Communities in control
Real people, real power

EVIDENCE ANNEX
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Real people, real power

EVIDENCE ANNEX
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Introduction

The evidence base relating to empowerment is extensive. A recent evidence mapping exercise conducted for Communities and Local Government uncovered 45,000 academic journal articles on community development alone. As such, this annex does not intend to provide an exhaustive synthesis of all the relevant literature. Instead, it focuses on the state of empowerment in England and presents some of the key evidence underpinning the policies outlined in the White Paper, Communities in control: real people, real power. Chapters 1 and 2 examine the extent to which people are currently empowered and the degree to which they demand empowerment. Chapters 3 and 4 outline the barriers and incentives that appear most prominently in conceptual and empirical studies. Chapter 5 explores the potential outcomes of well executed participation exercises.

The definitions of engagement and empowerment used here build on those introduced in the Community Empowerment Action Plan. Engagement is defined as the process whereby public bodies facilitate citizen and community participation in order to incorporate their views and needs into decision-making processes. This includes reaching out to communities to create empowerment opportunities. Empowerment is defined as passing more and more political power to more and more people, using every practical means available, from the most modern social networking websites, to the most ancient methods of petitioning, public debates and citizens’ juries. In this way, democracy becomes, not a system of occasional voting or an imperfect method of selecting who governs us, but something that infuses our way of life.

Of course, it is now widely acknowledged that there are different depths of engagement and participation; and, therefore, empowerment. This concept has been widely illustrated over the years in various typologies of participation – the most recognisable being Sherry Arnstein’s ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation’. Arnstein (1969) grades levels of participation from manipulation to citizen control – see Figure 1 below. The evidence presented here, however, suggests that, regardless of the depth or type of participation in question, many of the observed barriers, incentives and outcomes of empowerment are the same. They are experienced in different degrees by different sections of society and more or less profoundly according to the participation activity in question.

1 This exercise was conducted as part of an on-going systematic review of the empowerment evidence base which we plan to publish in Spring 2009.
2 www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communityempowermentactionplan
Communities in control – evidence annex

Figure 1: Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969)
Chapter 1: Prevalence

Before considering the extent to which citizens are empowered, it is important to refine the definition of empowerment. In the literature, a distinction is made between subjective and objective empowerment. The subjective aspect of empowerment relates to a sense of efficacy and is measured by the extent to which people feel that they can influence local or national conditions and decisions. The objective aspect relates to whether people truly have and use power and is measured by the extent to which people actually participate in and influence their local or national conditions and decisions.

Our principal sources of information in this regard are the Citizenship Survey, the Audit of Political Engagement, the Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys, and the Helping Out survey of volunteering and charitable giving. The evidence presented below indicates that while

3 The Citizenship Survey is a household survey covering a representative core sample of almost 10,000 adults in England and Wales each year. There is also a minority ethnic boost sample of 5,000 people to ensure that the views of these groups are robustly represented. Until 2007, the Citizenship Survey was conducted every two years – with face-to-face data collection taking place in 2001, 2003 and 2005. Since 2007, the survey has moved to a continuous cycle of data collection which has enabled the reporting of headline findings on a quarterly basis. Unless otherwise stated, the figures presented in this annex are based on data collected during the first three quarters of 2007 (April to December), which constitutes 6,991 core interviews and an additional 3,570 interviews with people from minority ethnic groups. In most cases, the data presented here apply to England only – see Communities and Local Government (2008a).

Since 2003, the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society have measured public attitudes and behaviour in order to monitor levels of political engagement. The latest survey, reported on in the Audit of Political Engagement 5 (Hansard Society, 2008), is based on a representative quota sample of 1,073 adults in Great Britain. The data have been weighted to be representative of the profile of Great Britain. This includes down-weighting interviews in Scotland and Wales to their representative level in Great Britain as these groups are over-represented in the sample. As such, the ‘effective base size’ is 792.

The Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys are carried out by all English local authorities to a standardised postal methodology. All authorities utilise random or stratified random sampling and are required to achieve a sample size of 1,200. The survey data are then submitted to the Audit Commission for quality assurance and aggregation. The sample sizes in aggregated scores are therefore very large (with a total of over 500,000 responses). The results are weighted by age, gender and ethnicity to ensure that the achieved sample is representative of the target population. See Communities and Local Government (2007) for topline figures from the 2006/7 Surveys.

The Helping Out (2007) survey is a household survey of adults in England conducted amongst a sub-sample of the 2005 Citizenship Survey respondents – see Low et al. (2007). This sampling method was utilised to allow for certain groups of particular interest to the study to be over-sampled to ensure sufficient numbers for more detailed analysis (e.g. volunteers and ethnic minority respondents). Fieldwork ran from the end of October 2006 until the middle of February 2007. In total, 2,156 respondents were interviewed for the core sample, giving a response rate of 62%. Among a separate minority ethnic boost sample (designed primarily to supplement the numbers of Black and Asian respondents interviewed), 549 respondents were interviewed with a response rate of 51%. It should be noted that the prevalence estimates of formal volunteering from Helping Out tended to be higher than those from the nearly contemporaneous Citizenship Survey and the National Survey of Volunteering. This has been variously attributed to the study context, fieldwork period (which for Helping Out included Christmas), question methods and sample profile. In light of this, the report authors suggest that prevalence estimates derived from this study should not be used to look at changes in measures over time.
the general level of citizen empowerment has been *mainly* stable, there has been a recent trend towards disengagement from the political sphere. Moreover, there are clear disparities in levels of engagement and empowerment amongst different groups in society.

**Perceptions**

**Influencing local and national decisions**

In the Citizenship Survey, subjective empowerment is measured by questions on whether or not people feel able to influence decisions affecting both their local area and Great Britain. In the period from April to December 2007, only two-fifths (38%) of respondents to the Citizenship Survey felt they could influence decisions in their local area and one-fifth (20%) of people felt they could influence decisions affecting Great Britain – see Figure 2. These proportions remain unchanged since 2005 and 2003, although they have fallen since 2001. The gap observed between the local and the national sense of subjective empowerment has been constant since 2001. There is thought to be a distance factor at work here. As Pattie et al. observed, “an institution’s proximity to people makes a difference to their sense of political influence” (2004:46).
Here, the distinction between subjective and objective empowerment is important, since involvement, participation or engagement in civic or civil life might not necessarily equate to feeling empowered. Correlations do, however, appear to exist between participating in such activities and feeling empowered, suggesting a link between feeling powerful and having real power. Preliminary analysis of Citizenship Survey data, as part of an ongoing study to understand subjective empowerment, has uncovered a relationship between participating in such activities and feeling empowered when some socio-demographic and attitudinal factors are controlled for (National Centre for Social Research, forthcoming). Of course, an association of this sort does not imply causality and further research is needed to improve our understanding of how these two subsets of empowerment inter-relate.

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**Figure 2:** Whether people feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area and Great Britain, Citizenship Survey, 2001 to April-December 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Local Area</th>
<th>Great Britain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April-December 2007</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Satisfaction with information provision

Emerging findings from an on-going study into the drivers of subjective empowerment suggest that the quantity and quality of information provision by local councils can be important in determining the extent to which people feel that they can influence local decisions (forthcoming, National Centre for Social Research). Participants in 10 focus groups felt that local authorities often did not do enough to involve local people in decision-making. For instance, participants felt that at any given time local people often did not know which key local decisions were being taken or how they could get involved. Moreover, on the occasions when research participants had taken part in consultations, it was felt that local people were not kept abreast of how their contributions were fed in to the decision-making process. There was also concern about the nature of local authority information provision. For example, participants mentioned that information about local meetings is often placed in the back pages of local newspapers. They felt that the lack of prominence of this information limits its ability to reach out to a large number of people. Similarly, it was felt that the most common means of local authority communication, such as paper-based newsletters, are not always the most accessible ways of informing local people.

Quantitative data on this issue is available from the Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys which collect information on satisfaction with information provision. In 2006/07, 47 per cent of local authority residents who responded felt that their council kept them well informed about the services and benefits it provided, a decline of 9 percentage points since 2003/04 (Communities and Local Government, 2007). See Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall, how well informed do you think your council keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides?</th>
<th>2003-04 (%)</th>
<th>2006-07 (%)</th>
<th>Percentage point change 2003-04 to 2006-07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very well informed</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly well informed</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very well informed</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not informed at all</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is interesting to note that people who feel more informed tend to be more satisfied with their council overall. See Table 2.

**Table 2: Levels of overall satisfaction with the authority by information provision – 2003-04 to 2006-07**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall, how well informed do you think your council keeps residents about the services and benefits it provides?</th>
<th>2003-04</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfied (%)</td>
<td>Neither (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very well informed</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly well informed</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very well informed</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not informed at all</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trust in public institutions**

The relationship between trust and empowerment is complex. Trust is arguably a component of subjective empowerment as well as a driver and an outcome. Complexities notwithstanding, it is interesting to note how levels of trust vary by different public institutions and over time. Data from the Citizenship Survey show that levels of trust in the police (at 81%) are much higher than levels of trust in either local councils (60%) or Parliament (36%) (April-December 2007). See Figure 3.
There has been a statistically significant increase in the proportion of people who trust their local council (from 52% in 2001 to 60% in 2007), while levels of trust in the police and in Parliament remain unchanged since 2001.

Civic participation and behaviour

Another key distinction made in the literature is between vertical and horizontal forms of citizen participation. Vertical participation is focused on the relationship between citizens and the state and between public services and their users (such as participation in a Local Strategic Partnership or in a council committee). Horizontal forms of participation focus on relationships between citizens and each other (such as participation in sports clubs, faith groups or voluntary and community sector bodies). Here, for the purposes of clarity, the former is referred to as civic behaviour and the latter is civil behaviour.

Building on an extensive body of literature, the Citizenship Survey divides civic behaviour into three broad categories:

- **civic participation** covers wider forms of engagement in democratic processes, such as contacting an elected representative, taking part in a public demonstration or protest, or signing a petition
- **civic consultation** refers to active engagement in consultation about local services or issues through activities such as attending a consultation group or completing a questionnaire about these services
- **civic activism** refers to involvement either in direct decision-making about local services or issues; or in the actual provision of these services by taking on a role such as a local councillor, school governor or magistrate

**Civic participation**

There is evidence of considerable civic participation activity in England. Analysis of Citizenship Survey data (April to December, 2007) reveals that 39 per cent of people have contacted an elected representative or public official, attended a public meeting or rally, taken part in a public demonstration or protest, or signed a petition in the last 12 months, and 3 per cent do so at least once a month. Signing a petition was by far the most commonly cited activity (mentioned by 62% of all civic participants). See Figure 4.
**Civic consultation**

According to the Citizenship Survey, levels of civic consultation are lower than levels of civic participation. The results from April to December 2007 indicate that one in five adults (21%) had taken part in some form of civic consultation about local services or problems within the previous year, and only 2 per cent had done so at least once a month.

Amongst those who had taken part in civic consultation at least once in the past year, the most common activity was completing a questionnaire about a local service or problem (67%). Fewer respondents had attended a public meeting (32%) or had been involved in a group set up to discuss local services or problems (22%) – see Figure 5.

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**Figure 4: Types of activities undertaken by those engaging in civic participation in the last 12 months, Citizenship Survey, April-December 2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signed a petition</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted public official working for the local council</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted local councillor</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted Member of Parliament (MP)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a public meeting or rally</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted government official</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken part in a public demonstration or protest</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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6 Base: 2581
Chapter 1: Prevalence

Civic activism

Civic activism is the least common form of civic behaviour. According to the Citizenship Survey, just 10 per cent of people had participated in direct decision-making in the last year about local services or issues, or in the actual provision of these services by taking on a role such as a local councillor, school governor or magistrate (Citizenship Survey, April-December 2007).

The most significant levels of involvement among civic activists were associated with decision-making about local services, in particular young people’s services (24%), local regeneration (20%) and housing, in the sense of being a member of a tenants’ committee (19%). Below this came crime (17%), education (15%) and health (12%). Involvement in specific community roles was at a lower level – 11 per cent of ‘activists’ had been a school governor, 7 per cent a local councillor, 3 per cent a magistrate and just 1 per cent Special Constables – see Figure 6.

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7 Base: 1376
Levels of all three types of civic behaviour are unchanged since 2005.

**Figure 6:** Types of activities undertaken by those engaging in civic activism in the last 12 months, Citizenship Survey, April-December 2007

- Decision making group – Other services: 31%
- Decision making group – Young people’s services: 24%
- Decision making group – Regeneration: 20%
- Decision making group – Tenants’ committee: 19%
- Decision making group – Tackling local crime issues: 17%
- Decision making group – Education: 15%
- Decision making group – Health: 12%
- School governor: 11%
- Local councillor: 7%
- Magistrate: 3%
- Special constable: 1%

**Complaining and seeking redress**

Redress is regarded as an important element of citizen and client focus in public services. It refers to accountability arrangements that enable citizens to seek remedies for what they perceive to be poor treatment, mistakes, faults or injustices in their dealings with departments or agencies. Since the early 1990s, successive governments have stressed that modern public service organisations need to be more proactive in resolving complaints and appeals at an early stage (National Audit Office, 2005). The systems currently in place have developed over time and for a variety of purposes. Redress may be available through ombudsmen, tribunals, statutory compensation schemes or ex gratia payments made by public bodies. Parties may be encouraged or required to attempt dispute resolution through mediation or arbitration.

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8 Base: 630
For local authorities, the Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys ask respondents whether they have contacted the authority with a complaint in the last 12 months and how satisfied they were with how the complaint was handled. Analysis of data from the 2006/07 survey reveals that 20 per cent of respondents had contacted the authority with a complaint within the last 12 months; and 34 per cent of these were satisfied with complaint handling – a proportion that is broadly the same across all types of authorities (Communities and Local Government, 2007).

**Voting**

The 2001 general election turnout of 59.4 per cent was the lowest recorded since 1945. Concerns that voting at elections was in permanent decline in the UK were, however, partially allayed by a slight increase to 61.4 per cent in 2005. A report published by the Electoral Commission in 2005 nonetheless highlighted three reasons why we should continue to be concerned about turnout (Electoral Commission, 2005).

In the 2005 General Election:

- just over 17 million of those registered to vote decided not to do so
- turnout was 10 percentage points lower than it was in 1997 – even though that year’s turnout had been a post-war low at the time; and
- turnout was the third lowest since the turn of the twentieth century (behind 1918 and 2001).

Figures for local elections are lower still. When local elections are not held concurrently with a general election, turnout in England has generally fluctuated between 30 and 40 per cent – see Figure 7.
Online civic participation

The Oxford Internet Institute’s survey of The Internet in Britain collects valuable information about online civic engagement and e-Government (Dutton and Helsper, 2007). The 2007 survey found that use of online government services had increased between 2005 and 2007 – in 2005 almost 40 per cent of internet users had undertaken at least one e-government activity online, while 46 per cent had done so in 2007.

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9 The Oxford Internet Institute 2007 survey of The Internet in Britain is the third in a series, with previous surveys conducted in 2003 and 2005. The surveys aim to reach a nationally representative random sample of 2000 people aged 14 and upwards in Britain (England, Scotland and Wales). Interviews are conducted face to face in people’s homes by ICM Research. The sampling design incorporates two stages. First a random sample of 175 areas is selected, stratified by region. Then, within each selected area, a random sample of addresses is selected from the Postal Address File. This allows for comparisons based on socio-economic grade using Acorn measures. The data are then weighted based on gender, age, socio-economic grade, region and Acorn. The survey has achieved a high response rate for all three surveys, reaching 77% in 2007. See Dutton and Helsper, 2007.
2007. However, the proportion of people interacting with government online was still relatively low. The survey found that amongst internet users:

- a quarter (25%) had signed a petition offline and 7 per cent had used the internet to do this
- one tenth (9%) contacted a politician offline, but only 2 per cent had done this online; and
- one tenth (9%) of internet users had undertaken a least one civic action on the Internet, compared to two thirds (36%) of users who had done this offline.

**Participation in housing**

Turning to policy-specific participation, housing is one of the most established spheres for community engagement and empowerment. Citizenship Survey data reveal that 19 per cent of those who report being involved in civic activism are involved in a tenants’ committee (April to December 2007). Other research (Skidmore et al., 2006) suggests that there are around 20,000 tenant representatives performing lay governance roles on housing association management committees and tenant management boards.

Indeed, community participation has been a theme in discussions of housing policy for at least two decades (Rogers and Robinson, 2004:32). Tenant empowerment is at the heart of the Government’s drive to ensure that decent homes are available to all those renting from social housing landlords, and all local authorities and housing associations are required to make provision for tenant participation. Ministers expect tenants to have meaningful opportunities to participate in the day-to-day management of their properties, as well as to be involved in their landlords’ strategic decision-making processes.

As with more general civic participation, tenant participation is a very broad concept involving a spectrum of opportunities from provision of information through to community control. It includes: activity by social landlords to consult tenants and treat them as customers (including information provision, newsletters, surveys, focus groups and open meetings); involving tenants in decision-making by the landlord (for example, tenant votes on transfer of ownership or management of housing stock, support for tenants’ and residents’ associations, and tenant membership of boards); and the formation of tenant management organisations, where tenants take over some landlord functions in managing their own housing.
Data from the 2004/05 Survey of English Housing reveal that just over a quarter of social sector tenants surveyed felt that their landlord took ‘a lot’ of account of tenants’ views (26%), about half (51%) said ‘a little’; but a further quarter (23%) said that the landlord took ‘no notice at all’ of their views (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006b)\(^\text{10}\). More than half (54%) of social renters were satisfied with the opportunities for involvement in management and decision-making provided by their landlord; about one in six (16%) were dissatisfied and almost a third (30%) were neutral\(^\text{11}\). Two fifths (39%) of social sector tenants read information provided by the landlord or local tenant group; one fifth (21%) had direct contact with the landlord by writing, receiving letters or telephone calls in relation to involvement in management and decision-making; almost one fifth had completed a survey or questionnaire on local housing issues (18%); almost one in ten (9%) had attended meetings held by the landlord or tenant group; but only a very small minority (2%) were actively involved in a decision-making forum\(^\text{12}\).

**Participation in planning**

Community involvement is a long-standing feature of the planning system dating back to the Skeffington Report, *People and Planning: Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning*, in 1969. Subsequently, legislation provided for community involvement in planning. The law required public bodies to publish information about plans and planning applications and to allow people to make representations about them. The legislation also provided for independent examinations and inquiries.

The Planning Act 2004 builds on this approach making it easier for stakeholders and the wider community to access information and participate in decision-making. Each local planning authority now prepares a Statement of Community Involvement, setting out their policies for involving interested parties in the preparation of local development documents and for consulting on planning applications. The emphasis in preparing local development documents for the local development framework, whether they form part of the development plan or supplementary planning guidance, is on engagement with the community from an early stage in their preparation\(^\text{13}\).

\(^{10}\) Base: 3534  
\(^{11}\) Base: 2920  
\(^{12}\) Base: 1883  
\(^{13}\) A Local Development Framework is a folder of local development documents prepared by district councils, unitary authorities or national park authorities that outlines the spatial planning strategy for the local area.
Chapter 1: Prevalence

Changes proposed in the current Planning Bill will make the planning system for nationally significant infrastructure quicker, more transparent and easier for the public to become involved, with opportunities for public participation locked into each stage of the process. This includes the setting of policy on delivery of national infrastructure, the development of individual projects and planning decisions themselves. The Bill also strengthens accountability and ensures decisions are both transparent and fair. Local communities too often find the system opaque, making participation difficult, costly and time-consuming; a faster and fairer system will allow the public to put across their views more easily, quickly and cheaply.

Participation in regeneration

Since the mid-1990s, public participation has been at the forefront of the regeneration agenda. First the City Challenge programme and then the Single Regeneration Budget insisted that grant recipients worked with external partners, preferably with a high level of public involvement. More recently, community involvement has been at the heart of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme. Indeed, NDC Partnerships have become a recognised and valuable source of experience in community-led renewal. Residents usually form a majority on Governing Boards; they are also involved through committees, theme groups, residents’ panels, and open meetings; and they regularly receive information through newsletters. NDC programmes have been designed to put a great deal of effort into engaging with groups that other initiatives sometimes miss out, specifically young people, faith groups and black and minority ethnic groups (Rogers and Robinson, 2004:40). Developing the skills and confidence of residents to get involved is also a core part of the NDC approach. They frequently provide dedicated teams and funding for this purpose. Levels of citizen involvement in NDC activities have increased steadily over time – in 2006 22 per cent of local residents were involved in NDC activities, compared to 16 per cent in 2002.

Engaging the community is also at the heart of the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder (NMP) Programme. NMPs aim to enable deprived communities and local services to improve local outcomes, by joining up local services and making them more responsive to local needs. A core part of the Neighbourhood Manager’s role is outreach to the local community to consult and involve them in local decision-making processes about public services. This involves identifying priorities for action; helping in appraisal of options for intervention, design and delivery of the preferred options; and monitoring progress and triggering contingency as required. An important part of their
work is bringing residents and service providers together more often in ways that can improve their relationship and the flow of information. All pathfinders engage in, or promote, a range of different citizen engagement mechanisms to achieve these aims. These include: Pathfinder Boards; thematic working groups; networking and forums; community outreach and consultation; community and voluntary sector capacity building; and facilitating community consultation or involvement for service providers.

**Participation in health**

Citizenship Survey data reveal that 12 per cent of those who report being involved in civic activism activities are involved in health decision-making groups. Research (Skidmore et al., 2006) estimates that there are around 2,500 Foundation Trust Board governors, 4,500 members of Patient and Public Involvement Forums, and around 2,000 community representatives on Primary Care Trusts/NHS Trusts.

Opportunities to participate in health-related decisions are many and varied. In England, Patient and Public Involvement has been given formal status with the establishment of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH), Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS), overview and scrutiny committees (OSCs), independent complaints advocacy services (ICAS) and Patient and Public Involvement Forums (PPI Forums). In 2003, 98 per cent of NHS Trusts and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) were reported as having active PALS (House of Commons Health Committee, 2003).

In April 2008, Local Involvement Networks (LINks) covering health and adult social care services in local authority areas, replaced PPI forums covering health services commissioned and/or provided by individual NHS organisations. LINks aim to give citizens a stronger voice in how their health and social care services are planned and delivered. The role of LINks is to:

- provide everyone in the community – from individuals to voluntary groups – with the chance to say what they think about local health and social care services – what is working well and what is not so good
- give people the chance to inform and check how services are planned and run
- feed back what people have said about services so that things can be improved.
There is a range of underpinning legislation to enable LINks to perform this role. They are able to:

- prepare reports and make recommendations and get a reply within a set amount of time
- ask for information and get a reply within a set amount of time
- go into some types of health and social care premises to assess the nature and quality of services
- refer issues to the local overview and scrutiny committee and receive a response

**Participation in education**

Citizenship Survey data reveal that 15 per cent of those who report being involved in civic activism activities make decisions in education. Eleven per cent of civic activists report being a school governor. Figures provided by DCSF suggest that there are approximately 350,000 school governors in England, with a further 12 per cent of posts vacant. Vacancies are particularly prevalent in inner city areas (DCSF, 2006).

The last twenty years have seen the progressive delegation of funding and responsibilities from local education authorities to individual schools. Schools are now largely self-managing, responsible for their own budget and accountable for all aspects of their performance. Equally, school governors have also gained an increasing degree of responsibility over this period. School governing bodies now have responsibility for the financial and staffing management of the school and have a key role in setting strategic direction, ensuring accountability and acting as a critical friend to the head teacher.

Governing bodies vary according to the type and size of the school. Generally the following stakeholders are represented:

- parents – elected by other parents at the school
- staff including the head teacher – elected by the school staff
- the community – appointed by the governing body
Local communities and individuals can also become involved in the extended schools programme. An extended school is one which provides a range of extra activities beyond the regular school day both for the pupils at the school and the wider community. It works with the local authority and other partners to offer access to a range of services and activities which support and motivate children and young people to achieve their full potential. Extended services in schools are to be universally available by 2010, but many schools (approximately 9,000) are already offering access to the core extended services, including:

- a varied menu of educational, sporting and cultural activities, combined with childcare for younger children, from 8am to 6pm in line with demand
- community use of school facilities
- swift and easy access/referral to specialist services such as health and social care
- parenting and family support

**Participation in policing**

Seventeen per cent of those who report being involved in civic activism activities are involved in decision-making groups which are aimed at tackling local crimes (see Figure 6). In terms of formal lay governance positions, evidence (Skidmore et al., 2006) suggests that there are around 30,000 magistrates, 4,000 Youth Offender Panel members, 200 independent members of police authorities, and 450 members of probation boards.

Community engagement has become increasingly prominent in policing and wider government policy in the last five years; particularly since initial thinking about what effective police service community engagement might look like appeared in the Police Reform White Paper which was published in November 2004 (Myhill, 2006). Evaluation of the National Reassurance Policing Programme, which reduced crime and increased public confidence in six trial wards, indicated that community engagement and problem-solving were, along with police visibility, the key delivery mechanisms (Tuffin et al., 2006). The recent Flanagan Review of policing has also highlighted that local
Community engagement is critical; and argues that the police can only fully understand the concerns and priorities of the public by engaging with them and responding to their views. Research has also identified that the public believes that the community has a role to play in crime prevention (Docking, 2003).

This last point is supported by the Casey Review of engaging communities in fighting crime, which found people felt they could play a role in tackling or preventing crime, particularly if they had confidence in the response and outcomes delivered by the police and other criminal justice agencies (including safeguards against intimidation), and given positive leadership and greater clarity about the role they were expected to play (Casey, 2008). Three out of four respondents in a survey conducted for the review said they would be willing to give up some spare time for activities that would help to tackle crime. The most popular options were looking out for vulnerable neighbours, joining a scheme such as neighbourhood watch, helping to run activities for young people, and attending meetings with the police to help set priorities. The review found that the key drivers for further involvement identified by respondents were: more information about how to get involved, more schemes to get involved in, and simply being asked or invited. The review found that community engagement in tackling crime should be improved by providing minimum requirements regarding information about policing such as what neighbourhood policing is and means locally, what they can expect from their local police and local authority, and what ‘Police and Community Together’ (PACT) meetings they can attend.

Police authorities have a statutory duty to engage the public in local policing. Home Office research (Myhill et al., 2003) suggests that, though there are examples of effective practice, authorities’ engagement varies both in quality and coverage between and within authority areas. The Association of Police Authorities (APA) has recently argued that authorities have themselves taken considerable strides forward in making policing more accountable to local people and that they invest a great deal of effort in engaging with their communities to ensure that policing reflects local needs (2007). It presents many case studies from authorities showing the innovative ways they have developed of ensuring that local people have a say in what they think their local police should be doing and how their money should be spent on policing issues. The APA provides support through training and the provision of guidance to police authority members and staff to assist them in their role of holding chief officers to account for the delivery of effective performance outcomes for local communities.
Civil participation and behaviour

As outlined above, civil behaviour (or horizontal participation) relates to participation in community activities and other less formal types of association. It includes residents’ associations, sports clubs and faith groups. Distinctions are also made between being an association member, charitable giving and volunteering. If empowered behaviour is defined more broadly to include these types of horizontal participation, there is more scope for optimism as such activities remain popular.

Charitable giving

Most people give to charity at least once a month: according to the Citizenship Survey from April to December 2007, 77 per cent of people in England had given to charity in the four weeks prior to interview. Their average donation (excluding those who gave £300 or more) was over £16. High rates of charitable giving were also reported in the 2007 Helping Out survey. In fact, nearly all respondents reported having given to charity in the last year (95%) and four fifths (81%) claimed to have given in the previous four weeks. The survey found that the most common methods of donating in the four weeks prior to interview were putting money in a collection tin and buying raffle tickets. Almost three in ten (29%) respondents had donated by standing order, direct debit or another regular giving method, with an average donation of £31 per donor.

Formal and informal volunteering

According to the Citizenship Survey, levels of volunteering have been consistently high since 2001 when the survey began. The survey distinguishes between formal and informal volunteering. Formal volunteering is defined as giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations to benefit other people or the environment. Informal volunteering is defined as giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not relatives. Figures show that almost three-quarters (73%) of all adults had volunteered (formally or informally) at least once in the last 12 months (Citizenship Survey, April to December 2007). See Figure 8.

Overall levels of volunteering (formal and informal) are in line with those in 2001, although they are lower than levels in 2005. Since 2001, levels of formal volunteering have risen (from 39% to 43%), whilst informal volunteering has fallen (from 67% to 64%).
Chapter 1: Prevalence

Fewer people volunteer regularly: 47 per cent of adults had volunteered at least once a month in the 12 months prior to interview. Here too, levels of regular informal volunteering were higher than formal volunteering (35% compared to 27%). Current levels of regular formal volunteering are in line with those in 2001, although they are lower than levels in 2005 (from 29% to 27%). Levels of regular informal volunteering have also declined since 2005 (from 37% to 35%).

The Helping Out study focused on formal volunteering (help given through an organisation or group) and did not include informal volunteering (help given as an individual). Interviewers asked people about their involvement in helping out without getting paid, rather than using the term ‘volunteering’. Among the survey participants, 59 per cent had taken part in formal volunteering in the past 12 months, referred to here as ‘current volunteers’. Of these, 39 per cent were regular volunteers (once a month or more), 16 per cent volunteered quite often or a few times, and 4 per cent volunteered as a one-off activity.

Figure 8: Participation in volunteering (formal and informal) at least once in the last 12 months, Citizenship Survey, 2001 to April-December 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Informal volunteering</th>
<th>Formal volunteering</th>
<th>All volunteering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April-December 2007</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online social networking

Since around 2004, the online sphere has seen a move from the era now known as Web 1.0 (focused on connecting computers) to the new age of Web 2.0 (aimed at facilitating creativity, information sharing and collaboration among users). The widespread adoption of Web 2.0 technologies has created an emerging phenomenon known as ‘social media’ which describes the online tools and platforms that people use to share and discuss their opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives. Social media can take many different forms (including text, audio and video) and include many different media such as blogs, message boards, online communities, podcasts and wikis.

The increasing availability and popularity of free Web 2.0 technologies has engaged large numbers of citizens in a new type of online community participation and associational behaviour. Young people, in particular, have been at the forefront of the new Web 2.0 move toward user-generated content. They regularly use online technologies to communicate with one another, and increasingly conduct more and more of their lives online.

Meaningful and detailed social media statistics in this sphere can prove elusive and dated. Equally, the international nature of the medium makes it difficult to obtain data specific to England. Nonetheless, these figures (accessed online in March 2008) provide a flavour of the scale of this phenomenon:

- according to its own statistics, Facebook (a social networking site) has more than 66 million active users. The UK has the most users outside of the United States – currently, more than 8 million
- Bebo (the most popular social networking site amongst British teenagers) has 7.3 billion page views per month
- Flickr (a photo storage and sharing site) has two million uploads per day, which is the equivalent of 12,000 photos per second. The site has 8.5 million users worldwide
- eBay (the auction site) had hosted 14,463,346 auctions by the end of November 2006
- MySpace (a social networking site) had 230,000 new registrants per day as of September 2007, and over 200 million active accounts worldwide
Chapter 1: Prevalence

- YouTube (an online video sharing site) has two million uploads a day; more than 100 million videos a day are watched on the site
- Wikipedia (an encyclopaedia based on user generated content) has seven million articles in over 200 languages worldwide
- New communities of interest, such as netmums.com, with 275,000 users, are proliferating rapidly

Another useful source is the 2007 survey of *The Internet in Britain* (Dutton and Helsper, 2007), which found that:

- Almost one fifth (17%) of internet users had created a profile on a social networking site and that men were more likely than women to have created such a profile (19% compared to 13%)
- The largest difference in the use of social networking sites was based on lifestage. Student users were three times as likely (42%) as employed users (15%) to have a profile, and almost no retired users (2%) had such a profile
- Most respondents to the survey did not think that access to the internet influences the contact they have with friends and family. If they did see an influence it was that the internet had increased the contacts with their existing offline networks
- Blogging on the internet had decreased from 17 per cent in 2005 to 12 per cent in 2007
Communities in control – evidence annex

Socio-demographics and empowerment

Propensity to participate varies amongst different socio-demographic groups. For both civil and civic participation, it is possible to identify the more engaged and disengaged. As Pattie et al. point out, “political engagement is very much dominated by the already well-resourced, in other words, the most highly educated, the rich, and those from the top educational echelons” (2004:109). However, this general picture obscures much of the detail, as we can see below.

Age

According to various indicators, levels of subjective empowerment vary significantly by age.

- **Influencing Decisions.** Data from the Citizenship Survey (April-December 2007) show that people aged 35-49 years are the most likely to feel they can influence *local* decisions (41%), while those aged over 65 are the least likely (33% of those aged 65-74 and 36% of people aged 75+ feel able to influence local decisions). Perceived ability to influence *national* decisions, however, does not vary among the different age groups.

- **Trust in Government.** The Citizenship Survey (April-December 2007) reveals that trust in the local council is lowest among those in the middle age groups, with 53 per cent of those aged 50-64 saying they trust their local council, compared with 64 per cent of 16-24 year olds and 70 per cent of those aged over 75.

Young people are less likely than their older counterparts to participate in civic and political life.

- **Political Participation.** As well as being under-represented in the council chamber and in Parliament, a comparison with older age cohorts reveals that young people are also less likely to exercise their right to vote in local and national elections or to identify with a political party (Pirie and Worcester, 2000). Estimates show that young people were half as likely to vote in the 2005 general election as older age groups – turnout among 18-24 year olds was 37 per cent, the equivalent figure for those aged 65 and over was 75 per cent (Electoral Commission, 2005). The most recent Audit of Political Engagement (Hansard Society, 2008) finds that less than a quarter of 18-24 year olds (23%) are absolutely certain to vote, compared with almost eight in 10 of the 65-74 age group (78%).
Chapter 1: Prevalence

- **Civic Participation.** According to the Citizenship Survey, civic participation tends to peak in middle age – with 44 per cent of 35 to 64 year olds taking part, compared to 29 per cent of 16-24 year olds, and 30 per cent of those aged over 75 (April to December 2007).

- **Civic Activism.** Similarly, civic activism tends to be higher in middle age. Eleven per cent of those aged 35 to 49 have been civic activists, compared with 8 per cent of 16-34 year olds and the over-75s (April-December 2007).

- **Making a Complaint.** Analysis of data collected as part of the 2006 Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys reveals a positive correlation between age and propensity to make a complaint, although there is a small drop amongst those aged over 65. For the most part, as age rises, so does the likelihood that a resident would have contacted their local authority with a complaint in the previous twelve months. Satisfaction with complaints handling also rises with age.

On the other hand, young people are more likely than older age groups to be active in some aspects of civil life.

- **Volunteering.** According to the Citizenship Survey (April – December 2007), young people aged between 16 and 24 were more likely than the over 50s to participate in informal voluntary activities at least once a month (41% compared with 32% of 50-64 year olds, 34% of 65-74 year olds, and 27% of those aged 75+).

- **Online Engagement.** The online world is predominantly a young domain. For all the talk of ‘silver surfers’, Colville (2008) reports that 71 per cent of those aged 65 and over have never used the internet. In fact, he found that internet use grows rapidly as age declines – 35 per cent of those aged between 55 and 64 had never gone online, falling to just 4 per cent of 16-24 year olds. This is supported by evidence from the 2007 survey of The Internet in Britain which found that 90 per cent of those age under 18 had used the internet, compared to just 24 per cent of those aged over 75 (Dutton and Helsper, 2007). The survey also found that while only a third of retired people were online (in comparison to 97% of students), those who were online were more likely than students or employed users to be civically engaged (16% of retired internet users had signed a petition online compared to 7% of employed users and 5% of students). Students were also found to be less likely to use e-Government services than the employed and retired internet users.
Gender
There are no notable gender differences in relation to subjective empowerment. Moreover, men and women seem to participate at similar rates in civic and political life.

- **Political Participation.** A study published by the Electoral Commission in 2004 concluded that there is no gender gap in voter turnout at national, regional or local elections. The study, which considered the extent and nature of male and female political participation found that although, before 1979, women were less likely to vote than men, the voting gap in local and national elections has since lessened and may even have reversed (Electoral Commission, 2004). In relation to the most recent general election, the Electoral Commission recorded that men and women were almost equally likely to vote in 2005. Of course, the exception here is the well documented disparity in the numbers of men and women who actually become politicians – women make up only 29 per cent of councillors and 20 per cent of MPs (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

Levels of participation in volunteering, on the other hand, do vary significantly between men and women.

- **Volunteering.** The Helping Out 2007 survey found that women were significantly more likely to volunteer than men (64% compared to 54%). Likewise, the Citizenship Survey (April-December 2007) shows that women are more likely than men to volunteer. In particular, women are more likely than men to volunteer regularly (29% of women compared to 24% of men in relation to formal volunteering; 38% and 31% respectively in relation to informal volunteering).

Ethnicity
The evidence suggests that ethnic minority citizens feel more empowered than white citizens.

- **Influencing Decisions.** Data from the Citizenship Survey (April-December 2007) found that fewer white people than people from ethnic minority backgrounds felt they could influence local decisions (37% compared with 47%).

- **Trust in Government.** Similarly, ethnic minority citizens exhibit higher levels of trust in local government than their white counterparts (70% compared to 59%) (Citizenship Survey, April-December 2007).
This pattern is not reflected, however, in objective measures of empowerment.

- **Political Participation.** According to the Electoral Commission (2006), voter registration is lower among the black African and black Caribbean population, while registration rates for some Asian communities are above average. Consistent with these findings, a large-scale survey of British black and minority ethnic attitudes towards the 2005 general election, undertaken for the Electoral Commission, found that turnout was lower among black citizens (61% among those from African communities, 54% among Caribbean groups) than among Asian citizens (67% among those of Indian descent, 70% among those of Pakistani descent, and 76% among those of Bangladeshi descent); it was lower still among the mixed-race group and ‘Others’. The survey also found that, as with the British population as a whole, abstention was highest among young black and minority ethnic voters (Electoral Commission, 2005). Ethnic minorities are also under-represented in Parliament and councils. Of a total of 647 MPs in Westminster, only 15 are from ethnic minority groups (2%), and only 4 per cent of councillors are non-White compared to 10 per cent of the population (Government Equalities Office, 2007; Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

- **Civic Activism.** Ethnicity does not have a significant effect on participation in civic activism when controlled for other factors (Citizenship Survey, April to September 2007).

- **Making a Complaint.** According to the 2006 Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys, propensity to make a complaint varies significantly by ethnic group, with black respondents most likely to have contacted their local authority with a complaint in the last 12 months (27%) and Asian and Chinese and other respondents the least likely (18% and 17% respectively). Asian respondents were also the group least satisfied with the way their complaints were handled.

- **Volunteering.** The Citizenship Survey (April-December 2007) reveals some differences in levels of regular volunteering between ethnic groups. Black Caribbean (29%), black African (26%), mixed race (27%) and white (28%) people were all more likely to volunteer formally on a regular basis than those from the Pakistani (17%), Bangladeshi (15%) and Chinese or other (16%) ethnic groups. A similar pattern was observed for informal volunteering: 41 per cent of mixed race people, 39 per cent of black Caribbean, 36 per cent of black African people and 35 per cent of white people regularly volunteered informally, compared to 22 per cent of Bangladeshi and 29 per cent of Indian people.
Pakistani people also reported lower levels of informal volunteering than mixed race and black Caribbean people (30% compared with 41% and 39%, respectively).

**Socio-economic status**

There is a clear correlation between socio-economic status and several empowerment indicators.

- **Influencing Decisions.** Citizenship Survey data (April-December 2007) show that people in the upper socio-economic groups are more likely than those in the lower groups to feel able to influence local decisions. Some 43 per cent of people in the higher/lower managerial and professional group feel able to influence local decisions, compared with 30 per cent of people with routine occupations and 32 per cent of people who are long-term unemployed or have never worked. The same applies to influencing national decisions: 21 per cent of people in the higher/lower managerial and professional group feel able to influence national decisions, compared with 17 per cent of those with routine occupations.

- **Political Participation.** There are significant differences in political interest according to education and social class. According to the latest Audit of Political Engagement, two in three (66%) of those belonging to social grades AB are ‘certain’ to vote in an immediate general election, compared to just one in three DEs (34%) (Hansard Society, 2008).

- **Civic Participation.** There is a significant association between socio-economic status and taking part in civic activities (such as contacting an elected representative, joining a public demonstration or protest, or signing a petition). Citizenship Survey data reveal that people in managerial and professional occupations were more than twice as likely to have undertaken such activities in the last 12 months as people in routine occupations or those who had never worked (49% compared to 23%) (Citizenship Survey, April-December 2007).

- **Civic Activism.** Graduates are more likely to be civic activists than people with lower level qualifications or none. Similarly, those in managerial and professional occupations were more than twice as likely to have taken part in civic activity as those who had never worked or were long-term unemployed (48% compared to 21%) (Citizenship Survey, April-September 2007).
• **Volunteering.** Levels of volunteering are also closely associated with socio-economic status. Managers and professionals are almost twice as likely as those with routine occupations to engage in regular *formal* volunteering (34% compared with 18%). This difference is less pronounced – although still significant – among regular *informal* volunteers (38% compared with 30%) (Citizenship Survey, April-September 2007).

• **Online Engagement.** Colville (2008) has noted that 51 per cent of those earning up to £10,400 had never used the internet, compared to 6 per cent of those on £36,400 or more. This is supported by evidence from the 2007 survey of *The Internet in Britain* which found that those in the highest income category (>£50,000) were more than twice as likely to use the internet than those in the lowest income category (<£12,500) (91% compared to 39%). The survey also found that education was strongly related to internet use, with only half (55%) of those with secondary school education using the internet, compared to 90% of those with a university education (Dutton and Helsper, 2007).
Chapter 2: Demand

Extent of demand

There is some evidence of unmet demand for engagement opportunities. For example, most respondents to the 2007 Audit of Political Engagement wanted a say in how the country is run (69%) (Electoral Commission/Hansard Society, 2007). Given the current levels of activity reported in Chapter 1 above, this suggests a degree of latent demand. Similarly, research exploring public attitudes towards local government funding and responsibilities conducted for the Lyons Inquiry, found that 73 per cent of respondents felt that people should be able to influence how council tax is spent, and over two-fifths (45%) would personally like to be involved (BMG Research, 2007). When respondents to the Citizenship Survey were asked how important it is to influence decisions in the local area, 32 per cent said it was very important and a further 47 per cent thought it quite important. Fifty per cent of respondents to the same survey wanted to be more involved in the decisions that their local council makes that affect their local area (April-December 2007).

There is also a sizeable appetite amongst citizens for engagement with public service providers with a view to making a complaint or seeking redress. MORI (2003) found that people believed in their right to complain to public service providers, with eight in ten (82%) strongly agreeing with this sentiment. The public have suggested ways to improve complaints handling, for example, alternative mechanisms for reporting complaints, a speedy acknowledgement of a complaint, more consistent feedback and an easily traceable system to keep them informed of progress (National Audit Office, 2005). Related to this, one study conducted by researchers at Leeds Metropolitan University uncovered fairly widespread demand for information on council performance (Darlow, 2008). When probed about how they would use this information, some respondents suggested that it would inform their engagement with local politics and democracy, including holding their local representatives to account and informing their voting behaviour. Importantly, those respondents who displayed an appetite for performance information were clear they wanted information that is relevant to them and specifically related to the services they used regularly. Despite such demand, however, the study also uncovered significant apathy amongst some groups about performance information and how it might be used.

There is, however, a notable discrepancy between what people say they might be willing to do and what they have actually done. People may, in principle, be willing to take action on an issue they feel particularly strongly about, but in practice don’t do so
(Audit of Political Engagement, 2007). And for more demanding roles, such as school governance and councillor positions, there are too few candidates, despite opportunities to engage being available. For instance, when Woods et al. (2002a) looked at parish and town council elections in the 1998-2000 electoral cycles, they found that fewer people were nominated than there were available seats in more than a third (36%) of local council wards, and that the proportion of wards with a shortage of candidates had doubled in the preceding decade. Likewise, a now fairly dated Ofsted report on the work of school governors showed that many schools had difficulty in recruiting their full complement of governors and that this problem was most acute in inner city schools (Ofsted, 2002).

Research by MORI into how well local authorities ‘connect with their communities’ suggests that most people are content to take a passive interest in the activities of their local council. The majority of local residents surveyed indicate that they would like to know what the council is doing, but are happy to let them get on with their job (MORI, 2001). Similarly, 38 per cent of respondents to the Lyons Inquiry survey mentioned above wanted no say in setting standards of service delivery (BMG, 2007). As Stoker has noted: ‘Most people don’t want to spend all their time on politics, […] they are comfortable with the division of labour. They want to engage directly over the issues that are most salient to them but would prefer to rely on the judgements of representatives and activists over most issues, most of the time’ (2006:151).

Significantly, the 2007 Audit of Political Engagement found evidence of a small yet statistically significant proportion of the public who do not want to have a say in how the country is run and express no interest in politics: 19 per cent are ‘not at all’ interested in politics; 11 per cent are absolutely certain not to vote in an immediate general election; 15 per cent would not be willing to do anything from a list of 12 different activities designed to allow citizens to express their opinion on important issues. This ‘hard core’ of politically disengaged people – many millions of citizens – has remained fairly stable since the Audit began in 2003 (Hansard Society/Electoral Commission, 2007).

This does not mean that our democratic structures and political parties should not strive to be more inclusive, but it does set the terms of debate for considering how to involve a greater proportion of people in politics and public services. In relation to user participation in service delivery, Bovaird and Downe (forthcoming) have argued that it may be unrealistic and inappropriate to expect a very large proportion of the population to be involved in ‘deep’ engagement activities. Although mobilising a wider cross-
section of service users may be important in order to ensure that currently under-represented groups are included, mass participation in service provision is arguably not the answer. Instead, they suggest that what is needed is: (1) a small group of active members who emerge from the user community and are prepared to interest themselves in the organisation, to stand for positions on committees and to represent service users in general; (2) a much larger group to be knowledgeable about the organisation, to develop some loyalty and pride in it, and to provide support for their representatives; and (3) a strategy for keeping in touch with the mass of service users through giving information, consulting, and perhaps even asking them to vote in important decisions. This sort of approach echoes that advocated by Skidmore et al. (2006) who propose a ‘1 per cent solution’, whereby 1 per cent of the population is deeply engaged in local governance.

**Nature of demand**

**Demand by service sector**

Demand for involvement in service delivery varies by service sector. Research suggests that the nature of a service is an important determinant of the likelihood of citizens wishing to become involved in making decisions in relation to it. High interest services, such as health or education, are more likely to attract participation than, for example, waste management, which tends to garner low levels of interest. According to a survey undertaken for the Lyons Inquiry (BMG, 2007), the two areas that attract the highest level of interest are police and community safety issues and the NHS. When asked which public services they personally want to have a say in (with regards to standards of service delivery), 25 per cent of respondents cited the police and community safety, and 19 per cent cited the NHS – see Figure 9.
Figure 9: Demand for influencing standards of service delivery by service sector, Lyons Inquiry (2007)\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure9}
\caption{Demand for influencing standards of service delivery by service sector, Lyons Inquiry (2007)\textsuperscript{15}}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Demand by engagement mechanism}

Research has also been undertaken to explore which methods of consultation are preferred by the public. As part of the Lyons Inquiry Survey (BMG, 2007), respondents were asked to select the methods of consultation their local council should use if they were to consult people about issues to do with service provision. Face-to-face surveys were most popular, selected by two in five respondents (41\%); postal surveys followed closely (39\%). Three in ten (29\%) would be happy with routine local elections while a quarter (25\%) felt that they should use leaflets or posters. Other methods of consultation were chosen by fewer than one in five respondents.\textsuperscript{16}

A subset of respondents who personally wished to be involved in making decisions about how council tax was spent in their area were subsequently asked how they would prefer to get involved.\textsuperscript{17} Half would prefer to do so via public meetings (50\%),

\textsuperscript{15} Base: 1056
\textsuperscript{16} Base: 1242
\textsuperscript{17} Base: 479
two-fifths (41%) via surveys, focus groups and related research mechanisms, and around a quarter via petitions (28%), meetings with councillors (27%), meetings of groups to which they belong (24%), meetings with council staff (24%), and through written communication (22%). Only a few mentioned standing for council elections themselves (6%).

**Demand by socio-demographics**

Differences in demand are also discernable according to certain socio-demographic characteristics. According to the 2007 Audit of Political Engagement:

- men are more likely than women to want a say in how the country is run (73% compared to 64%)
- the youngest age group participating in the survey, the 18-24 year olds, are least likely to want a say in how the country is run (58%)
- people in classes ABC1 are significantly more likely than those in classes C2DE to want a say in how the country is run (75% compared to 60%)
- people living in rural areas are more likely to not want a say in how the country is run than those living in urban areas (20% compared to 10%)
Chapter 3: Barriers

Activating – or expanding – any public demand for participation requires government and its partners to understand why people don’t currently participate. The key barriers are well established in the literature. They are similar and recurring regardless of the depth of engagement sought, although barriers to more demanding types of engagement are greater.

For example, barriers identified in research for the Councillors Commission (see Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007) are echoed in much of the literature relating to other lay governance roles (Dalziel et al., 2007), such as school governors (Ellis, 2003) and parish and town councillors (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007). In all these instances, it is often the cumulative effect and interaction of many factors that does most to undermine participation (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

a) Lack of interest or understanding about local governance

Research by Lowndes et al. (2001a) into local authorities’ perspectives on public participation found that a lack of public interest was a major inhibitor in many authorities. The importance of interest and awareness is also well documented in citizen-perspective research. For instance, Aspden and Birch (2005) cite interest in and understanding of local government and local politics as an important driver of participation.

Low turnout at both national and local elections has been taken by many commentators as evidence of widespread political apathy; debates about the cause and extent of disengagement have now become entrenched in British political discourse. A lack of interest by the general public in politics and politicians was repeatedly cited in submissions to the Councillors Commission as a barrier which prevented people from seeking to become councillors. Yet, despite widespread popular concerns of a downward spiral of public interest and engagement with the formal political process, the latest Audit of Political Engagement (Hansard Society, 2008) reveals relatively stable political attitudes and behaviours since the Audit began in 2004 (despite a small drop in some indicators between 2007 and 2008). Just over half of people are ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ interested in politics; a similar proportion would be ‘absolutely certain to vote’ at an immediate general election (51% and 53% respectively).

This perceived disinterest may, in fact, be the product of misunderstanding. Research suggests that there is widespread confusion about types and access to governance roles and how to get involved (Dalziel et al., 2007). Skidmore et al. have argued that the governance
landscape is ‘terribly confusing’ and that it needs to be made easier to navigate and understand (2006:55).

A widespread public lack of understanding about what councillors do is a recurring theme in the literature (see Granville and Laird, 1999; Taylor and Williams, 2006; White et al., 2006, all cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007). Most recently, qualitative research for the Councillors Commission with community activists found a very limited understanding of the role of a councillor and governance in general (Hands et al., 2007:6). This was most pronounced amongst the youngest respondents (teenagers) who knew virtually nothing about councillors, to the extent that ‘in one group there was obvious confusion between the roles of ‘councillor’ and ‘counsellor’.’ Likewise, a study of young people aged 16-25, conducted by the National Centre for Social Research, uncovered very low levels of awareness and understanding about the role and responsibilities of local government and a general confusion about the difference between national and local politics – particularly in terms of the local representation of young people (Molloy et al., 2002). This lack of understanding prevented young people from developing an interest in local government.

Amongst the public, confusion reigns regarding the roles and responsibilities of different tiers of local government, and their relationships to one another. Submissions to the Councillors Commission made common reference to such confusion, particularly in multi-tier areas, and suggested that the public often assume that councils have responsibilities for services they do not control, such as the fire service and the police. Submissions also showed that the public may not appreciate the distinction between councillors and officers in terms of pay or responsibilities; this appeared to be corroborated by qualitative work undertaken for the Commission (Hands et al., 2007). With parish councillors in particular, there is some anecdotal and qualitative evidence that both the general public and parish councillors themselves lack clarity about their role in relation to other tiers of government and alternative governance bodies (Commission for Rural Communities, 2007b).

Widespread public confusion is also evident in relation to procedures for complaints and redress over local services. The National Audit Office has identified poor awareness and understanding of redress mechanisms: “the public see the bulk of handling of complaints and appeals by government departments and agencies as complex to access and understand” (2005: 13). Likewise, evidence from the 2006-07 Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys suggests that there is only limited awareness about complaints procedures within councils. When asked whether they knew how to complain, only
44 per cent of respondents felt well informed. It is notable that the National Audit Office (2005) found that citizens without access to the internet confront much greater problems in accessing general information about redress procedures than whose who have such access.

There is also a growing body of evidence suggesting that partnership working compromises local accountability, as the public struggle to understand who is ultimately responsible for different aspects of local service provision. In particular, recent work on citizen redress and partnerships raises serious concerns about the ways in which citizens might gain redress when services have been delivered through a partnership of providers (Local Government Ombudsmen, 2007). The research found evidence of a lack of information about how to register a complaint from the outset; confusion amongst staff and the public about various responsibilities; and a lack of any formalised process for handling complaints by the public. Further evidence of confusion is provided by the National LSP Evaluation which highlights the fact that: ‘substantial numbers of LSPs identify accountability as an area that needs strengthening’ (Communities and Local Government, 2006b:8). The evaluation (based on research that ended in 2005) found a lack of clarity on a number of aspects including the accountability of the LSP to partners, and the accountability of partners to the LSP, as well as wider public accountability. Nonetheless, according to the report on the 2006 Survey of all English LSPs, perceptions of the accountability of LSPs, both to the public and to local partners, have improved significantly since 2004. On the two issues where similar questions were asked in 2004, 79 per cent of responding LSPs (compared to 55 per cent in 2004) agree or strongly agree that the LSP is now accountable to its partners; 53 per cent agree or agree strongly that it is accountable to the public (compared to 45 per cent in 2004), with more ‘strongly agreeing’.

b) Negative perceptions and lack of trust in public institutions

Lowndes et al. (2001a) identified negative views of the local authority as a key barrier to participation in councils. They argue that ordinary citizens (as opposed to active citizens) tend to have overwhelmingly negative views of the local council – its services, its officers and its members. Such views were sometimes based on personal experience but were often felt to be simply ‘common sense’ based at least in part on prejudice (Lowndes et al., 2001a). Further evidence of an implicit mistrust of local councils and councillors is provided by a 2006 study of public perceptions of local government in England (Taylor and Williams, 2006). This qualitative study of local authority residents found widespread mistrust of both the council as an entity and local councillors as
individuals. The main reasons residents gave for this lack of trust can be categorised into two groups: (1) a deep-seated mistrust of politics and politicians; and (2) a more practical belief that their councils cannot be trusted to deliver value for money services, or their election promises. The study found that respondents felt that their council makes little effort to communicate with them and residents’ negative experiences of consultations engendered a belief that councils will act on their own agenda rather than on residents’ wishes.

This finding is reiterated in an ongoing study being undertaken for Communities and Local Government by the National Centre for Social Research. Members of the public taking part in focus groups felt that councils should do more to actively seek their views. Here, the onus should be on the council to facilitate this process by providing convenient mechanisms for eliciting views. Councils should also do more to communicate their decision-making: people felt that communications from their local council were full of ‘good news stories’. This contributed to a sense of mistrust since people felt that they only gave a partial picture that lacked transparency about why decisions had or had not been taken, and omitted information about what could not be achieved.

With young people, Molloy et al. (2002) found that widespread disillusionment with politics, often driven by images from national politics, significantly influenced their attitudes towards local government. A lack of faith in politicians and their ability to tell the truth, keep promises and be accountable seemed to be instrumental in alienating young people from local government. This was further exacerbated by a perceived inability of politicians to effect change. In contrast, the group of politically active young people who participated in the same study gave an insight into what motivates them to participate in local government. It showed that feeling that there was a real opportunity to influence was an important driver – the politically active group did not share the disillusionment and cynicism observed amongst the disengaged group (Molloy et al., 2002).
c) Lack of awareness of how to get involved and inaccessible recruitment practices

A recurring theme in literature relating to volunteering, lay governance and other forms of participation is that a lack of public awareness about opportunities to participate constitutes a serious barrier to wider engagement. Lowndes et al. (2001b) found very little awareness amongst the public about opportunities to influence or participate in their council. Few people knew that they could attend council meetings, or how to find out about them. Among ordinary citizens there was little awareness of tenants’ associations or other standing forums in their area. At the same time, the focus groups revealed considerable enthusiasm for more information about how to contact the council including more ‘eye catching’ information on services and activities and more regular and reliable delivery of council newspapers. Not knowing how (or whom to approach) to find out more information is also a barrier to participation in school governance (Ellis, 2003).

Most people don’t know how to stand for selection or election as a councillor (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995; Lowndes et al. 1998; White, Bruce and Ritchie, 2000, cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007). Research for the Councillors Commission found that very few respondents (other than the few interested in becoming councillors and some senior level activists) had any understanding of the process by which a candidate stands for election (Hands et al., 2007).

Research has identified that one of the key barriers for people thinking of taking on a governance role is the perceived process by which people are chosen. Governance roles are, for example, often considered to be available only by invitation (Dalziel et al., 2007). Similarly, the often ‘closed’ recruitment practices of the three main political parties present a barrier to becoming a councillor, particularly against a backdrop of declining party membership and increasing reluctance to take on party political roles. Those that do belong to the main political parties tend to be older and white – thus limiting the pool of potential candidates (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007). Nevertheless, it is important to note that research in areas where councils are highly representative of the local population, found that political parties have been instrumental in recruiting councillors from traditionally under-represented groups (John et al., 2007).

By contrast, in parish and town councils, the lack of party political activity often means that the role of recruitment or selection falls to existing councillors, raising similar concerns about selector bias and closed networks. Most parish councillors are not party-
political; in the absence of parties, individuals recruit from their own social networks which may represent only a small section of the community (Woods and Gardner, 2007) and which are susceptible to breakdown when communities are increasingly fragmented or traditional social networks are disrupted by in-migration. This is exacerbated by the limited time councillors have available to seek new participants and support new members, which in itself perpetuates the narrow demographic and may act as a barrier to participation by others (Steel et al. 2006, cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007). In school governance, as with parish and town councillors, involvement often relies on face-to-face contact and word of mouth. In a similar way, the perceptions of existing governors, who make judgements about the eligibility of others to become governors, also create barriers for some people (Ellis, 2003).

d) Lack of time to participate

People often say they don’t have enough time to participate. For example, the Helping Out survey (2007) found the main barriers limiting those who would like to volunteer or do more voluntary work related to the perceived time commitment. Among those not volunteering but willing to help in the last year, ‘not enough spare time,’ was by far the most cited barrier (82%). Similarly, 41 per cent of respondents who had previously volunteered, but no longer did so, gave time constraints of home or work life as the reason for stopping. More spare time was felt to be the most significant thing which would make it easier to get involved by 31 per cent of respondents. In relation to young people specifically, time is also found to be one of the biggest barriers. Volunteering is just one of many competing demands on young people’s time, including studying and work. Their view that volunteering is very time-intensive and involves a fair amount of travelling time means that it has to justify itself by giving them clear returns for their time investment (Gaskin, 2004).

These findings are supported by evidence from the Citizenship Survey which also found that time-related barriers were important reasons for not volunteering. Factors such as work commitments (59%), having other things to do during spare time (32%), and having to look after children/home (31%) were more commonly cited than reasons such as having not heard about opportunities to help (15%), having never thought about volunteering (9%), or having an illness or disability (8%).

Focus group research with active and inactive citizens found people had limited time to get involved, and people felt that any kind of involvement in the community is time consuming and requires a large commitment (Dalziel et al., 2007). Participants saw
governance roles, such as local councillor, school governor and magistrate, as particularly demanding, and many people felt that the intensity of the commitment would rule them out of taking on such a role (Dalziel et al., 2007). To many, these roles were equivalent in time and commitment to a full time job and not accessible or open to the ‘average’ person. It was also suggested that such roles meant a regular, lengthy commitment from which it would be difficult to resign; and that this potential commitment discouraged people from getting involved (Dalziel et al., 2007).

Specifically in relation to becoming and remaining an elected councillor, the time commitment associated with the role and the concomitant impact on employment and caring responsibilities is seen as a significant barrier. Working councillors face the most practical difficulties and there is a widespread belief that being a councillor, particularly an executive one, amounts to a full-time job (Representing the Future, 2007). In contrast, the evidence is more mixed for school governors. Though some evidence suggests time is a significant barrier (Ellis, 2003; Ofsted, 2002), other research suggests only a minority of governors feel the burdens are ‘onerous’ (Ranson et al., 2005). The diversity of powers adopted by parish and town councils makes it hard to generalise about the time requirements needed to be a parish councillor; but there is some anecdotal evidence that the time commitment needed disincetivises or prevents some people from participating (CRC, 2007, cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007), and that the workload of such councillors has reportedly increased in recent years (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

Time barriers may be exacerbated by the fact that the same people often have multiple roles in their community and become overstretched (Steel et al., 2006). The general lack of willingness amongst people to take on governance roles exacerbates this trend for multiple memberships and increases the burden placed on the few.

e) Lack of confidence and perceived lack of skills

Research has identified a perceived lack of confidence and skills as a key barrier to involvement, particularly for more formal civic participation. Focus group participants regarded the type of person getting involved in civic governance as someone who is well educated, articulate and confident (Dalziel et al., 2007). In turn, a lack of confidence in public speaking, feeling intimidated by others, having to know how committees work and having to make decisions that affect other people were frequently mentioned as barriers to involvement (Dalziel et al., 2007). Equally, a lack of confidence or self-esteem, and alienation from the education system, left some people
feeling unable to volunteer as school governors. Formal recruitment, application and election procedures may also potentially create barriers for people who feel they lack the necessary skills (Ellis, 2003).

There is also evidence that differential levels of political and civic skills and confidence among under-represented groups may make them less willing to come forward without encouragement and support. For example, an Electoral Commission study (2004) identified that women have a weaker sense of political efficacy than men and less confidence about their ability to influence the political process through their own actions. Likewise Ellis (2003) referred to a lack of confidence amongst disabled people who are subject to repeated negative stereotyping, and Molloy et al. (2002, cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007) identified a lack of confidence among some young people as a reason for their lack of involvement in more active forms of participation. Brown et al. (1999, cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007) also suggested that young people and those from minority ethnic communities may be deterred for this reason.

Negative peer pressure can be a considerable barrier to volunteering. Many young people are conscious of the low status of volunteering among their age group and speak of the stigma of looking ‘sad’ or ‘not cool’. Tackling this barrier is seen as central to any future efforts to mobilise young people to volunteer (Gaskin, 2004). Some young people are put off volunteering by lack of confidence and fear of rejection. They feel that they have nothing to contribute and that other people will not value their efforts and achievements. This is particularly strongly felt among disaffected young people and those in the youngest age groups, and is a reflection of a broader feeling of disempowerment and social disapproval (Gaskin, 2004).

It is also important to recognise that the perceived lack of confidence and skills in relation to citizen participation relates not only to citizens but to those who are running and organising such exercises. Smith suggests that ‘we should not presume that staff possess the skills and understanding needed to undertake effective participation’ (2005:107).

**f) Stereotyping of those who participate**

The literature makes clear that the stereotyping of the kinds of people who are involved in governance roles can present a barrier to wider involvement. For example, Lowndes et al. (2001b) identified a strong sense among many research participants that participation was for ‘other people’. For some, this was a general sense that getting
involved simply ‘suited’ particular people. Similarly, recent focus group research (Dalziel et al., 2007) has shown that governance roles are perceived to be undertaken by people who are well educated, articulate, ‘well to do’, and have time on their hands. Many felt that ‘ordinary people’ were unlikely to get involved in these roles and that such roles are ‘not for people like me’. Several people were not even aware that the general public could take up governance roles (Dalziel et al., 2007). Equally, some young participants in this research felt that involvement was only for older people (Dalziel et al., 2007). In another study, the images of the types of people who become involved in local government were found to be alienating to young people and discouraged their involvement (Molloy et al., 2002). These negative stereotypes undermined any sense of aspiration to undertake roles seen as suiting and being performed by those with negative personality traits (including ‘busybodies’) (Molloy et al., 2002:37).

Similar issues relate to both councillors and school governors. Negative stereotypes about the kinds of people who become involved act as barriers to wider engagement. For the latter, a lack of publicity contributed to the persistent stereotype of governor bodies being dominated by white, middle class, middle aged people (Ellis, 2003). Equally, research with community activists found councillors regarded as typical ‘politicians’ – motivated by self-interest (personal and financial) and self-aggrandizement, lacking integrity and being out of touch with their constituents. By contrast, volunteers or community workers are regarded as largely philanthropic (Hands et al., 2007, p.ii). Research with members of the public has uncovered perceptions that councillors ‘live it up’ on expenses and are inaccessible and ‘haughty’ (OPM, 2006:39; Taylor and Williams, 2006:7). Councillors were generally thought to be driven by their ego and a desire for local recognition, rather than a motivation to serve the people in the local area. Other research (Dalziel et al., 2007) found community activists suspicious of the motivations for people’s involvement in governance roles (for example, people becoming magistrates to wield power over others) (Dalziel et al., 2007:47).

g) Scepticism about the difference participation will make

The Power Inquiry remarked that people want to become engaged, but see no point in it. It concluded that: ‘citizens do not feel that the processes of formal democracy offer them enough influence over political decisions’ (2006:17). Citizens often believe that the official mind is already made up, or that it will not listen to the results of participation exercises. Lowndes et al. (2001b) identified that the biggest deterrent to public participation was citizens’ perception – or experience – of a lack of council
response to consultation. Many research participants reported being deterred because they believed that the council wouldn’t do anything or had already made up its mind.

Such views may not be without foundation. Smith argues that “there is evidence to suggest that the outcome of citizen engagement has little or no impact on decision-making processes. Systems are often not effective or even in place to ensure that the decision-making processes within public authorities take into account public opinion. For example, surveys of local authorities found that only one-third of officers felt that public participation had a significant outcome on final decision-making. In a survey of ‘best practice’ authorities, the Audit Commission found that three-quarters failed to link the results of consultation with decision-making processes” (2005:107). Research has also shown that local authorities themselves recognise some of these concerns. Lowndes et al. (2001a) identified that the primary concern of local authority respondents was that public participation initiatives may raise unrealistic expectations. This was particularly important when the authority’s ability to respond to particular issues was constrained by financial or legal limitations. Some authorities also indicated that this was a problem when public demand on a particular issue conflicted with broader council policy.

The research makes the importance of outcomes clear, and highlights that involvement opportunities must present meaningful chances to make a difference. People tend to feel it is not worth getting involved in any type of community activity unless there is a real possibility of influencing outcomes. If they think the outcome will end up negatively – such as protesting against a development which will ultimately go ahead – then there is little incentive to take part (Dalziel et al., 2007:26). Research by Demos for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation argues that incentives to participation are “fundamentally about the devolution of power” and that ‘participants in governance will find it much easier to mobilise others and plug into their networks if the formal structures they inhabit are places where real power lies” (Skidmore et al., 2006:50). They argue that ‘seeing a direct, tangible impact from participation is a big incentive to get involved, yet this is one of the things that governance structures have generally been poor at showing’ (2006:56).

The erosion of local government influence is often cited as a barrier to becoming and remaining a councillor (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007). An exit survey undertaken by the Employers Organisation and the IDEa in 2003 found that 26 per cent of retiring councillors cited the erosion of local government influence as their reason for standing down (second only to personal reasons). Within this category the top three reasons
given were: changes to council structure (41%); extent of central government control (16%); and inability of local government to get things done (13%). Similarly, there is some evidence that the limited powers of parish and town councils by comparison to other tiers of government also act as a disincentive to becoming or remaining a councillor. Qualitative research for an inquiry by the Commission for Rural Communities inquiry encountered a perception that the parish sector had too little power to influence change; this disincentivised the community from interacting with parish councillors. Pearce and Ellwood (2002, cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007) argue that one explanation for the lack of candidates in local elections is that potential and existing parish and town councillors feel powerless to achieve even modest improvements in local services or to influence higher tier decision-making bodies. In addition, they argue that the replication or replacement of local councils’ traditional roles by a myriad of alternative agencies (such as partnerships of various sorts, rural community councils, area panels, and the voluntary and community sector), accompanied by a shift in emphasis from representative to participative and deliberative forms of democracy, has served to frustrate and undermine the community representative role of local councillors (Pearce and Ellwood, 2002, cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

With regard to young people specifically, Molloy et al. (2002) identified a widely held scepticism about the value of participation in local politics. Underlying this phenomenon were a combination of factors including: a lack of faith in existing methods of participation; perceptions that local government is not interested in the views of young people; and assumptions that the ‘system’ works and there is no need to get involved. Of particular importance perhaps is the perceived lack of interest in the views of young people by local government. Even when young people acknowledge that there are opportunities to participate, they sometimes abstain, assuming that their views will be given little status or ignored (White et al., 2000; Lowndes et al., 1998; Carnavon and Smith, 2001; cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

**h) Earlier experience of poorly-executed participation**

Evidence suggests that citizens’ perceptions of whether they can successfully influence local decisions are driven by their experiences of contact with both their current council and of councils where they have previously lived. For instance, in forthcoming research by the National Centre for Social Research, participants in cognitive testing and focus groups pointed to day-to-day contact with their council, as well as more explicit attempts to get involved, and the outcome of those issues, as forming an important part
of their perceived political efficacy. It has been argued that poorly focused engagement exercises are likely to deter citizens from participating in the future. In particular the evidence suggests that a failure by bodies to respond to the outcomes of participation makes future involvement less likely (Smith, 2005). Too often, once a participation exercise has taken place, it is not made clear how it has affected decision-making. Very rarely do authorities inform citizens of any impact (Newman et al., 2004 cited in Smith, 2005). Participants often express frustration with institutional inertia and the slow speed of change (ibid). Cole (2008) has suggested that poorly executed tenant participation initiatives, or involvement that leads to no tangible change, can reduce overall levels of satisfaction, as fragile trust may be eroded still further.

Newman et al. (2004) have suggested that poorly executed participation may be the result of a ‘climate of compulsion’ in certain policy areas which can have ‘perverse consequences in terms of producing short-term and inappropriate strategies for engaging the public’ (p.208, cited in Smith, 2005). As the Commission on Poverty Participation and Power (2000) point out: “If those responsible only carry out consultation because of the need to satisfy funding conditions, it will be poorly executed and half-hearted” (p.18, cited in Smith, 2005). In addition, consultation overload can occur as different agencies seek to justify their use of public money.

i) Financial costs of participation

Evidence in relation to more demanding participation roles draws attention to the financial costs that might be incurred by participants and highlights the fact that these costs may create barriers to involvement. School governors, for example, incur costs in terms of travel and childcare expenses. The lack of reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses creates particularly serious barriers to participation for certain groups (people on low income, people who are unemployed, lone parents and disabled people) (Ellis, 2003). Insufficient remuneration is also widely recognised as a barrier to becoming and remaining a principal tier councillor (especially for those reliant on state benefits) but there is a lack of consensus regarding how, and whether, it should be reformed (Councillors Commission, 2007; Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007). Anecdotally, it is also suggested that the lack of remuneration for parish and town councillors in comparison to higher tiers acts as a disincentive to participation in general. In particular, an inability for local councils to compensate childcare costs, for example, may discourage involvement. The high cost of travel for local councillors in very rural parishes is also considered a potential problem (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).
Research (Lowndes et al., 2001a) has also identified that the costs of involvement present a barrier from the local authority perspective. Respondents raised concerns that initiatives had introduced additional costs to the decision-making process or placed additional burdens on officers and members without any clear gains from participation. As Smith argues, “democratic innovations cannot be effective on the cheap” and poorly-resourced participation exercises will likely be ineffective (2005:106). He explains that sustained and effective engagement can be time-consuming and hard-work, and that capacity building is often needed, particularly to engage hard-to-reach groups who may have little or no experience, confidence and participation skills.

j) Fear of repercussions

For some active citizens, lay governance positions can cut them off from their communities rather than making them champions. The potential for voicing a different or controversial view from others in the community, and the fear of alienation, can discourage people from getting involved (Dalziel et al., 2007). The potential humiliation of nominating yourself and then failing to be elected into a governance role was also a discouraging factor (Dalziel et al., 2007). For parish and town councillors, the visibility and closeness of councillors to their electorate can create additional pressures; constant scrutiny and open criticism, as well as the potential for rejection by peers at election time, were found to be factors in the low numbers of people prepared to take on the formal responsibility of a governance role (acting as both a deterrent to standing and an incentive to stand down) (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

k) Structural disincentives and cultural resistance

A number of significant barriers to widening participation relate to institutional or structural factors. Smith (2005) identifies various structural barriers operating at the local authority level, including: the difficulty of reconciling the need to demonstrate short term performance improvements with the creation of participation opportunities; lack of dedicated resources for participation; and a lack of clarity about the aims of participation at a national and local level. In relation to councillors, a range of structural barriers to becoming and remaining a councillor were identified in research undertaken for the Councillors Commission, including: the system of politically restricted posts which limits the pool of potential candidates; anti-discrimination legislation that prevents parties adopting affirmative action; and the current electoral system that discourages selection of ‘non-standard’ candidates and favours incumbents (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).
The culture in which participation opportunities are designed and implemented is also potentially problematic. Smith describes a “tendency towards ‘incorporation’ of citizens into official bureaucratic ways of working” as opposed to a system whereby officials are more open to and respectful of the experience that participants can contribute (2005:107). This is arguably symptomatic of the documented organisational and professional resistance to participation, on the grounds that citizen involvement is either not suitable for strategic level decisions, or even that the public lack the skills to contribute effectively (see Newman et al., 2004 and Lowndes et al. 2001b). In Smith’s words: “it is often claimed that the capacity of citizens needs to be developed for effective participation – however, there is perhaps even more need to build the capacity of public authorities to both organise and respond to citizen engagement. Widespread cultural and institutional change is needed in order that public officials accept the legitimacy of citizen participation and are able to respond effectively to its outcomes” (2005:107).

I) Socio-economic status

Structural explanations for levels of political participation contend that participation will be affected by the resources available to groups and individuals (including educational qualifications and income). Possession of these assets makes some people better placed than others to take part in public service. As Verba et al. bluntly state: “those with higher education, higher income and higher status jobs – are more active in politics” (1995:281).

Analysis of data collected as part of the 2006 National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England demonstrates a link between educational attainment and propensity to become a councillor. Whilst just 30 per cent of the adult population hold a qualification equivalent to NVQ level 4 and above (eg degree or professional qualification), the figure for councillors was 50 per cent (IDeA/LGA/LGAR, 2007). Further evidence of the link between socio-economic status and participation is provided by figures relating to the occupation of councillors. Again, analysis of the 2006 Census reveals that councillors are more likely than the general adult population to hold managerial or executive roles (40% compared to 17%). On the other hand, councillors are less likely than the wider adult population to hold administrative, secretarial or sales roles (11% compared to 19%). Around the same proportion of both councillors and the wider population hold professional or technical roles. Interestingly, John et al., (2008) have observed that resources are a more important determinant of individual action than of collective action.
Chapter 4: Incentives

If we are to understand how to encourage more participation, we must reflect on why those who already get involved choose to do so. As with barriers to participation, incentives can be individual or institutional, influencing both supply and demand for enhanced opportunities. Research by Dalziel et al. (2007) has found that motivations to involvement in governance roles generally tend to reflect those for getting involved in volunteering. Motivations can be either positive (such as wanting to contribute because of pride in a community) or negative (such as protesting about proposed changes to local services).

Some incentives represent the flipside of the barriers we have identified – for example, a belief that it is worthwhile and likely to have a tangible impact on policy or services for the individual or community can encourage participation, just as the opposite belief will discourage it. Perceived political efficacy is associated with participation, and higher levels of participation are observed amongst those who feel able to influence local decision-making (Citizenship Survey, 2005; Aspden and Birch, 2005). Along the same lines, Birchall and Simmons found higher levels of participation amongst those who were confident that they could get things done and could personally make a difference. In particular, if people believe their contribution will produce tangible results, and that they will be listened to and taken seriously, then their motivation to express an interest in getting involved is increased (2004). Equally, whilst a lack of confidence may discourage participation, efforts and programmes to enhance individual confidence may encourage people to participate.

Some of the key motivating factors identified in the research literature are explored in more detail below.

a) A desire to serve the community, change things and/or make a difference

There is evidence that many active citizens are driven by strong positive motivations, such as a wish to ‘get something done’. But such motivations can be couched in less positive terms – for example, a wish to fight against something, or counter the interests of others (Bovaird and Downe, forthcoming; Grimsley et al., 2005). Birchall and Simmons (2004) have found that negative relationships with authorities, a sense of relative deprivation and a desire for change are also catalysts for participation.

There is some evidence that dissatisfaction with local service provision acts as a trigger to engagement and that service quality can influence the extent to which the public
wish to engage with empowerment mechanisms. For example, anecdotal evidence shows that people tend to be more prepared to engage in a service if there are problems with it that they want to put right (Involve, forthcoming). Analysis undertaken by Involve (forthcoming) using MORI polling data suggests that there is an inverse link between net satisfaction with council performance and a desire to be more involved with the council; this suggests that the more satisfied people are with their council the less they will want to be involved.

As with less demanding civic involvement, research for the Councillors Commission established that the underlying and initial motivations for most councillors to get involved in politics stemmed from an interest in their community and a strong desire to ‘make a difference’ (Hands et al., 2007). The latest quantitative source of evidence on reasons for becoming a councillor is the 2006 National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England (IDeA/LGA/LGAR, 2007). When respondents were asked to identify their reasons for becoming a councillor, the main reason reported was ‘to serve the community’ (87%), followed by ‘to change things’ (52%). Evidence from the existing literature on councillors (Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007) and submissions to the Commission all reiterated these motivations.

Similar motivations are identified as drivers to involvement in volunteering. The Helping Out (2007) survey showed that people mostly said they started volunteering for reasons which were broadly social and practical. The factor with the greatest support was I wanted to improve things, help people (53% of current volunteers), with the importance of the cause and having a sufficiency of time to spare coming joint second (41%).

b) Personal invitation to become involved

Research shows that people’s readiness to participate often depends upon whether they are approached and the nature of the approach. Personal invitations to participate play a crucial role in encouraging involvement; this may be particularly true for hard-to-reach groups (IPPR, 2004; Lowndes et al., 2001b). Birchall and Simmons (2004) found that 80 per cent of participants were actively recruited by people they knew. Active (rather than passive) recruitment campaigns are therefore vital, and mobilisation matters. With tenants, a small-scale survey of 125 participants in the 2003 Tenant Participation Advisory Service Conference identified the importance of an invitation to a meeting or to join a committee as a motivator (Millward, 2005).
Data from the National Census of Local Authority Councillors also demonstrates that being asked to stand is an important motivator to becoming a councillor: 29 per cent of respondents stood ‘because I was asked to’ (IDeA/LGA/LGAR, 2007). It should be noted, however, that respondents were permitted to tick more than one driver from a menu of response categories so being asked may not necessarily have been a primary motivator. It does, however, point to the crucial role played, primarily by political parties, in approaching potential candidates and encouraging them to stand. Equally, face-to-face recruitment is considered key to encouraging more people into a broad range of governance roles, not just councillor roles.

In particular, research (Dalziel et al., 2007) has found that being asked by someone already on a committee is regarded as a powerful way of gaining the involvement of those that may be unsure or lacking in confidence. This one to one contact allows initial concerns or questions to be answered and allows potential candidates to receive a first hand account of what is expected. As Dalziel et al. suggest, “being told that you are suitable and capable of undertaking such a role is flattering and can motivate people to get involved.” They also suggest that using people in the community who have ‘big’ personalities, who can inspire people to get involved is an effective way of encouraging involvement (2007:48).

In parish councils, too, Steel et al. (2006) found that only one third of councillors had put themselves forward for election or co-option. The rest had been encouraged to stand by a serving councillor or clerk (39%), approached by the council for co-option (19%) or encouraged to stand by a local group or organisation (8%). Woods (2005) suggests that even where individuals put themselves forward for election, it is often important that they have had previous contact with individuals who are already involved – what he terms ‘activating by example’ (all cited in Haberis and Prendergrast, 2007).

c) Practical or rational reasons

A small-scale study involving 125 participants in the 2003 Tenant Participation Advisory Service Conference identified that practical or rational motivations (an interest in housing issues; a desire to learn or fill time productively; a desire to improve individual circumstances) acted as important drivers to involvement (Millward, 2005). However, Birchall and Simmons (2004) found that although a few participants in their study agreed that ‘external’ benefits were important to them (eg help with a political career or being ‘looked up to’), many considered ‘internal’ benefits more important (eg
greater self-confidence or chance to ‘have one’s say’). The Helping Out (2007) survey of volunteering found that benefits in terms of skills or job prospects were an incentive for some, but were relatively minor in comparison to other benefits such as enjoyment and the satisfaction gained through seeing results. There were, however, some differences among age groups. Young people aged 16-34 were the age group most likely to ascribe importance to the benefits of gaining new skills, enhancing their employment prospects, and gaining a recognised qualification.

d) Positive experiences of participation

Just as poorly-executed participation and negative past experiences have been shown to act as a barrier to participation, so staying involved and repeating the process may depend strongly on the satisfaction obtained from the initial experience. Positive experiences of participation can reinforce key motivations to get involved and lead to growing commitment (Aspden and Birch, 2005; Birchall and Simmons, 2004). A good experience – for example, enjoying the process and learning something of interest, together with the sense of having made a difference, or at least having been listened to – can be a very important factor in the decision to remain involved (Lowndes et al., 2001b:6).

e) Local civic and associational culture

It has been argued that civil participation and associational behaviour – for example, involvement in volunteering, donating to charity, social networking – can facilitate civic participation. This is consistent with the theories of social capital which suggest that formal and informal sociability build up relations of trust and reciprocity which enhance individuals’ capacity to join together in collective action and resolve common problems (Lowndes et al., 2006c). Putnam has argued that community activity is a determining factor in involvement in democracy. For Putnam, association is the essential factor in establishing trust, norms of behaviour, shared understandings or values, reciprocity and networks – all of which are crucial to a healthy civil society and for collective action aimed at progress toward the ‘good society’. In this regard, a sense of community is considered be a strong motivator for participation.

However, despite the popularity of Putnam’s work, there is a significant debate about the extent to which engagement in civil or associational life actually engenders civic participation, rather than simply enhancing the potential for people to take up such opportunities. In 2000, the NCVO was commissioned by the Commonwealth Institute to assess the nature of civil society in the UK. For the purpose of the research, civil
Chapter 4: Incentives

society was loosely defined as ‘any kind of association or organisation which works on a voluntary basis to achieve certain aims.’ This definition included informal associations such as residents’ associations, local protest groups and sports clubs as well as trade unions, political parties and charities, but excluded profit-making, state-organised and family-based activities. Much of the associational activity identified in the research was neither public policy nor politically orientated. For research participants, civil society was not about engaging with political processes and institutions; it was about engaging with others, at a community level. The research findings supported the view that people felt a sense of alienation from formal institutions and were reluctant to engage in political processes and institutions. However, they did not necessarily feel a sense of alienation from each other, and were more likely to engage in less formal associational and community activity (cited in Jochum et al., 2005: 9).

A recent ESRC seminar paper has looked into people’s pathways to and from participation. It explores whether being involved in community activities – as a volunteer, member or beneficiary – can lead individuals to take part in decision-making structures and processes within voluntary and community organisations as well as others including state institutions and public services. By exploring attitudes in a North-East London community, it found that “while a large degree of informal social networking and activism created substantial ‘social capital’ for residents, there was no automatic relationship between this and their engagement with the public realm” (Annette and Creasy, 2007:3). The report challenged “presumptions that involvement in social activism automatically leads individuals and communities to political engagement because this campaigning helps them to see a link between their community concerns and the decisions made by political institutions” (Annette and Creasy, 2007:13). It also illustrated a lack of automatic connection between social activism and political engagement: “whilst there was a high level of social interaction on the estate and concern about the physical, social and environmental conditions of the area, this did not translate into participation in formal neighbourhood governance structures” (Annette and Creasy, 2007:16).

f) Local leadership and/or institutional culture

As with barriers to involvement, organisational attitudes and approaches can have a significant impact on opportunities for participation and the extent to which they are regarded as worthwhile by participants. As Involve argue: “culture can have a great impact on most of the mechanisms under consideration. For example, the de facto success of participative approaches depends on those in power being prepared to
accept and respond to the views of participants. Choice based mechanisms often depend, at least initially, on advisors such as social workers being willing to accept that the preferences of the people they are working with should have priority over their recommendations” (Involve, forthcoming). As such, changing local institutional attitudes towards participation may be an important driver for participation. As Gaventa (2004) points out, government, staff and councillors have been traditionally trained to act for the community; acting with the community requires new attitudes and behaviours.

Lowndes et al. (2006d) have suggested that levels of political participation are shaped by locally distinctive ‘rules in use’. Whilst acknowledging the importance of resources and levels of social capital, they demonstrate how the formal and informal arrangements that structure local participation are also important determinants of participation. These ‘rules in use’ are said to shape the behaviour of politicians, public managers, community leaders and citizens. One example from their study examines the cases of two cities with similar socio-economic profiles and levels of social capital, both subject to a similar modernising agenda intended to encourage civic participation. Despite these similarities, differences in participation were profound. The first city created successful structures for participation on the back of a vibrant and open local polity and a well-organised and funded voluntary and community sector. In the second city, formal innovations such as area committees failed to dislodge established rules and norms of political behaviour based on paternalistic and patronage-based politics. Moreover, the city’s voluntary sector had poor relationships with the authority and failed to organise itself well. The result was strongly contrasting levels of participation in two cities which might have been expected to produce similar levels of citizen engagement – but for the influence of the ‘rules in use’.

g) Socio-economic status, confidence and skills

The importance of socio-economic resources as a motivator is the corollary of their role as a barrier to participation. Lowndes et al. write: “when people have the appropriate skills and resources they are more able to participate. These skills range from the ability and confidence to speak in public or write letters, to the capacity to organise events and encourage others of similar mind to support initiatives. It also includes access to resources that facilitate such activities (resources ranging from photocopying facilities through to internet access and so on). These skills and resources are much more commonly found among the better educated and employed sections of the population: those of higher socio-economic status” (2006b:10).
With tenants, Cole (2008) suggests that the social and economic context of the local neighbourhood is likely to be among the more telling influences on their participation. There are exceptions, and research has identified very deprived areas with high levels of participation and affluent areas with lower participation (Lowndes et al., 2002).
Chapter 5: Outcomes

“The merits of participation are difficult to ascertain as there are relatively few cases in which the effectiveness of participation exercises have been studied in a structured (as opposed to highly subjective) manner” (Rowe and Frewer 2004, cited in Nicholson, 2005:44).

It is generally acknowledged that identifying and measuring the outcomes of participation and engagement is problematic and that this is exacerbated by a lack of systematic and comparable evidence (Rogers and Robinson, 2004; Nicholson, 2005; Albert and Passmore, 2008). Several reasons have been suggested for the lack of robust evaluations. Rogers and Robinson (2004), for instance, cite the difficulty in establishing reliable and meaningful measures of community engagement and the complexity of establishing a firm causal chain from engagement to desirable social goods. Similarly, Albert and Passmore highlight the difficulties of demonstrating a “causal relationship between particular public participation initiatives and resultant changes or improvements to services, when participation is often part of a larger programme” (2008:36). Nicolson (2005) collated various other barriers to systematic collection of outcome data:

- the longer-term impacts of some activities make shorter-term attempts at evaluation difficult
- it can be difficult to isolate the impact of one element of the input to the policy process
- there can be a tendency for commissioners to go by subjective measures of effectiveness and see no need for formal evaluations
- public participation exercises are likely to have potentially competing goals and inherent trade-offs (for example, citizens’ juries may compromise on representation but have other benefits which off-set this)
- direct comparisons between different methods are very difficult due to different contextual factors
- there may be differences in opinion over what constitutes a ‘good’ exercise or activity which can act as a major challenge for those responsible for designing and carrying out public participation processes
- there may be confusion over the ultimate purpose of the activity
Evidently, the difficulties in measuring impacts are numerous and substantive. Nonetheless, where studies have attempted to overcome these difficulties, the results have frequently been promising. It is worth emphasising, however, that positive outcomes are not automatic – they are variously dependent on (amongst other things): the appropriateness of the engagement/empowerment mechanism used; the skill with which it is applied; and the context in which it operates. Of course, the impact of participation and engagement is also related to the level or depth of empowerment it confers. Shallow forms of engagement, such as information provision, are unlikely to deliver outcomes that are as widespread or profound as those possible through an individual becoming a councillor or a community taking over management of a local asset. With these caveats in mind, some of the positive outcomes of successful participation and engagement are outlined below.

Communities and Local Government has commissioned a full systematic review of all the evidence related to six key empowerment themes which will report next year. In addition, as part of the implementation plan for the White Paper, we will continue to work with delivery partners to support them in systematically evaluating the outcomes of user driven services and initiatives in order to further improve service delivery and wider outcomes.

Impact on individuals

There are numerous accounts in the literature of the personal benefits of participation (Barnes and Bennet, 1997; Involve, forthcoming; Popay et al., 2007; and SQW, 2008). These include:

- increased political efficacy (closely related to ideas of subjective empowerment, discussed above)
- satisfaction gained from making a contribution and influencing change
- personal development through learning about services and developing new skills
- increased self-esteem from a sense of being listened to, or from a sense of altruism
- a greater understanding and sense of trust in service providers
- greater self-confidence from the experience of attending business meetings, speaking in public, expressing opinions etc
- personal enjoyment and satisfaction from gaining an inside knowledge of a neighbourhood and extending social networks
More specifically, research into co-production by people outside paid employment suggests that the resulting increase in social interaction has the potential to lead to positive health and well-being outcomes (Boyle et al., 2006). The experience of one participant with severe ME is indicative: “Stress affects my health to a certain extent, so having regular contact and conversation in small doses can actually give me energy rather than tire me out.” Similarly, there is evidence among mental health services users that great satisfaction can be gained from providing services to each other as participants in decision-making networks. It has been demonstrated that the impact of participation could go beyond users’ direct influence on services to challenging widespread assumptions about who can contribute as an active citizen and about the capacity that those who have experienced mental illness can develop. As one such participant has testified, “it’s given me a life and without it I wouldn’t have dreamed of doing half the things I do now. It’s given me confidence, assurance … I get up now and speak at a conference quite happily” (Barnes and Shardlow, 1997).

In relation to young people, research into youth councils found evidence of a range of personal benefits including increased self-worth (60%), the acquisition of new skills (24%), and a better understanding of local issues (19%). The great majority of participants also reported that getting involved was an enjoyable (79%) and positive experience (71%) (Matthews, 2001).

I gained something personally … confidence … it was a good experience … I think I kind of want to be a politician… it might be quite nice. (Female, aged 15, D3)

I was quite quiet before I came … yeah, I never used to say anything but now my confidence has grown. (Female, aged 15, B1)

I used to be so shy and now I can just talk … it really brought me out of my shell… I also think now about what’s going on locally … and what do other young people want from this. (Female, aged 16, A2)

Evidence of similar outcomes is also forthcoming from the regeneration literature. One study which sought to assess the skills and knowledge developed by individuals benefiting from the Community Champions Fund found that taking part in community-based regeneration projects had led to notable personal gains (Johnstone and
Campbell-Jones, 2003). For instance, nearly two-thirds of participants reported increased confidence, self-esteem and satisfaction from helping others. Other important but less frequently cited gains, included: meeting new people/useful contacts; money to do something useful; recognition and respect; and greater awareness of what is possible.

There is also evidence that when a citizen feels that they can have an influence over local decisions (if they choose), and that their voice will be heard and respected, this can have an influence over their general sense of well-being and even levels of happiness (Inglehart, 2006). Whilst social and economic factors play a central role in determining whether someone feels happy or not, research from Switzerland (which has a well-developed system of direct democracy) shows that citizens are happier when there are greater levels of local democracy (Frey and Stutzer, 2000). Two reasons are given for this: firstly, that participatory democracy leads to better decision-making, so that people feel government actions more closely match the people’s wishes; and secondly, because people value being directly involved in democracy.

### Impact on democratic renewal

As we saw in Chapter 4, some proponents of community engagement believe that (through the creation of social capital) it can spark democratic renewal. Robert Putnam has sought to show that community activity (for example, membership of neighbourhood associations, choral societies or sports clubs) is a determining factor in involvement in democracy. Putnam also argues that the performance of government and other social institutions is powerfully influenced by citizen engagement in community affairs (1995). Much of this discussion emerged from a study of local and regional government in Italy. Putnam argues that the higher performance and capacity for engagement in northern Italy can be directly correlated to the nature, vitality and density of its associational life (1993). He maintains that these associations helped to create the social conditions to develop and maintain democracy by generating social capital (Lowndes et al., 2006:4). For Putnam, then, a positive circle of social capital could be found in the north of the country: “stocks of social capital, such as trust, norms, and networks, tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative.” In southern Italy, on

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18 The Community Champions Fund – a joint Department for Education and Skills and Home Office programme provided small grants, typically up to £2,000, to support individuals by:

- developing their skills, through formal or informal training, and access to information and wider networks
- supporting them in driving forward community projects and passing on their expertise to others
the other hand, he suggests there was a self reinforcing destructive circle: “defection, distrust, shirking, exploitation, isolation, disorder, and stagnation intensify one another in a suffocating miasma of vicious circles” (Putnam, 1993:177).

In a discussion paper prepared by the Performance and Innovation Unit of the Cabinet Office (PIU, 2002), three pathways to improved governance were identified.

1. Social capital makes citizens more community-orientated, law abiding and co-operative with the state.

2. Social capital makes citizens more sophisticated consumers of politics, providing routes through which they can learn about the wider policy context, and can mobilise and lobby government to act in ways that benefit the community.

3. Social capital, invested in bureaucrats and politicians, makes them better at cooperating with citizens.

However, research by Lowndes and colleagues has suggested that while approaches based on resources (socio-economic status) and social capital can each play a role in explaining civic participation, “this is not the end of the participation story” (Lowndes et al., 2006:4). Rather, they argue that local leaders’ behaviour – their openness and responsiveness to citizen participation – also makes a difference to participation. Research by Lowndes et al. revealed that certain ‘institutional filters’ determined whether social capital converted into political participation – in particular, party politics, public management and the infrastructure of the voluntary and community sector. In this sense, they argue that “locally-specific civic infrastructures shape the extent to which social capital is mobilised as a resource for political participation” (2002:9). They further hypothesise that:

“In areas where the voluntary and community sectors are internally fragmented or poorly connected to the local state, social capital is more likely to be invested in informal social and neighbourhood activity than in political participation directed at the policies and decisions of local government. Hence, it may be possible for an area to have strong reserves of local social capital that are not translated into effective demands upon local policymakers. It is clear, then, that political and managerial initiatives to increase participation may go down very differently in different places, depending upon the institutional structures and sensibilities of civil society. Institutional
rules within the political, managerial and ‘civic’ domains thus interact to ‘switch on’ (or off) the potential of social capital as a resource for political participation” (2002:9).

The common assumption that social capital is intrinsically good or at least neutral has also been challenged. Halpern (1999) questions social capital as a ‘good’ to society by arguing that organised crime or gangs involve a ‘social network’ with shared norms; but they hardly constitute a societal good. Indeed, some of the same characteristics of social capital that enable beneficial outcomes can also have negative effects. The Performance and Innovation Unit (2002) identified other potential downsides of social capital:

- fostering behaviour that worsens rather than improves economic performance, which may occur, for instance, if individuals or groups form networks to pursue sectional interests at the expense of the efficient functioning of the market
- acting as a barrier to social inclusion and social mobility (for example, creating an arena of ‘old boys’ networks’). After all, social capital, like other forms of capital, is not evenly distributed
- dividing rather than uniting communities or societies (for example, the kinds of groupings and associations which can generate social capital also always carry the potential to exclude others – exclusive clubs may have strong internal bonds, but are hardly open to outsiders and may be unwilling to work for a wider social good)
- facilitating rather than reducing crime, educational under-achievement and health-damaging behaviour, so that social capital, through problematic social networks, can become a constraint on individuals’ actions and choices

**Impact on services**

Local authorities perceive that participation can have a positive impact on service delivery. For instance, a 2002 survey suggested that 70 per cent of local authorities think that public participation initiatives are either ‘often’ (26%) or ‘fairly often’ (44%) influential on decision-making (Birch, 2002). Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) felt that the most important benefit of public participation was improved services. Similarly, a survey of local authority officers in 2006 found that the great majority of them believed that public engagement in their authority or service had led to better services. Bovaird and Downe (forthcoming) found agreement that engagement had led to:

- services that were more responsive to the needs of users (89%)
- more informed decisions (86%)
• more accessible services (81%)
• higher quality services (79%)
• more ‘joined up’ services (76%)
• better value for council tax payers (59%)

Evidence in relation to actual, as well as perceived, impact on service delivery is provided below.

**Regeneration**

Since the introduction of the Single Regeneration Budget in 1994, public participation has been at the heart of regeneration policy. For instance, the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme – which established regeneration partnerships in 39 deprived areas – involves local people on Boards, thematic forums and committees, as well as providing various *ad hoc* opportunities for engagement. However, assessing the outcomes of NDC interventions is difficult, and disentangling the role played by the wider community even more so. Evidence from the national NDC evaluation reveals that local people believe that community engagement can have an indirect but important influence over NDC activities: community involvement helps shape strategies and in some cases the detail of NDC interventions. Nonetheless, the nature and impact of community involvement varies from major interventions in housing, which could not have been achieved without the community involvement approaches adopted, through to more modest (but important) adjustments to project detail in employment projects.

The Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder (NMP) programme aims to enable deprived communities and local services to ameliorate local outcomes, by improving and joining up local services, and making them more responsive to local needs. The national NMP evaluation has concluded that the involvement of residents has provided a degree of accountability in the improvement of services that would otherwise have been unlikely (SQW, 2008). The presence of neighbourhood management teams with local knowledge and the capacity to engage both local residents and voluntary groups is facilitating a greater level and quality of citizen engagement in most Pathfinder areas. This in turn provides opportunities for service providers to shape their services in ways that are more in line with local priorities, sometimes in modest ways (eg changing the times of opening hours) but sometimes more significantly (eg shaping masterplans and housing proposals).
SQW (2005) conclude that community involvement, if managed effectively, can improve the delivery of mainstream services in deprived areas by:

- giving providers better local knowledge
- improving user access to services
- increasing awareness amongst providers of the potential for joined up solutions
- enhancing the motivation of front-line staff
- prompting innovation in service design and delivery

These benefits to the way services are delivered can be translated into immediate outputs and outcomes, in the form of:

- new or improved services
- reductions in the unit costs of service provision
- reduced costs in other aspects of service provision (especially in housing)
- increased user satisfaction
- improved environmental quality
- reduced crime rates and fear of crime
- better prospects for improved health outcomes
- improved employment opportunities for local residents

The sustainability of these benefits depends on providers buying into the localisation of decision-making and the implementation of community involvement with clear objectives, stable long-term structures and processes, and mechanisms to encourage broad involvement.

**Health**

According to Rogers and Robinson (2004), many studies have linked levels of mortality, morbidity and disease to social capital. They argue that the social capital that is produced by community health projects can, in itself, be an effective preventative tool. Citing Putnam, they refer to more than a dozen large studies conducted in the USA, Scandinavia and Japan which show that “people who are socially disconnected are
between two and five times more likely to die from all causes, compared with matched individuals who have close ties with family, friends, and the community” (2000:327). Further evidence of reduced morbidity is proffered by Berkman (1988) who makes the link between a sense of community and improved immune systems, lower blood pressure and the prevention of premature ageing.

Research for the Department of Health’s *Health in Partnership* programme shows that public involvement can influence policies, plans and services, and can increase the confidence, understanding and skills of those participating (Harrison et al., 2002 cited in Welsh Office, 2005). Findings from the twelve research projects (Department of Health, 2004) in this programme found evidence of a number of positive outcomes – particularly in the area of the patient experience. The study found that patient involvement:

- increases patient satisfaction
- increases patient confidence and reduces anxiety
- fosters greater understanding of personal needs, improved trust, and better relationships with professionals
- leads to positive health effects

**Policing**

There is a long-established acknowledgement that strong communities can help reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. By the 1940s, Chicago School sociologists Shaw and McKay (1942) had recognised that if a community is not self-policing and imperfectly policed by outside agencies, some individuals will take the opportunity to participate in delinquent behaviours. They observed that one of the factors that differentiated low crime areas from high-crime areas was the existence of strong community ties with extensive social networks and high levels of trust or solidarity. Combined, these characteristics worked to monitor and socialise young people and enabled communities to pull together to maximise the value of public services. More recent analysis, again conducted in Chicago, found further evidence to support this ‘social disorganisation theory’. In a study of 343 ‘neighbourhood clusters’, Sampson et al. showed that, “after adjustment for measurement error, individual differences in neighbourhood composition, prior violence, and other potentially confounding social processes, the combined measure of informal social control and cohesion and trust remained a robust predictor of lower rates of violence” (1997:923). It is worth highlighting, however, that social disorganisation theory is not without its critics and even
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proponents do not argue that strong communities are the sole, or even most important, factor in preventing crime.

Perhaps the best known experiment of community involvement in policing and crime prevention is the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) which was initiated in the mid-1990s by the Chicago Police Department. This initiative shifted the onus of maintaining public safety from the police to neighbourhood partnerships between police and local residents. This was supported by strong inter-agency partnerships, to the extent that CAPS was regarded as a citywide programme. This programme has been the subject of a large scale ongoing evaluation by a consortium co-ordinated by the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University. In a report examining the progress of CAPS during its first ten years, the evaluation team found:

- evidence of sustained and high levels of public involvement – in 2002, 67,300 people attended a total of 2,916 beat meetings
- a big increase in the percentage of residents who agree that police in their area are dealing with the problems that concern residents and working with residents to solve them, both goals of CAPS
- that crimes of almost every category have declined significantly, though the drop in crime observed in Chicago paralleled trends in other big cities

However, the evaluators also highlight sustained problems with aspects of public involvement – in particular, the limited ability of beat meetings to prompt action and the fact that rapid turnover amongst officers attending the meetings acted as a barrier to the development of strong relationships between police and the public. What’s more, the analysis reveals that efforts to solve local priority problems have not been very effective: “district-level priorities get more sustained attention, but the same problems, in about the same locations, persist year after year. Over time the effectiveness of beat meetings in setting problem-solving agendas for the public has declined” (Chicago Community Policy Evaluation Consortium, 2004:x).

More recently, the evaluators reported that the Chicago Police Department have responded to media-generated concerns about crime by shifting significant resources from CAPS into specialist crime ‘crackdown’ squads. They describe the programme as a ‘shell’ waiting to be resurrected, surviving only due to the entrenchment of the beat meetings in the city’s organisational life (Skogan, 2008). This emphasises the importance of political and organisational support for effective community involvement.
In his review of neighbourhood policing, Myhill (2006) reports that evaluation has been restricted to specific projects and programmes which, in most instances, come from the US. He concludes that all major evaluations of community policing in the US have recognised some degree of implementation failure, but there that is evidence to support the benefits of community engagement in policing. A summary of the key findings from this literature review are presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reducing crime</td>
<td>Weak positive evidence</td>
<td>Some positive findings, some neutral, no negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing disorder/anti-social behaviour</td>
<td>Fairly strong positive evidence</td>
<td>Mostly positive findings, some neutral, no negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing feelings of safety</td>
<td>Fairly strong positive evidence</td>
<td>Mostly positive findings, some neutral, no negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving police community relations and community perceptions</td>
<td>Strong positive evidence</td>
<td>Almost all positive findings, minimal neutral, no negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing community capacity</td>
<td>This is a gap in the evidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing policy officers’ attitudes and behaviour</td>
<td>Fairly strong positive evidence on attitudes; mixed evidence on behaviour</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Myhill, 2006)

**Housing**

Rogers and Robinson (2004) identify a range of potential outcomes associated with greater tenant involvement in social housing:

- increased tenant satisfaction with housing management
- improvements in objective measures of service performance
- greater trust among tenants in the management of housing estates
However, a recent review of the evidence for Communities and Local Government argues that despite anecdotal evidence about the benefits of participation for landlords, tenants, the housing service and the wider neighbourhood, validated research findings to support these assertions are much more difficult to find (Cole, 2008). The distinction between the analytical and the anecdotal is blurred. The author argues that the limited evidence available suggests that tenant management does not necessarily secure greater tenant empowerment – the relationship is context-dependent and not straightforward. Whilst the Cave Review (2007) recommendation for the creation of a National Tenant Voice may provide a conduit for greater tenant influence on landlords’ policies and strategies, Cole argues that there is no systematic evidence on how far tenants have been able to exert influence through the existing regulatory regimes in both local authority and housing association sectors.

A major evidence review for ODPM on housing management effectiveness also noted a scarcity of evidence about whether or not tenant participation makes a difference (More et al., ODPM 2005). The only relevant study identified pointed out that the benefits of participation were taken as self-evident truths by many officers in the research case studies, rather than as empirically demonstrated outcomes. However, the research concluded that the overall evidence of the case studies was unequivocal. Tenant involvement had a positive impact on service quality and none of the participants – officers, elected members and tenants – thought that services had deteriorated as a result of tenants being involved, informed or consulted (DETR, 2001). While such consensus is not conclusive, it is the best available current evidence.

Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs), where tenant-controlled organisations take on aspects of the management and maintenance services under contract to the landlord, are widely cited as positive examples of participation in housing. An evaluation of TMOs (ODPM, 2002) found that:

- they were performing better than their host local authorities and compared favourably with the top 25 per cent of local authorities in England in terms of repairs, re-lets, rent collection and tenant satisfaction
- 77 per cent of TMO tenants were satisfied with their TMO overall compared with 67 per cent of council tenants in the Survey of English Housing (2000/01)
- 77 per cent of TMO tenants compared with 49 per cent of council tenants in the Survey of English Housing (1999/2000) were satisfied with the opportunities to be involved in the management of their homes
• 77 per cent agreed that the TMO played an important part in improving the quality of life in the area

However, Cole (2008) argues that it is difficult to rely too much on this evidence because of the small number of TMOs, the marked differences in scale compared to local authority landlords and the possible ‘halo’ effect in the early years, when the level of commitment may be at its peak. Longer term comparative evaluation would help to answer such questions more effectively.

The most recent systematic study of housing outcomes was undertaken by the Audit Commission (2004). It sought to establish the costs and benefits of resident involvement in housing associations. The research found that it was possible to identify some benefits from participation in improved performance, stronger accountability and better services, although these could not be quantified. Separately identifying the ‘costs’ of participation was much more difficult – whether for landlords (because in most cases these were not separately accounted for) or for residents (especially the ‘opportunity costs’ of time spent in attending meetings, sitting on committees or leafleting).

The Audit Commission pointed out that it was easier to suggest that participation brought value for money in securing service improvements than it was to demonstrate its effects in building residents’ ‘social capital’ or in enhancing overall landlord accountability. The report suggested that landlords often underestimated the investment needed to ensure that residents had an effective role as board or committee members – formal representation was often seen as the end of the process of involving residents, rather than the start of a longer journey.

**Education**

According to Rogers and Robinson (2004), there are at least four potential benefits that can result from engaging communities in their local schools:

• helping to ensure that schools and related services understand the needs and values of parents and students, so delivering a better service to them

• fostering social networks and social trust

• involving parents, pupils and local people in the decision-making process, helping schools to gain the trust and co-operation of the communities they serve
• involving parents, pupils and community representatives in school governance, encouraging the habit of active citizenship

Evidence of actual outcomes is available from the evaluation of the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) – a pre-school intervention in Oxfordshire aimed at increasing the educational attainment of disadvantaged children from infancy to five years through partnerships of parents and carers. Evangelou and Sylva (2003) evaluated the effects of the PEEP Project over two years and found that children whose parents had participated in the programme made “significantly greater gains” in language, literacy, numeracy and self-esteem, than a control group who had not been involved with the project.

The Evaluation of the Full Service Extended School (FSES) initiative also uncovered evidence of increased pupil attainment (Cummings et al., 2007). The FSES initiative was launched in 2003 with an aim to support the development, in every local authority area, of one or more schools which provide access to health services, adult learning and community activities, study support and 8am to 6pm childcare. An evaluation of the programme (Cummings et al., 2007) found that the approach was impacting positively on pupils’ attainments – particularly in the case of pupils facing difficulties. FSES were also found to be having a range of other impacts on outcomes for pupils, including engagement with learning, family stability and enhanced life chances. In the case of children facing real difficulties, these outcomes were often closely related. The cost-benefit analysis conducted by the evaluators found that the costs and benefits of the FSES were both high. Nonetheless, the benefits were found to equal or outweigh the costs, and since they accrued particularly to children and families facing the greatest difficulties, FSES approaches were deemed to represent a good investment.

**Employment**

In his seminal work on the “strength of weak ties”, Granovetter (1973) highlighted the importance of weak ties (to former colleagues, acquaintances, friends of friends), as opposed to strong ties (to close friends and family), in the process of finding employment. Although labour economists had long recognised that personal contacts were important routes to employment, Granovetter’s study was particularly interested in the nature of the relationship between the job seeker and the contact. He found that counter to the intuitive hypothesis that: “those with whom one has strong ties are more motivated to help with job information”, it was in fact “those to whom we are weakly tied” who are “more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive” (1973:1371).
More recent studies have continued to demonstrate the importance of personal contacts in the job search process. For instance, a US study of 35,000 job applicants to one company over a nine year period concluded that access to and effective use of social networks was an important route to getting hired (Petersen et al., 2000). In the UK, a study of one Department of Health and Social Security cohort during the 1980s concluded that more of these jobseekers found employment through personal networks than through any other individual route (Daniel, 1990).
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