement and deliver solutions to local problems on the ground
- Small-scale evaluation of the impact of the new ethical framework
- Evaluation of the new power to promote economic, social and environmental well-being
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of partnership working
- Evaluation of the operation and impact of a reformed capital allocation system (and related planning processes)
- Evaluation of a reformed revenue grant distribution system
- Evaluation of the operation and effectiveness of Regional Development Agencies

New Projects for 2000/01 and Medium/Long-Term Projects

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.

Governance in General

1. New approaches to participation and decision-making, service delivery and local strategic partnership

Expressions of interest are not required for this project

Public participation is at the heart of the future of local government. It spans the Best Value and service delivery, local decision-making (including local government finance), community strategy and neighbourhood renewal policy agendas. Research commissioned by LRGRU (*Enhancing Public Participation in Local Government*, De Montfort and Strathclyde Universities, DETR 1998) suggests that public participation is already an everyday element of local government practice. However, the test of whether local government initiatives are effective is whether citizens, at the local level, feel the council and services are responsive and accessible. Action research, jointly carried out with The National Consumer Council

will take up the opportunity to shadow and monitor/evaluate the activities of a small number of authorities as they develop from scratch new approaches to participation and decision-making, service delivery and local strategic partnership in specific neighbourhoods within their boundaries. The research would examine in-depth: how strong links can be established and maintained with the political and managerial processes of the authority; the lessons learnt from developing and implementing community participation action plans; best practice in building capacity for members, officers and citizens; and, in particular how the outcomes of public participation can be fed back into the decision-making processes of authorities.

A specific element of the study described above will consider in detail the efforts of authorities to increase participation and involvement by ethnic minorities, both in formal institutional structures and informal forums. The ethnic minority population is often viewed as an undifferentiated bloc having homogenous characteristics and problems. However, there are major differences along the lines of religion, culture, language and race between populations of different origin and, particularly with the Asian community, within populations. There have been relatively few studies of ethnic minority political participation and a qualitative exercise in this area might

be timely. Research might look specifically at the issues involved in attracting the participation of ethnic minority groups in local elections, in public meetings and other forms of consultation, and to stand as councillors.

2. Overall evaluation of the beacons councils initiative

Expressions of interest are not required for this project

Further research will be needed this year to support the selection of beacon councils following the decision on themes for the second round. An overall evaluation of the beacons councils initiative will also need to be set up this year to assess the breadth and effect of good practice disseminated by beacon councils and the impact of the scheme in terms of possible improvements in service delivery on participating authorities. Questions to be addressed include: who is coming to events and the reasons why others are not, how successful are events at sharing learning and developing thinking about best practice and have participants implemented any lessons learnt in their own authorities? If changes have been introduced based upon what has been learnt from beacons, how successful and sustainable are those changes and what other development activities are being considered? As was the case last year, it is proposed to undertake this work jointly with the IDeA and, subject to the outcome of a feasibility study, select a group of local authorities (including participants and non-participants in the scheme) to monitor and evaluate over a long-term timeframe.

3. Cohorts of individuals and businesses to provide longitudinal data on attitudes towards and understanding of local government

As part of monitoring and evaluating the pace and extent of change within local government, it would be worthwhile setting up cohorts of individuals and businesses to provide longitudinal data on attitudes towards and understanding of local government. The data collected need not be solely quantitative but could be qualitative in nature as well to explore in-depth the reasons behind people's views on service delivery, participation, finance and councillors. Periodic small-scale telephone surveys could be accompanied by in-depth interviews and focus groups. Given that the programme has just completed two large-scale surveys of citizen and business attitudes towards local government, it may be possible to identify samples for these cohorts from these databases. Alternatively, omnibus surveys or the People's Panel may provide another source.

4. National baseline surveys of aspects of local government policies

In recent years, the research programme has commissioned several important national baseline surveys of aspects of local government policies, including public participation, partnership working, voting and electoral procedures, innovation and best practice, characteristics of councillors and attitudes towards and understanding of local government. In order to track and measure change, it will be important to periodically repeat these surveys to provide a reasonably robust database over time. Such surveys need not always follow up LRGRU research.

5. Impact of central government upon the ability of local government to implement and deliver solutions to local problems on the ground

Long-term research is needed on the impact of central government upon the ability of local government to implement and deliver solutions to local problems on the ground, not just at the specific neighbourhood level but at the strategic, authority-wide level as well. The final report for PAT17 calls for a more '... sensible national framework leaving room for local creativity and innovation'. For example, in relation to mechanisms for distributing resources to avoid problems created by tensions between targeted programmes and general expenditure support, and to prevent funding and policy rigidities which create difficulties for partnership and joined-up working. Research is needed to regularly feed back lessons to central government about the overall impact of its policy design and delivery at the local level. This research would follow up the PIU study on the role of central government at regional and local level.

Democratic Renewal

6. Developing learning from international experience of local government

There are currently two projects in the local and regional government research programme that are seeking to obtain potential lessons from approaches in other countries towards political management arrangements and other aspects of democratic renewal. This research is being funded jointly with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum examining key local government reform experiences in selected Commonwealth countries, and a study of experimentation in local government where greater freedoms have been given to local administrations to pursue specific local solutions. As part of developing learning from international experience of local government e.g. councillor representativeness, specific approaches and issues surrounding the separation of the executive function and ethical frameworks, it would be worthwhile adding a small-scale, call-off contract or project to these studies which could produce specific papers from reviews of literature and study-visits.

7. Evaluation of a sample of authorities adopting new political management arrangements and new ethical frameworks

Royal assent on the Bill for new political management arrangements is anticipated by Summer 2000 with the first councils adopting new structures in late 2000/early 2001 and all councils by, roughly, 2002. A full-scale, long-term evaluation of a sample of authorities adopting new political management arrangements and new ethical frameworks is required so that lessons from the new arrangements adopted can be shared with other authorities and an assessment can be made of the impact of the new approaches in terms of improved leadership, clarity and efficiency in decision-making, and improved transparency and local accountability. Also, consideration needs to be given to the operation and effectiveness of: checks and balances within new political arrangements.

cross-cutting portfolios; officer support and linkages with other aspects of the modern local government agenda. Central to the successful operation of new arrangements will be new roles for councillors, in particular:

- The overview and scrutiny role for non-executive councillors and how this function might affect every aspect of the council's business from Best Value in service delivery to medium and long-term financial planning.
- The role of councillors in representing local people, specifically in relation to area based decision making and the involvement of voluntary groups and business.

In order to conduct such an evaluation, it is likely that a 'consortium' of local authorities will need to be identified that can be tracked over a 3-5 year period. The first phase would involve a baseline evaluation to provide the basis for measuring change. An evaluatory framework for assessing new forms of political management is currently being developed by INLOGOV, University of Birmingham, as part of this year's research programme.

Management Issues

8. Small-scale evaluation of the impact of the new ethical framework

Research is being carried out in this year's programme on ethical arrangements within local government as part of a project on current and changing political management arrangements being carried out by INLOGOV. In particular, it is looking at the nature and extent of existing arrangements within a small sample of case-study authorities to ensure high standards of conduct from both members and officers, and any linkages made with new political arrangements. Royal assent on the Bill containing proposals for a new ethical framework – independent Standards Board and standards committees for all councils, plus a Model Code of conduct for councillors – is expected by summer 2000. Once these codes and new institutional structures have been put in place, and have been in operation for some time (possibly by beginning 2002), it would be worthwhile setting up a small-scale evaluation of the impact of the new ethical framework upon standards of conduct within local authorities.

9. Evaluation of the new power to promote economic, social and environmental well-being

The current Bill will also provide local authorities with a new power to promote economic, social and environmental well-being. Evaluation of the power of well-being and the creation and implementation of community strategies can be supported through relatively small-scale, long-term monitoring of how a sample of local authorities are using the new power, their approaches to community leadership and regular reviews of their perceptions of the constraints of the legislative framework surrounding local government. Results and data from Best Value, beacon councils and cross-cutting research studies can also feed into this evaluation.

Service Delivery

10. Review of Best Value 'User satisfaction performance indicators'

Expressions of interest are not required for this project

The Department has published questions and basic survey guidance for local authorities to collect data on what have been termed 'user satisfaction performance indicators'. Research will be needed to pilot these questions in advance so that any problems are ironed out before their use in the field. Then in late 2000/early 2001, once all of the local authorities have carried out surveys, research should be commissioned to look at any weaknesses of the questionnaire, guidance and method. This research/consultation exercise would be undertaken for at least the general survey, planning survey and possibly the housing survey.

11. Cross-cutting/well-being/community strategy performance indicators for the Best Value regime

Research is needed to look at how local authorities are approaching the development of local PIs, how performance against these and national PIs is disseminated, both internally and externally, how it is used by officers and elected members to develop responses to poor performance and how local PIs actually perform as a means of accountability to local people and whether local people have different concerns and priorities. It is also envisaged that within this project there would be scope for some conceptual research on cross-cutting/well-being/community strategy performance indicators for the Best Value regime. There is a need to develop indicators for cross-cutting issues, of which effective working through community strategies to tackle economic, social and environmental well-being would seem to be one. As would be the need to identify performance indicators for other forms of partnership working and to measure the potential impact of joined-up working, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods.

12. Measuring the impact of Best Value through: a PSA basket or baskets of national BVPIs; efficiency and unit costs; and, the scope and method for disaggregating Best Value PIs

Further work is required on measuring the impact of Best Value through:

- Basic econometric analysis to inform the development of an analytical framework for a PSA basket or baskets of national BVPIs on service costs and quality, efficiency and public satisfaction. This analysis could also be supported by practical advice on how to receive, prepare, store and present these data in a simple and readable format for a variety of audiences.
- Desk research on definitions of efficiency and unit costs that could be applied in the Best Value context and how to measure these in a relatively simple and cost-effective way. This research could also start with a review of research data and literature on the relationship between levels of expenditure, unit costs and performance in service delivery.

- An analysis of the scope and method for disaggregating Best Value PIs down to the neighbourhood level and the best way of setting targets for the most deprived neighbourhoods in a practical and cost-effective way.

13. Long-term evaluation of the implementation of the Best Value regime

The statutory duty of Best Value came into effect for all authorities on 1 April 2000. This year's research programme would, therefore, be an appropriate time to put in place a full-scale, long-term evaluation of the implementation of the Best Value regime – to evaluate the processes by which it is being delivered in local authorities, and whether these are in line with the objectives for the policy, and to evaluate its impact as a means of improving relevance, quality and cost-effectiveness and the responsiveness and customer-focus of all activities. In particular, the emphasis will be upon the measurement of outputs and outcomes from the implementation of the Best Value framework.

In order to conduct such an evaluation, it will be necessary to identify a consortium of authorities to track over a 3-5 year period with regular reporting on their successes and failures, and an overall assessment of the impact of Best Value upon their activities. Such a consortium could exchange learning and lessons both internally and externally to the wider local government community. The researchers appointed to carry out the evaluation would probably be commissioned on a call-off contract basis. The contract would contain core process and impact evaluation activities but could also leave room for non-core analysis, papers and research to be carried out with the consortium as required.

14. New and innovative approaches to service delivery

A research project is needed to investigate in-depth new and innovative approaches to service delivery being developed in other public sector organisations and agencies and in the private sector, from which useful lessons and comparisons might be drawn for local government. For example, the use of e-commerce within service delivery and the procurement of goods and services, and the strategic role and development of outsourcing. At this stage, it is not clear whether this can be achieved through a review of published and unpublished literature on such initiatives or whether case-study visits will also be required. This will need to be clarified as part of a two-stage project aimed at gathering intelligence and background information on emerging approaches across sectors

15. Evaluation of the effectiveness of partnership working

Further developmental work is required to produce a more rigorous and universally accepted methodology for analysing the effectiveness of partnership working, its costs and benefits. It is also clear that local government is at the early stages of developing approaches to partnership working and adapting current structures of service delivery, financial planning and decision-making to its

demands. In the long-term, research will be required to evaluate the impact of partnership working upon all aspects of local government. In the meantime, whilst it is unlikely that the Department's current research on partnership working being carried out by Newchurch and Co. will provide the complete answer to this issue, it is part of the brief for the project. It might be worthwhile, therefore, waiting upon the outputs from that study and the commission IPPR have started on partnership working before thinking about setting up any new research.

Local Government Finance

16. Evaluation of the Capital Challenge Scheme

By April 2000 successful Capital Challenge authorities will be completing their three year programmes. Before valuable lessons are lost, it will be worthwhile carrying out a small-scale process and impact evaluation of the schemes they set up. The evaluation will seek to establish how well local authorities delivered their plans; what problems had typically occurred; whether partnerships worked as promised; whether private sector leverage was delivered; how useful the 'capital strategy' proved – had it been forgotten or adapted or was it now part of the council's framework for decision-making? What had been the role and effectiveness of Government Offices (GOs) in encouraging partnerships to achieve a corporate strategy towards their delivery plans, and had this led to greater emphasis on cross-cutting issues and working in local government?

17. Citizens' perceptions of and understanding of council tax banding levels

A small-scale research project is required to provide backcloth data on citizens' perceptions of and understanding of council tax banding levels. A set of questions investigating views on the number, range and width of bands will be designed and inserted into an omnibus survey such as the Survey of English Housing or other regular surveys run by the ONS and other research organisations. Data from these questions can then be analysed in-house.

18. Links between the finance and non-finance elements of the local government modernisation agenda

Research is needed to address the links between the finance and non-finance elements of the local government modernisation agenda. A round-table discussion has been held, involving researchers and policy-makers, to discuss this issue. There may be several strands of work that flow from this round-table discussion. One piece of research that will be required, however, is a review of research and literature on the extent to which there are clear links, if any, between revenue and capital funding and service standards. This could also cover the related issue of how differences between well-funded and poorly-funded authorities or significant increases or decreases in funding for authorities might manifest themselves in service quality and efficiency, Council Tax levels, the range of discretionary services provided or the quality of core services.

19. A new type of financial manager/director

Over the next 5-10 years, a new type of financial manager/director will have to emerge within local government. New skills and competencies will be required, for example, to handle different accounting frameworks, a more long-term approach to financial planning and aligning it with service planning and greater freedoms for the better performing councils. Good practice research to support this transition might be needed.

20. Short and medium-term effects on expenditure of growth and decline in client populations

A research project is required looking at the short and medium-term effects on expenditure of growth and decline in client populations. At present, a simple assumption is made within SSA calculations that there is a proportionate change in costs in response to a change in client numbers. Depending upon data availability, it may be possible to refine this assumption by, not only looking at the relationship between population change and expenditure across an authority, but also at uneven growth or decline in different parts of an authority – this may give rise to similar costs if, for example, spare capacity at one end of a county is of little help in offsetting the costs of growth at the other end. It is proposed to commission a scoping study to examine what data exists on this issue and the kinds of statistical analysis that might be required.

21. Forecasting and managing capital and revenue funding streams

There will be a longer-term approach to, and greater predictability in, the revenue grant distribution and capital finance systems, a research project is needed to look at various aspects of how local government might manage greater certainty, ensuring less risk and more scope for forecasting in planning expenditure including:

- Annual forecasting of capital expenditure: how effective are local authorities at monitoring and managing planned expenditure profiles and avoiding pressures to skew expenditure towards quarters three and four?
- What kinds of confidence limits do authorities place upon their anticipated annual and longer-term e.g. 3 yr., projected expenditure? How effective are they at setting confidence limits and what systems have been (and might be) developed to manage greater certainty, for example, in levels of targeted funding or changes in revenue grant allocation totals, at corporate and departmental levels?
- What methods are, and might be, used in local government to try to predict future revenue and capital funding streams and what, if any, policy decisions are made based upon these objectives?

22. Evaluation of the process by which asset management plans and corporate capital strategies are developed and implemented

Research commissioned by the Department last year examined the nature and extent of asset management in

local authorities. The research highlighted the fact that in many authorities their property management arrangements make effective strategic asset management difficult to achieve. Part of the allocation under the 'single pot' will be based on assessments of authorities' performance in managing their assets, taking into account authorities' cross-service capital strategies and Asset Management Plans. It is expected that all authorities will have produced and started to implement asset management plans and corporate capital strategies by 2001/02. In the short-term, there is a need for an evaluation of the process by which asset management plans and corporate capital strategies are developed and implemented in a small sample of local authorities. This could then be followed by an evaluation of their impact upon the efficiency and effectiveness with which these local authorities manage their property and other capital resources. The research would not only inform other authorities as they develop their approaches, but also inform Departmental guidance on asset management and capital strategies.

23. Analytical framework and data for an evaluation of reforms to local government capital and revenue finance systems

In preparation for the two long-term evaluations "Evaluation of the operation and impact of a reformed capital allocation system (and related planning processes)" and "Review of the revenue grant distribution system", a research project needs to be commissioned which has two key elements as follows:

- A feasibility study to provide an analytical framework and data for the evaluation programmes, through, amongst other things, identifying currently available baseline information and any gaps in the information needed. Current baseline data includes the research completed this year on Local Government Perspectives in relation to the Revenue Grant Distribution System (the 'Opinion' survey) and the research on local authority asset management arrangements carried out by DTZ Peda Consulting. Also, further qualitative baseline information is needed in order to fully consider how decisions on revenue and capital finance expenditure are presently made in local government: the current role of finance in local authority plans; the degree of cross-departmental working, strategic thinking and long term planning; the assessment of need across the authority and the ability to prioritise.
- A small-scale set of pilots to test some of the proposed reforms in a selected group of authorities so that operational lessons can be learned and any potential problems ironed out. For example, what new and desirable skills, methods and structures would need to be in place in local authorities to meet the requirements of reformed capital finance and revenue grant distribution systems.

24. Evaluation of the operation and impact of a reformed capital allocation system (and related planning processes)

In the long-term, an evaluation of the operation and

impact of a reformed capital allocation system (and related planning processes) will be required. At present authorities are constrained in terms of how they spend capital finance, in which service areas and what on. Under the new 'single pot' allocation system allocations would be based in part on a central government judgement of need and part on an assessment of each authority's performance in managing its assets. Research, building on the above-mentioned analytical framework, could consider the introduction of greater flexibility and freedoms. The 'single pot' should allow more freedom to focus expenditure on priority areas within an authority at the expense of others in the short and medium term. The new system should also improve the efficiency and effectiveness of strategic asset management and capital planning and encourage a more cross-cutting approach to expenditure. Evaluation of the 'single pot' would, however, need to be set within the context of a broader evaluation of the impact of longer-term capital finance reform to dispense with the statutory requirement that authorities seek credit approvals from the Government and introduce prudential indicators in their place. Potential effects include an increase in total capital investments through, amongst other things, local authorities having greater freedoms to promote schemes, such as waste management and leisure facilities, which may be important locally, but are not currently eligible for supplementary credit approvals.

25. Evaluation of a reformed revenue grant distribution system

The review of the revenue grant distribution system plans to produce a consultation paper in the Summer outlining options for reform. Following this, and the debate there would be about the practicalities of different proposals, it is unlikely that any reforms would come into effect much before 2002/03, and possibly 2003/04. Any new system will need to be evaluated in the long-term to assess how well it meets intended objectives of greater predictability, transparency and fairness, and to see how well it is bedding down, including any unintended effects

Regional Governance

26. Mapping of (sub)regional research activity

Expressions of interest are not required for this project

The 'rebirth' of the regional agenda since the last election has led to a flurry of research and commentary surrounding the scope for, form of and impact arising from, regional and sub-regional policies and administrative structures. In addition, it is evident that there is legacy of research and government enquiry – dating from the 1970s and earlier – which may have resonance with and lessons for the policy issues, which are currently under discussion across central government and beyond.

A literature review provides the opportunity for the 'mapping' of this research, to explore the key messages and lessons that emerge from it, and identify the research gaps that remain. It would build upon the existing reviews that have been undertaken by the Unit, which explored

the body of research concerning the rationale for, and potential form and remit of, regional government in England. The research would want to include reviews of a number of conceptual and empirical bodies of work, including, *inter alia*, those relating to:

- Regional boundaries and regional identity
- Regional governance, inter-governmental relations, and democratic accountability
- The (future) role and effectiveness of regional governance structures, including RDAs, GORs, regional agencies (quangos, NDPBs) and voluntary regional chambers
- Inter-regional disparities, transfers and transparency of policy impacts
- Impacts of regional structures on partnership working and (joined-up) policy making
- Constitutional, legal, administrative and resource implications of moves towards regional government.

The review would want to include research that examines both the inter-regional and national perspective as well as the context within individual regions. It would include a review of research commissioned across government, through major research funders (including the ESRC, the Leverhulme Trust, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation), through academic and policy research organisations, and through regional thinktanks and intelligence units.

27. Governance relationships at the regional and sub-regional level

Governance structures within the English regions have recently undergone significant change, embodied within the introduction, alongside existing GORs, of RDAs, voluntary regional chambers and embryonic regional assemblies. In addition, there remains a density of regional decision-making across the public and quasi-public sectors, with a diversity of (sub)regional structures and roles. The emerging structures have led to questions about the 'value-added' of additional organisational arrangements, and the extent to which existing structures might foster (or, indeed, hinder) effective policy responses. Alongside these debates about the administrative structures and relationships within the regions, there are additional changes underway in the role, and organisation, of central government within the regions, in the wake of the Performance & Innovation Unit 'Reaching Out' report, (February 2000).

A research project provides scope for an examination of the emergent baseline relationships between sub-regional and regional organisations, within all or some regions, to both assess the extent to which governance within individual regions might be deemed effective, as well as to inform the decisions concerning central government activities within the regions. The research would provide an opportunity to explore the nature and form of these networks of relationships from a number of perspectives, including:

- policy coherence and the degree of 'embeddedness' (or joining-up) of policy activity

- notions of openness, accountability and patterns of influence
- partnership working with, and ownership by, local and regional stakeholders and the wider community
- relationships with central government and their implications for policy design and management, and departmental co-ordination
- relationships with, and notions of accountability to, local government, especially two-tier local government
- the implications of new forms of delivery vehicles (e.g. Learning and Skills Councils; Small Business Service) for policy activity at the regional level.

28. Overseas lessons for regional government

The current government was elected on a manifesto commitment to introduce elected regional government where there was a demand to do so, and has set in place a programme of devolution and regional decentralisation. In any proposals for moving towards a system of regional government, a number of questions emerge about the process of change, the powers and scope of new structures, and the implications of their creation both nationally and regionally.

The research would build upon preliminary work undertaken within the LRGRU, which explored the nature of, and lessons from, overseas regional governance across western and central Europe. This research revealed the wide variety of approaches to, and forms of, regional government within Europe. This work concluded that there was no 'blueprint' or single model for those examining the options for regional government within England.

It is clear, however, that a review of the experiences of other countries may serve to draw out useful lessons for regional governance (in its widest sense) in England. It is envisaged that this research would primarily comprise of a review of published and unpublished material relating to the development and operation of regional structures within specific countries. The research would also need to include interviews with overseas researchers and policy makers in order to probe the political and administrative context of regional government within individual countries, and the transferability of any lessons which emerge. It would need to cover, but go beyond, the relatively well-researched experiences of Western Europe, to consider, in particular, Australasia and the recent trends towards regionalisation across central Europe. The review would need to examine the context for, and nature of, regional government, including:

- Constitutional and legal frameworks for regional government
- Distribution of functions
- Relationships of accountability
- Levels of autonomy
- Processes of evolution, (including financial

implications) and the political, economic and social effects of its introduction

- Notions of regional identity and their implications for delineating boundaries and functions, and engendering support.

29. Review of RDA evaluation and performance monitoring frameworks

The creation of new forms of governance inevitably focuses attention upon their performance, and the extent to which their activities might be considered to represent an effective and efficient use of resources. The creation of the RDAs in April 1999 saw the introduction by central government of an interim performance monitoring framework, in order to identify the impact on the region both of the RDA itself and the programmes and projects it oversees. In addition, the RDAs have been charged with developing their own monitoring frameworks for measurement and evaluation of their activities, in relation to the aims and objectives set down within their strategies.

The interim performance monitoring framework developed centrally – as set down within the Corporate Planning Guidance – incorporates five groups of performance indicators relating to both regional performance (state of the region indicators, and RDA activity indicators), and operational objectives, (strategic activities; programme activities and efficiency activities). Of the first group – those relating to regional performance – a core group of indicators have been prescribed by central government, whilst RDAs are encouraged to develop their own indicators to reflect the particular features of their region.

The core group of indicators chosen by central government seek to capture key aspects of the RDA performance. They include a series of headline measures, including GDP per head and proportion of development on reused land. Operational objectives relate to the internal organisation of RDAs, achievements of inherited programme spending, and their strategic 'value-added'. However, the choice of indicators was inevitably primarily based on the availability of data rather than their direct relevance, and RDAs (and beyond) continue to question their utility.

Questions also exist in relation to the monitoring frameworks being developed by RDAs themselves. The methodologies for developing approaches to monitoring – of identifying outputs and outcomes directly related to objectives, and establishing robust and reliable data collation and analysis – are embryonic. There is recognition, both amongst RDAs and central government, that access to expertise and advice is necessary, and that sharing of good practice amongst each other would be valuable.

This research project provides an opportunity to examine the interim RDA monitoring frameworks established both centrally and by the RDAs themselves, and assess the extent to which they are rigorous and appropriate. Taking a broad perspective of the framework, it would need to identify whether:

- the proposed indicators are appropriate
- whether there are robust or timely alternatives which more satisfactorily relate to the activities of the RDAs (particularly cross-cutting areas of policy)
- the extent, and form, of any obstacles to providing performance data
- the need for additional data collation centrally or regionally
- the activities of the RDA might be separated from wider contextual issues and the activities of other agencies in the analysis of data
- RDAs have developed monitoring frameworks which could be considered innovative, or to constitute good practice.

30. Mapping the availability, and use, of regional intelligence data

Data availability at the regional level has not been well developed to date, owing to the plethora of different boundaries used by regional forms of administration, and the lack of any commitment to the development of additional forms of regional governance. The creation of the RDAs and voluntary regional chambers has highlighted this weakness, and led to increased calls for more disaggregate forms of data which allow comparison of the socio-economic context within each of the regions, and the extent to which policy activities are arresting inter-regional disparities.

The result of this weakness in regional data availability has led to agreement to create a Regional Information Unit (RIU) within the Department. It is the intention that this research project would undertake the baseline data 'mapping' for the RIU, and provide recommendations concerning existing data availability (and gaps and duplication) and the need and opportunity for collating additional data, both for central government and regional bodies including the RDAs. In doing so, the research would look beyond data collated centrally, to include that which is collected, for example, through local authorities, NDPBs, or NGOs, GORs or regional intelligence units and observatories.

The research would provide scope to feed into cross-government policy decisions incorporating regional levels of disaggregation into existing data collation, thereby highlighting the need for additional survey areas and questions. This piece of research should consider a wide set of questions relating to the use of existing, and potential, sources of data at the regional level, including:

- The existing sources of (local, regional, national) data available for regional analysis
- The purpose of different datasets
- The extent of collaboration for collation and analysis of data, between regional organisations and (sub)regional stakeholders
- The robustness, and timeliness, of existing sources of regional data

- Other sources of data which may offer useful information at a regional level.

31. Evaluation of the operation and effectiveness of Regional Development Agencies

The eight RDAs began operating in April 1999, and were charged primarily with improving their regions' economic performance and competitiveness. In exercising their statutory functions, the RDAs were required to formulate a credible and appropriate strategy for their region and develop a series of action plans setting down the approach to, and timescale for, implementation of this strategy.

RDAs are primarily strategic bodies. Their resources and direct powers for intervention are limited. Each sits within a network of regional and sub-regional organisations, spanning the private, public and voluntary sectors, each of which has different priorities and varying strategic and operational powers and capabilities. RDAs need not only demonstrate success in improving economic conditions within the regions, and addressing market failures preventing sustainable economic development, but develop a strategic focus and 'value-added' status amongst the plethora of priorities and stakeholders within each region.

This research would enable both the strategic and operational effectiveness of RDAs to be assessed. It would build upon the findings from the current research projects commissioned by the Department into (a) the form and extent of partnership working by the RDAs and (b) the content of RDA strategies and action plans, and the extent to which they represent coherent policies at the intra- and inter-regional level. In assessing effectiveness, the research needs to consider the following:

- the effectiveness of RDAs in delivering the outputs laid down within their strategies and action plans
- the form of networks which the RDAs have fostered in order to develop and deliver their strategies and action plans
- the nature of those relationships – the degree of accountability, leverage and strategic focus
- assessment of the 'value-added' of the RDAs, and their role in policy 'coherence' within a region
- the relationship between the RES, action plans and corporate plans within individual regions, and the degree of integration with external strategies
- the collective contribution of RDAs to ameliorating inter-regional economic disparities and the achievement of national policies.

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 short-list, 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 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.

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.

Publication 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 and regional 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.

Summary of Current and Recently Completed Projects

This section describes a selection of 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 in 2000/01.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES IN GENERAL

Joined-up strategies for tackling social exclusion

Research undertaken by the LRGRU examined the extent of, and approach to, integrated strategies to tackle social exclusion amongst local authorities, in order to obtain a better understanding of what constitutes *practice* amongst local authorities and, by association, identification of those aspects which appear to be successful and represent transferable lessons. Through a sample postal survey of local authorities, and interviews with a number of case study authorities, the research explored: the organisational and planning structures adopted by local authorities; the nature of priorities and action plans; the form and nature of partnership working across organisations and across service areas; geographical area-based forms of working; bending of mainstream resources, and the utilisation of data to identify the nature of social exclusion and as a mechanism for providing more responsive and targeted service planning and delivery. *The research has been published in the Policy Action Team 17 companion research volume in April 2000.*

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A full-scale review of literature and research on local action to tackle social exclusion

This was written by Professor Murray Stewart of the Cities Research Centre, University of the West of England. It consists of a full-scale review of published and unpublished research and literature in the UK and the rest of Europe on local action to tackle social exclusion. Interviews and discussions were also held with a number of research teams active in areas related to social exclusion and with professional staff in the UK and other European countries, including France, Denmark, the Netherlands and Ireland. The report addresses a wide range of issues, including the history of area-based regeneration, local strategic planning, partnership working, the role of the private sector, community capacity and social entrepreneurs and the role of front-

line staff. A summary of the findings and full report has been published in the Policy Action Team 17 companion research volume in April 2000.

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Guidance to local practitioners on diagnostic frameworks to analyse and overcome barriers to effective joint working

This report, written by the Office for Public Management and the University of the West of England, presents the issues that emerged from three local workshops held, under the auspices of PAT 17, in Nottingham, Birmingham and Bradford. They explored a series of aspects of partnership working in practice – drawing upon the experience and knowledge of a wide range of practitioners on the ground and members of PAT 17. The report also describes a number of alternative analytical frameworks and processes for helping local practitioners and others consider ways of achieving effective joined-up working for themselves, including the whole systems model developed by UWE/OPM, David Wilkinson and Elaine Applebee of C2M, Bradford, the Kings Fund and INLOGOV at the University of Birmingham. A copy of this report has been published in the Policy Action Team 17 companion research volume in April 2000.

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Baseline papers for beacon councils

Research was commissioned jointly with the IDeA to help inform the selection process for awarding beacon council status to local authorities under each of the seven themes covered by the first round:

- Community safety – preventing crime and disorder in local town and shopping centres
- Education – helping to raise standards by tackling school failure
- Housing – improving housing maintenance
- Modernising planning – streamlining planning decisions for business
- Modernising Service Delivery – improving housing and council tax benefit administration
- Social services – helping care leavers
- Sustainable development – getting rid of waste.

Reports on these pieces of research were published in December last year on the Local and Regional Government's website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>

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DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Evaluating New Forms of Political Management
INLOGOV, at the University of Birmingham, were jointly commissioned by the DETR and IDeA to carry out research focussing on pre-legislation experimentation in political management arrangements within a study group

of six local authorities. The outputs of this study will complement other documents produced by the Department aimed at assisting authorities in the movement to new constitutions, as set out in the Local Government Bill. A research report and an evaluation guide will be published by the IDeA in mid-April.

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Turnout at Local Government Elections

Plymouth University (LGC Elections Centre) and Maxwell Stamp plc were commissioned to: investigate current local level initiatives and practices to enhance electoral registration and participation; investigate the impact of a range of structural, socio-economic and political variables on voter turnout; review evidence from overseas. The researchers employed a variety of research approaches including a questionnaire survey, case studies and detailed statistical analysis. Among other things, the research provides an important baseline against which future studies might assess the influence of new electoral procedures. The research report was published in April 2000.

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Commonwealth Local Government Forum

The Department has been acting as a contributory funder in a research project 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 have been the 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.

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MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Law relating to local government

As part of the 99/2000 programme, the Faculty of Law and INLOGOV at the University of Birmingham and two members of 40, King Street Chambers, Manchester have been commissioned to carry out research involving a review of the current legislative framework and case-studies where the vires of authorities actions has been questioned. The purpose of the research is to help inform thinking on the framework of the new power to power to promote economic, social and environmental well-being. This research is due to be completed by early Spring this year with the intention of publishing the final report shortly afterwards.

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Review of local authority statutory and non statutory service and policy planning requirements

Recent emphasis upon joined-up working driven by the local government modernisation agenda, has added fuel to the growing debate about the number, nature and extent of centrally required plans and strategies. In view of this, research was recently commenced by the LRGRU to review the current planning requirements for (existing and proposed) service and policy plans, assessing the scope for, and implications of streamlining, and to identify existing examples of innovation at the local level. The project will examine the aims and scope of the plans, and the processes of production outlined in legislation and guidance, through an in-depth documentary review, accompanied by interviews across government departments focusing upon perceptions of the purpose and utility of individual plans. Stage two of the research includes a sample of interviews with case study local authorities and partner agencies, to explore the implications for streamlining and drawing out innovative lessons from the local level. *It is anticipated that the first stage of the research will be completed by April 2000 and the final report by the summer.*

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"Innovation and best practice in local government" and "Innovation in local government: – a good practice guide"

INLOGOV at the University of Birmingham undertook research on Innovation and best practice within local government. The main objective of the research was to identify the conditions which give rise to successful innovation in local authorities, and to explore how best these might be sustained and replicated more widely. The first report covers a range of issues which can be summarised as:

- Perspectives on Innovation and Best Practice
- Patterns of Innovation in Local Government
- External Drivers of Innovation in Local Government
- Internal Drivers of Innovation in Local Government
- Managing the Innovation Process
- Managing Strategic Patterns of Innovation
- Dissemination, Innovation and Best Practice

The second report concentrates on lessons learnt from innovations in local government and includes a good practice section covering issues such as: Understanding Innovation; Managing the Innovation Process; Managing Strategic Patterns of Innovation; and, tips for Putting the Guidance into Practice.

Both reports are based on the results of a survey of local authorities in England and a series of in-depth interviews with several local authority officers and members from 12 local authorities.

Both reports are scheduled to be published in Spring 2000.

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SERVICE DELIVERY

Interim Evaluation of the Best Value Pilots programme

This evaluation is being undertaken by a team based in the Local Government Centre at Warwick Business School. This major research report provides an interim evaluation of the English Best Value pilot programme and the activities of three pilots in Wales. It highlights the main lessons for local and central government that have emerged during the first year of the piloting process, including important messages for elected members, managers and front-line staff. It draws upon a wide range of interviews with those involved in the pilot initiatives and detailed monitoring and evaluation of the activities of the pilot authorities. *The research report plus good practice examples of achievements by the pilots were published in November last year.*

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Research on local authority partnership working for service delivery

This programme of research is being undertaken by Newchurch & Company and has four main objectives: to identify the lessons from existing partnerships; to provide information on the range of partnership working possibilities; to assist the DETR in encouraging and developing local authority partnership working; and to highlight opportunities available and spread good practice. Key elements of the Research Programme include: a literature review; a postal survey of all local authorities in England looking at a range of issues, including the type of partnership, the factors which lead authorities and their partners to be involved in partnerships and the sources of partnership funding; case studies involving a mapping exercise in ten authorities followed by six detailed case studies; an evaluation of the Best Value Partnership Networks. Each partnership network will be evaluated at the baseline, after year one (interim) and after year two (final); and, lastly, a series of workshops and seminars on the differing aspects of the research. *Seven working reports from the research were published in November last year.*

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Lessons learnt from intervention

The Department commissioned KPMG to examine the lessons learnt from previous experience of intervention to inform thinking on the new intervention powers contained in the Local Government Act 1999. The research involved a literature review and case-studies to explore the effects of self-review; self improvement; audit and inspection; execution and monitoring of action plans; specific triggers for intervention; and, direct intervention. *The literature review and case-studies were published under separate cover in November last year*

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Best Value Performance Plans: Practice and Procedures

As input into the Department's development of secondary Best Value legislation and guidance, the LRGRU undertook research, during Spring 1999, into the experiences of local authorities who had produced early Best Value Performance Plans. Using a sample of eight case study authorities, the research had three key aims: provision of an account of the strategic decisions surrounding content, form and presentation of BVPPs, a content analysis of BVPPs, and identification of overarching lessons for other local authorities. The research revealed a number of key messages, including the integral relationship between the plan and the processes (the 'BV infrastructure') underpinning it and the vital role of political and managerial leadership in providing the process with drive and rigour. *The report was published, on the DETR website, in November 1999.*

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Local Government Procurement and Commissioning

To date, this research has involved a literature review of local government procurement and commissioning skills and practices. It looks at the current situation, areas in need of improvement and characteristics of good practice. It also draws on information from central government, other public sector organisations and agencies, the private sector and examples of overseas experience. The review is based upon information taken from published articles, guidance and research, as well as unpublished material provided by local authorities themselves. The purpose of the review was to raise awareness of these issues and to provide a supporting working tool for those involved in policy work in this area. The report contributes to a wider programme of research involving more in-depth case-studies of approaches by local authorities towards procurement and commissioning and, potentially, a national survey of corporate and departmental officers involved with procurement. *It is anticipated that reports from this work will be made available later in the year.*

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FINANCE

Research on the Revenue Grant Distribution System

During 1999 and early 2000 the Review of Revenue Grant Distribution has investigated alternative approaches to the method of distributing grant. A key part of the methodology comprised information gathering through two major programmes of research:

- an opinion survey of local government carried out by ORC International examining attitudes and perspectives of local authorities, and their members and officers, on the revenue grant distribution system. The report of the survey has now been published, following telephone interviews with some 1,850 council members and officers, and questionnaires to all English local authorities¹.

- research by PricewaterhouseCoopers into overseas systems to see if there are comparative lessons from approaches and developments in revenue grant distribution in other countries. PricewaterhouseCoopers initially prepared summaries of nineteen OECD countries. Eight of these countries were selected for in-depth study. Visits were then made to Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Sweden to investigate the systems in more detail and to discuss key features of interest with central and local government representatives².

This has been published on the Local and Regional Government Research Unit's website:
<http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>

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Measuring Performance in the Management of Local Authority Property

DTZ Pinda Consulting, undertook a review, through a survey and 20 detailed case studies, of asset management in local government. The study found that where authority-wide objectives for assets are used they tend to be implicit, not necessarily shared, and where they are explicitly used, they are often not specific and measurable. The research informs the development of the 'single pot' capital allocation system, part of which will be based upon assessments of authorities' cross-service capital strategies and Asset Management Plans. *The research report was published by the Department in September 1999 and in November 1999 draft guidelines on asset management and capital planning were issued to local authorities for consultation. A further draft of the guidelines will be issued in Spring 2000.*

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Measurement of Relative Need for Capital Expenditure

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) identify a regression-based formula to distribute ACG (from a 'single pot') to county level which consists of a constant and two indicators – a weighting for the percentage of resident households within an authority in receipt of income support and a weighting for density. A judgement-based model and a model combining (simplified) service specific formulae, like the Welsh model, are both presented along with their implications. The research suggests a retention of some form of RTIA is appropriate unless authorities accept an element of inequity. The report has informed decisions within the Department on the 'single pot'. *The research report was published in November 1999.*

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Prudential Indicators (for Regulating Local Authorities' Capital Expenditure)

Through a largely conceptual study, where approaches were exemplified with 'real' data from six case study authorities, PwC propose a move from the present complex and detailed system of statutory controls to a new system with a greater emphasis on self-assessment and adherence to professional codes. As well as providing central Government with an assurance that sound public finances are in place within local authorities, the system should allow local authorities more flexibility in managing their finances, a longer planning horizon and greater incentives for more efficient use of their assets. *This report was published for consultation in November 1999*

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A Prudential Framework for Repaying Debt and Providing for the Replacement of Assets

PricewaterhouseCoopers identify a possible replacement of Minimum Revenue Provision. Provision based upon the authority's net reckonable debt is put forward as a less formal but prudentially sound scheme intended to combine equity and simplicity but with full regard to the Government's objectives on sound and prudent finances. This largely conceptual study tested approaches using 'real' data from three case study authorities and scenarios are presented to illustrate how new controls might take effect in different circumstances. *The draft non-statutory code of practice and accompanying informal guidance were published for consultation in November 1999*

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Revisiting public perceptions of local government – a decade of change? and "It is our money anyway..." Lessons learnt from giving the public a voice in local authority spending decisions

The National Centre for Social Research (formerly SCPR) undertook 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 study is based on the results of a nationally representative survey using face to face interviews and it covers a range of issues which can be summarised as:

- Public knowledge of local government
- Public knowledge of local government finance
- Public understanding of the relationship between local taxes and service delivery, including user/non-user satisfaction with local services
- Public contact with their local council, including their views towards the information they have received from the council
- Public interest in local politics and voting behaviour

- Overall satisfaction with the council and the services provided
- Participation in consultation exercises and the public's interest in being consulted

The second study is informed by in-depth interviews with local authority officers and members, and by group discussions with the general public. The report looks at lessons learnt from consulting the public on local authority financial issues and it includes a good practice section covering issues such as: overcoming public apathy and distrust; choosing an appropriate method of consultation; reaching a cross-section of the community; and, adopting a more flexible, responsive approach. *The reports have now been published and are available from the DETR Publications Sales Centre.*

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Business perceptions of local government and local government involvement with the business community main report – key messages for business; and "Doing the business" – a guide for local authorities on engaging with the business community

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 into three main outputs; a main report, "Key messages for business" and "Doing the business".

The main report is based on a survey of Local Authorities and looks at current links that local authorities have with businesses, a survey of English businesses assessing their knowledge and attitudes towards local government, and an international literature review to review businesses involvement in other countries.

'Key messages for business' and 'Doing the business' are based on case study work in several local authorities in order to identify current practice, its strengths and weaknesses.

It is anticipated that these reports will be available by the Summer 2000.

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REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

Evaluation of the form, and scope, of RDA strategies and action plans

The University of Dundee (in conjunction with Aston University and Ove Arup & Partners) have recently been commissioned to evaluate the strategies and action plans prepared by the RDAs in order to: identify best practice and transferable lessons amongst the RDAs; and evaluate

the rigour and appropriateness of the proposals from an intra- and inter-regional perspective. The researchers are preparing regional organisational and policy profiles, and developing an evaluatory framework for their reviews of the strategies and action plans. A series of interviews and workshops are also to be held in each region with the RDAs and other stakeholders. Potential lessons for the emergent GLA will also be explored. *The research is due to report by July 2000.*

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NEWS

Local and Regional Government Research Programme Mid-year Consultative Meeting

To start the Department's 2000/01 local and regional government research planning cycle the Local and Regional Government Research Unit held a mid-year consultative meeting on 26th November 1999. The meeting was attended by representatives from local and regional government organisations, local authorities, academic institutions and other non-governmental bodies. The meeting had two overall aims: firstly, to consider how researchers and funders of research might work more collaboratively to ensure the challenging research agenda, created by the Government's manifesto proposals for local and regional government, could be fully addressed; secondly to provide a forum for early discussion on potential areas for the Department to fund research and possible overlaps with the plans of other organisations. Suggestions for research discussed in this meeting covered a wide range of local and regional government issues.

Some of the key points raised are summarised below:

- More regular and in-depth dialogue is needed, possibly through round-table discussions, between researchers and policy makers – at central and local government – to review research evidence and discuss emerging findings.
- More mechanisms need to be created to share learning and exchange data, information and findings, at national, regional and local levels to achieve maximum added value from research, including consortia of local authorities.
- A national database needs to be created, and regularly up-dated, with basic details of case-studies that have recently been undertaken or are on-going, so it is possible to track and re-visit places.
- New methods need to be developed to cope with disentangling the impacts upon actors of policies and other influences at different spatial levels from the neighbourhood, through the authority and the region, to the global change. Similarly, new methods are needed for evaluating, for example, the cross-cutting nature of problems faced by modern local government.

A number of gaps in the current evidence base or areas where medium-long-term research will be needed were identified:

- Accountability, inspection and regulation – the impact of various new and existing regimes upon local government, whether they will achieve a co-ordinated approach and have an impact at the authority-wide as well as individual service level.
- Performance – developing better methodologies for measuring improvements in efficiency and effectiveness and for measuring the impact of cross-cutting.
- New organisational structures, skills and competencies – the policy agendas will require new types of political and non-political actors at the local and regional levels with abilities to match the new political institutions. Such people will need to be identified and any transferable lessons obtained to build the capacity of others.
- Motivating change and innovation – much more work is still required to examine what motivates change and innovation in local government, particularly amongst slow and struggling authorities. More effort needs to be invested in understanding behavioural aspects of the response to new policies, systems and regimes, so that they can be more finely tuned to encourage improvement.
- Neglected areas and linkages – some areas of the modernisation agenda, such as the new ethical framework seem neglected at present and the necessary links are not being made by research with other aspects of democratic renewal.
- Regional economic disparities – there is a major gap in regional intelligence and data to help understand and interpret inter- and intra-regional disparities and how they might be addressed.
- Regional governance – more research is needed to track the consequences of devolution and inform the development of regional government.

One overriding theme through the day was the urgent need for the research community to address the challenge of linking the finance and non-finance elements of the local government modernisation agenda. There is clearly on-going research on issues such as Best Value and service delivery, new political management arrangements and other aspects of democratic renewal, regional economic development and governance and tackling cross-cutting issues, such as social exclusion. There is, however, very little, if any, research taking place on the influence of the local government capital and revenue finance regimes upon the ability to deliver these policy aims and vice-versa. For example, in relation to the links between funding and service standards, the links between finance and reinvigorating local democracy and the longer term vision of local authorities. To this end, a roundtable meeting was held on 2 March 2000 with interested parties to discuss these issues in greater depth

These ideas were then used by the Department in developing and prioritising potential research projects for this year. The report from this event has been published on the Local and Regional Government Research Unit's website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>

There will be another mid-year consultative meeting for the 2001/02 Local and Regional Government Research Programme. Attendance will be by invitation.

ESRC DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAMME

The ESRC's Democracy and Participation Programme runs from 1999 to 2003 and encompasses 21 projects from a range of disciplines, including politics, sociology, social policy, geography and education. The Programme addresses a number of key concerns about the current state of British 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.

The 21 projects selected are:

- Power, Participation and Political Renewal – Dr M Barnes
- A Theoretical Model of what Motivates Public Service Users to Participate – Dr R J Birchall
- Legitimacy, Participation and Constitutional Change – Professor J Curtice
- A Qualitative Study of Democracy and Participation in Britain – Dr. F. Devine
- Networks of Civic Organisations in Britain – Professor M. Diani
- Radical Participation: Protesters' Identities and Networks in Manchester, North Wales and Oxford – Dr. B.J.A. Doherty
- Participation, Political Organisations and the impact of the Internet- Dr. R.K. Gibson

- Social Capital, Participation and the Causal Role of Socialisation – Dr. D.S. Halpern
- Beliefs and Actions: Why Predisposition differs from Mobilisation – Professor G. Jordan
- The Locality Effect: Local Government and Citizen Participation – Professor V.B. Lowndes
- Explaining Non-Participation: Towards a Fuller Understanding of the 'Political'- Professor D. Marsh
- Public Access Broadcasting and Democratic Participation in the age of Mediated Politics – Dr. B. McNair
- Environmental Action and the Policy Process: The Case of the CPRE – Dr. J.L. Murdoch
- Local Electoral Participation: The Importance of Context – Professor C.S. Rallings
- Participation of Volunteer Citizens in the Governance of Education – Professor P.R.S Ranson
- The Dynamics of Attitudes Towards Democracy and Participation in Contemporary Britain – Professor D.J. Sanders
- Social Capital and Social Networks: The Careers of Political Activists – Professor M. Savage
- A Citizen Audit for Britain – Professor P Seyd
- Democratic Governance and Ethnic Minority Political Participation in Contemporary Britain – Professor J. Solomos
- Willing Partners? Voluntary and Community Associations in the Democratic Process – Professor M.E. Taylor
- Participation, Power and Rural Community Governance in England and Wales – Dr. M.J. Woods

ESRC PROGRAMME: DEVOLUTION AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The ESRC has agreed to fund a five-year programme of research to examine a wide range of matters relating to devolution and constitutional change. The creation of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament, and the introduction of the English Regional Development Agencies, voluntary regional chambers, and the creation of the Mayor and Assembly of London in 2000, provides scope for analysis of the processes of change and the political, economic, social and geographical effects. The three main themes of the research programme are: nationalism and national identity; governance and the constitution; and economic and social devolution – competition or co-operation?

The objectives of the programme are:

- To understand the dynamics of change and its historical context, and to analyse to what extent future developments are determined by past commitments or already altered by economic,

cultural and social pressures interacting with new political structures

- To evaluate intended, unintended and unanticipated political, social and economic consequences of change for England, the authority and institutions of Westminster as well as for the territories subject to devolution
- To inform policy-makers, opinion formers and the public about the process of devolution and what is occurring, and the alternatives for change based on evaluations of UK practice and drawing on expertise from abroad.

It is anticipated that about 35 projects in total will be funded. Following the first call for proposals in December 1999, shortlisted applicants are currently being invited for projects to commence in October 2000. A further call for proposals will follow later this year. Within the research programme, it is expected that two attitude surveys will be funded in each of the devolved territories, to track trends in opinion on devolution, nationality and independence.

ESRC PROGRAMME: INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN LONDON

The ESRC has established a short research programme to track institutional changes associated with setting up the Greater London Authority, and associated economic, political and social processes. Five research projects have agreement to be funded, including research examining: the London elections and the preferential structures of voters; the creation, and operation of, the GLA; network governance within London, and the institutional arrangements for sustainable development policies within the capital. They are due to commence in April 2000, and will run until the end of the year.

Local and Regional Government Research Programme Publications

DELIVERY AND QUALITY OF LOCAL SERVICES

“Competing for Building Maintenance: Direct Labour Organisations and Compulsory Competitive Tendering”, B Walker, HMSO¹ 1993.

“Competition and Service: The Impact of the Local Government Act 1988”, K Walsh and H Davis, HMSO¹ 1993.

“Competitive Tendering for Local Authority Services – Initial Experiences”, K Walsh, HMSO¹ 1991.

“Direct Labour Organisations”, Institute of Public Finance, DoE³ 1992.

“CCT: The Private Sector View”, BMRB International Limited, DoE 1995. (Full report³ and summary² available).

“Analysis of Local Authority CCT Markets”, Ernst & Young, DoE 1995. (Full report³ and summary² available).

“Provision of White Collar and Professional Services by Local Authorities: voluntary exposure to market forces”, K Desai and J Sealey, KPMG, DoE, 1996. (Summary only²)

“The Exposure of Professional and White Collar Services to CCT Phase 1: Preparations for Competition among London Boroughs and Metropolitan Districts”, R Taylor, B Setchell, R Pinto, Newchurch & Co, DoE June 1996. (Summary only²).

“The Exposure of Professional and White Collar Services to CCT Phase 1: Preparations for Competition among Non-Reorganised Shire District Councils and County Councils”, R Taylor, B Setchell, R Pinto, Newchurch & Co, DoE November 1996. (Summary only).

“CCT Non-Bidders: A Report on a survey of the views and awareness of non-bidding firms”, BMRB International Limited, The Stationery Office 1996. (Full report¹ and summary² available).

“CCT and Local Authority Blue-Collar Services”, Austin Mayhead & Co Ltd, DoE³ 1997.

“Local Authorities’ Involvement in Companies: Findings of Research”, Coopers & Lybrand, DETR 1997. (Full Report³ and summary available)

“Local Authorities’ Involvement in Companies: Good Practice Guide”, DETR 1997. (Report³ available)

“Local Councils’ Use of Section 137: A financial review of parish and town councils in England and their discretion to spend under Section 137 of the Local Government Act”, Aston Business School, DETR 1998. (Full Report³ and summary² available).

“Local Authorities’ Activity Under Section 137, Local Government Act 1972”, York Consulting, DETR 1998. (Full Report³ and summary² available).

“Achieving Best Value Through Performance Review”, (Paper Number 5: Warwick Business School/DETR Best Value Series) Ian Sanderson, Leeds Metropolitan University, DETR 1999 (Report available on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>)

“Achieving Best Value Through Competition, Benchmarking and Performance Networks”, (Paper Number 6: Warwick Business School/DETR Best Value Series) Tony Bovaird, Aston Business School, DETR 1999. (Report available on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>)

“Achieving Best Value Through Partnership”, (Paper Number 7: Warwick Business School/DETR Best Value Series) Mike Geddes, Warwick Business School, DETR 1999. (Report available on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>)

“Achieving Best Value Through Public Engagement, (Paper Number 8: Warwick Business School/DETR Value Series) Steve Martin, Warwick Business School, DETR 1999. (Report available on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>)

“Achieving Best Value Through Quality Management”, (Paper Number 9: Warwick Business School/DETR Best Value Series) Mike Lewis, Warwick Business School, DETR 1999. (Report available on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>)

“Organisation-wide approaches to Best Value”, (Paper Number 10: Warwick Business School/DETR Best Value Series) Jean Hartley, Warwick Business School, DETR 1999. (Report available on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>)

“Improving Local Public Services: Interim Evaluation of the Best Value Pilot Programme”, Warwick Business School, DETR 1999. (Full report³, summary² and Good Practice guidance² available)

“Lessons Learnt from Intervention – The Case Studies”, KPMG, DETR 1999. (Full report³ and summary² available)

“Lessons Learnt from Intervention – The Literature Review”, KPMG, DETR 1999. (Full report³ available)

“Best Value Performance Plans: Practice and Procedures – A review of early experiences within eight local authorities”, DETR 1999. (Available at <http://www.local-regions.detr.gov.uk/bestvalue/performance/ppindex.htm>)

LOCAL DEMOCRACY

“Identification with Local Areas”, A Hedges and J Kelly, DoE² 1992.

“Parish and Town Councils in England: A Survey”, S Ellwood, S Nutley, M Tricker and P Waterson, HMSO¹ 1992.

“Public Perceptions of Local Government: Its Finance and Services”, P Lynn HMSO¹ 1992.

“Roles and Activities of Parish and Town Councils in England: Case Studies”, M Tricker, J Collingridge, P Gosling, J Green, L Hems, L Mills, S Soni and P Waterson, HMSO¹ 1993.

“Explaining Election Turnout”, C Rallings and M Thrasher, HMSO 1994. (Full report¹ and summary² available).

“Public Access to Information about Local Government: preliminary postal survey findings”, A Maidment and J Steele, Policy Studies Institute, DoE 1995. (Summary²).

“Public Access to Information: an evaluation of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985”, A Maidment and J Steele, Policy Studies Institute, BEBC Distribution Ltd 1995. (Full report⁴ and summary² available).

“Faith in Local Democracy”, K Young and N Rao in British Social Attitudes the 12th Report, SCPR 1995. (ISBN 1 85521 606X).

“Enhancing Public Participation in Local Government”, V Lowndes, G Stoker, L Pratchett, D Wilson, S Leach, M Wingfield, DETR 1998. (Full report³ and summary² available).

“Modern Local Government Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation”, V Lowndes, G Stoker, L Pratchett, D Wilson, S Leach, M Wingfield, DETR 1998. (Guidance document³ and summary² available).

“The Impact of Releasing People for Council Duties”, G Courtenay (SCPR); S Finch (SCPR); N Rao (Goldsmith’s College); and K Young (Queen Mary and Westfield College); DETR 1998. (Full report³ and summary² available).

“New Forms of Political Management”, INLOGOV, University of Birmingham and S. Leach, De Montfort University, IdeA 2000 (Full report⁵ forthcoming)

“Guidance on Evaluating Political Structures”, INLOGOV, University of Birmingham and S. Leach, De Montfort University, IdeA 2000 (Guidance⁵ forthcoming)

“Turnout at Local Elections: Influences on levels of voter registration and electoral participation”, Plymouth University and Maxwell Stamp PLC, DETR 2000. (Full report³ and summary² available, also on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>)

“The Beacon Council Preliminary Research Activity”, IDEA/DETR, 1999 available on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research/beacon1.htm>

“The Beacon Council Preliminary Research Activity: Reports and summaries”, IDEA/DETR, 1999 available on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research/beacon2.htm>

“Revisiting Public Perceptions of Local Government: A Decade of Change”, C. Bromley, N. Stratford, N. Rao, National Centre for Social Research (formerly SCPR), DETR 2000. (Full report³ and summary² available).

“It is our money anyway...”: Lessons learnt from giving the public a voice in local authority spending decisions”, L. Spencer and G. Elam with R. Turner, National Centre for Social Research (formerly SCPR), DETR 2000. (Full report³ and summary² available).

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

“Cross-cutting Issues in Public Policy and Public Service”, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, DETR 1999. (Full report³ and summary² available).

“Cross-cutting Issues Affecting Local Government”, University of the West of England, Bristol, and The Office for Public Management, DETR 1999. (Full report³ and summary² available – also available on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>).

“Policy Action Team 17: Joining it up locally – The Evidence Base”, DETR 2000. (Full report³ and summary² available)

FINANCE

"The Relationship between Rates and Rents", the Institute for Fiscal Studies, DoE 1995. (Full report ³ and summary² available).

"The Impact of Rates on Businesses", IFF Research Ltd, DoE 1995. (Full report ³ and summary² available).

"Local Authorities Statutory Duties to Consult with the Business Community: preliminary postal survey findings", N Corble, Newchurch & Company Ltd, DoE 1995. (Summary²).

"An Alternative Geographical Classification for use in the ACA", M Coombes, C Wymer, CURDS University of Newcastle, DoE 1995 (available on request²).

"Sparsity and Local Authority Costs" J Twomey, K Padmore and N Topham, Salford University Business Services Ltd, DoE 1996. (This is the first part of a two part project – summary available²).

"Local Partnerships: A Research Review of Local Authorities' Statutory Duties to Consult with Business", Newchurch & Company Ltd, DoE 1995. (Full report ³ and summary² available).

"Evaluation of the Experience of Authorities during the Capital Challenge Pilot Scheme Bidding Round", York Consulting Ltd, DETR 1997. (Full report ³ and summary² available).

"Capital to Local Authority Accounts", B Walker and S Delay, University of Birmingham and A Marsh, University of Bristol, DETR 1997. (Full report ³ and summary² available).

"Local Authorities Attitudes to Private Sector Funding", FB Consultancy, LGMB 1998 (ISBN 0 7488 9331 8) (Joint LGMB/DETR Publication. Full report available⁵)

"Banks' Attitudes to Local Authorities: A Business Survey", FB Consultancy, British Bankers' Association, December 1998 (ISBN 1 874185 11 5) (Joint BBA/DETR Publication. Full report available⁶)

"Revenue Grant Distribution System: Research on Local Government Perspectives", R. Davis and R. Lopata, Opinion Research Corporation International, ORCI 2000. (Full report available at <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/review/opinion.htm>)

"Prudential Indicators", PricewaterhouseCoopers, DETR 1999. (Full report ³ and summary² available).

"A Prudential Framework for Repaying Debt and Providing for the Replacement of Assets", PricewaterhouseCoopers, DETR 1999. (Full report ³ and summary² available, also on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>).

"Measurement of Relative Need for Capital Expenditure", PricewaterhouseCoopers, DETR 1999. (Full report ³ and summary² available, also on the DETR Local Government Website: <http://www.local.detr.gov.uk/research>).

"Measuring Performance in the Management of Local Authority Property", DTZ Peda Consulting, DETR 1999 (Full report ³ and summary² available).

¹ The Stationery Office/HMSO publications are available from (mail, telephone and fax orders only):

The Stationery Office Publications Centre
PO Box 276, London SW8 5DT.
Telephone orders: 0207 873 9090
Fax orders: 0207 873 8200
General Enquiries: 0207 873 0011.

² These DoE/DETR publications and research summaries are available from:

Local and Regional Government Research Unit
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
5/D5 Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU.
Telephone: 0207 944 4125.
Fax: 0207 944 4099.
E-mail: Deborah_Kafka@detr.gsi.gov.uk

³ These DoE/DETR publications are available from:

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions
Publication Sales Centre
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Goldthorpe Industrial Estate
Goldthorpe
Rotherham S63 9BL
Telephone: 01709 891318
Fax: 01709 881673.

⁴ This publication is available from:

BEBC Distribution Ltd
PO Box 1496
Poole
Dorset BH12 3YD.
Telephone: 0800 262260 (Freephone)
Fax: 0800 260266 (Freefax)

⁵ This publication is available from:

Improvement and Development Agency
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5QU
Telephone: 0207 296 6600

⁶ This publication is available from:

British Bankers' Association
Publications Department
Pinners Hall
105-108 Old Broad Street
London EC2N 1EX
Telephone: 0207 216 8800
Fax: 0207 216 8811

To be completed by potential contractors

(d) Your Expertise and Experience

1. Number of years your organisation has been in operation

Number of research/consultancy staff

Number of interviewers (if applicable)

2. What research techniques or methods do you specialise in?

3. Please list up to 6 recent relevant projects undertaken/in progress for public sector clients. Please give brief details for each, including subject area, methods used, size of project and a client contact name and number, if possible

Please attach an additional sheet if necessary.

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Please return it to:

Paul McCafferty, Local and Regional Government Research Unit, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 5/E5 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU

We would also be interested to see any available literature/brochures about your organisation.