The benefits of community engagement

A review of the evidence

by Ben Rogers and Emily Robinson, IPPR

Published by the Active Citizenship Centre
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Commissioned by the Civil Renewal Unit
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The Civil Renewal Unit promotes the ethos of civil renewal and community engagement across Government departments and to partners and stakeholders.

The Active Citizenship Centre provides a resource for research and evaluation of community engagement, in order to inform policy in civil renewal. The Centre is chaired by Professor Paul Whiteley.

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Foreword

One of the most important challenges for public service reform is how the needs of diverse citizens can be met in a manner which takes their differences into account sensitively and effectively. The agenda for the ‘personalisation’ of public services calls for a much sharper focus on connecting the development of public policies and services with the real requirements of users and stakeholders. A major opportunity to achieve this would be through community engagement.

Community engagement encompasses a variety of approaches whereby public service bodies empower citizens to consider and express their views on how their particular needs are best met. These may range from encouraging people to have a say on setting the priorities for community safety, through involving them in shaping and supporting health improvement programmes for themselves, to sharing decision-making with them in relation to defined services.

Community engagement brings the views of citizens to bear on the development of public services, as individuals who place their own needs within the broader context of the community of which they are part.

What one may demand irrespective of the needs of others is quite different from what one may seek on the basis of an inter-personal appreciation of wider community concerns. If satisfaction with public services is to improve amongst users and stakeholders who recognise the shared community challenges they face, the personalisation of public services needs to be taken forward through the most appropriate form of community engagement.

But what benefits does the application of community engagement actually bring? What do we know about the key features of effective application? To help answer these questions, we commissioned IPPR Trading Ltd to review the available evidence. The resulting report helpfully sets out instructive findings in relation to crime, health, education, employment, housing, regeneration and local government. It points to the need for further research, in response to which the Active Citizenship Centre (set up by the Home Office in 2003) will be devising a more detailed research programme. In the meantime, you should find this report a most useful guide to some of the key evidence relating to community engagement and its benefits.

Dr Henry Tam
Head of the Civil Renewal Unit
Executive summary

Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Civil Renewal Unit in the Home Office in order to

- explore and assess evidence for the positive results of community engagement and
- identify further work needed to increase and promote understanding of what works.

What do we mean by community engagement?

In the context of this report we understand community engagement as the opportunity, capacity and willingness of individuals to work collectively to shape public life. We are primarily interested in reviewing evidence for the benefits of engaging communities in the governing and running of public services.

Policy context

The New Labour government has pledged itself to promoting active citizenship and community engagement at all levels and in all policy areas. David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, has argued that ‘civil renewal’ should ‘form the centrepiece of the government’s reform agenda for the coming years’.1

Yet, over recent decades, social scientists, politicians and commentators have become increasingly concerned with falling levels of community engagement. The picture in the UK is not as dramatic as that painted by US academic Robert Putnam. Informal social networks, membership of community organisations and voluntary groups appear to have held up relatively well, even as formal political participation and trust in political institutions and politics has fallen. Nevertheless, relative to levels of education and prosperity, we probably have seen an overall decline. Levels of social interaction and trust are often lowest among socially excluded groups, where, arguably, it is needed most. At a time when academics and politicians are coming to believe, as never before, in the importance of community engagement, this is a worrying trend.

Community engagement, crime and anti-social behaviour

Research undertaken during three quarters of a century in England, Australia and Chicago has shown that strong communities can help to reduce crime through informal social monitoring and control.

Community centred police initiatives, which aim to involve local people in developing policing strategies and fighting crime, have been shown to have significant potential. The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) has sustained high levels of public engagement over a long

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period of time. It has also worked to reduce crime and the fear of crime and tackled drugs problems and anti-social behaviour.

The closest model to this operating in the UK is probably Police Community Consultation Groups. Whilst PCCGs have been found to work well as a forum for highlighting urgent local issues, they have not proved successful at strategic planning.

Restorative justice programmes have proved to be another effective way of engaging the public in the way we deal with crime and criminals. Independent evaluation of programmes in the Thames Valley and Canberra and of the UK Youth Justice Boards has been predominantly positive and has shown that restorative justice is seen to be fair by both victims and offenders and can reduce the risk of re-offending.

**Community engagement and health**

The ‘new’ public health agenda focuses on ‘community-based frameworks to affect the broader social, environmental and economic factors that influence and underpin relative inequalities in health’.

Many studies have linked levels of mortality, morbidity and disease to social capital of various kinds. It has been shown that people who are socially disconnected are more likely to die from all causes, than matched individuals who have close ties with family, friends, and the community.

Healthcare has proved to be a potent tool for creating strong communities. One example of this is the time bank. By blurring the distinction between giver and receiver, time banks not only focus on support mechanisms but also build people’s sense of self-worth and have proved to be particularly effective for those with mental health problems, particularly depression, for this reason. They have also been found to attract socially excluded groups and those who would not normally participate in voluntary projects.

Programmes such as citizens’ juries and national involvement exercises have been shown to be mutually beneficial for health care professionals and participants. By involving communities in the formation of health policy, professionals are able to target their resources more accurately to suit the needs of their patients. Other communities have created their own health services, tailored to their own needs, using the buying power of the NHS to regenerate the local economy through procurement and employment.

When patients play a greater part in managing their own conditions they have been found to place less demand on NHS services. They can also become active in building patient communities based on mutual aid.

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2 Health Development Agency Website: [http://www.hda.gov.uk](http://www.hda.gov.uk)
Community engagement and education

Schools are particularly prominent and widely used public institutions with enormous potential as a focus of local collective life.

Although parental involvement in education is recognised as crucial, for many parents schools can be hostile and intimidating places. Involving parents, pupils and locals in the decision making process will help schools to gain the trust and co-operation of the communities they serve and ensure their policies are seen to be fair and intelligent.

The school governor system is one of the principal routes into participation in public life. The structure and level of authority assumed by school governing bodies is extremely varied, and no large study has ever been carried out into the roles and experiences of parent and community school governors. Some schools are beginning to appoint pupils as associate governors or to develop democratic and effective city-wide schools’ councils. This is based upon the idea that pupils should learn citizenship in an active way, as citizens of their schools.

Just as schools benefit from engaged parents, pupils and communities, so parents and communities benefit from engaged – or ‘extended’ – schools. It has been recommended that schools should be used as centres for adult learning, childcare facilities, regeneration and community meetings. Extended school pathfinders report improvements in school ethos, in pupil motivation and attainment, and in parental confidence and aspiration.

SchooLets is an experiment with a local exchange trading system, in which ‘goods’ include peer mentoring, classroom assistance and after-school activities. The idea is to encourage greater parental involvement in school life and children’s learning at the same time as turning the school into a community hub. It is also hoped that it will prove to be an effective way of encouraging pupils to become active citizens, with a greater sense of social and moral responsibility.

It is important for schools to engage with local organisations and community groups. Some disaffected young people may be more willing to relate to local people than to those identified with schools or welfare systems. Community groups can act as ‘an honest broker’ between the young people and the system they have rejected.

Community engagement, employment and prosperity

There is an impressive body of evidence that community engagement can promote employment and economic growth. It is weak ties (to former colleagues, acquaintances, friends of friends) that provide job leads, strategic advice and breadth of information. These are exactly the sort of networks which are formed through high levels of community activity of the sort advocated elsewhere in this report.

Networks are particularly important to the marginalized and can overcome obstacles such as employer racism and low skills. However, poorer communities tend to have less extensive networks. The kind of entrepreneurial networks, upon which small businesses thrive can be very
exclusive and are often built upon homogeneity within small clusters. This is the downside of social capital, particularly in relation to such a competitive area as the labour market.

When communities are able to develop their own training programmes, career advice centres and small businesses, the effect on local prosperity is often far greater than when job creation or skills development schemes are imposed from above. Not only will the resulting programmes be more responsive to local needs but the actual process will build the networks, skills and confidence of those involved.

Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) are a particularly good model for boosting employment through community activity. By tackling financial exclusion and creating a network of trust and reciprocity, LETS schemes are able to create the kind of environment in which entrepreneurship flourishes. A comprehensive evaluation of LETS found that, as well as building networks and bridges into work, their biggest impact on employability was as seedbeds for self-employed business ventures.

**Community engagement in housing**

The sheer range of housing models now available represents a real step change in the way we think about the management of social housing. The possibility of taking responsibility for their immediate neighbourhood is a powerful first step into active citizenship for many people and the skills which can be gained from positions on housing association boards are invaluable in the labour market. Greater tenant involvement can lead to increased tenant satisfaction with housing management; improvements in objective measures of service performance; and greater trust among tenants in the management of housing estates.

Tenant involvement in the evaluation of service performance is often limited, but in cases where it is well structured, it can help tailor service delivery and attune priorities more effectively. The Wrekin Tenant Auditors’ Project is a particularly successful example of this approach.

Tenant Participation Compacts were introduced in 1999, making tenants ‘fully contributing’ partners with the local authority on decision making in the housing service. Although in some cases TPCs have increased the involvement of a small number of tenants’ representatives at the expense of others, in many cases TPCs are creating more equal partnerships between officers, members and tenants, and had helped to erode paternalist attitudes within housing departments.

A more comprehensive form of participation is the establishment of housing co-operatives. These vary greatly in the level of control which tenants have over their homes, but the most participative are Ownership Housing Co-operatives. Under this system, estates are owned, managed and controlled democratically by tenants, as members of the co-op.

Community Based Housing Organisations in Scotland are based on the principle of community leadership; all residents have the right to be involved in the management structure of their organisation. They have led to increased tenant satisfaction and higher standards of housing management. In the majority of the areas studied, concerns over neighbourhood problems and fear of crime decreased after the CBHOs were established.
Applied tenant participation has led almost uniformly to improved service delivery and improved tenant satisfaction. However, it can be hindered by a lack of training and support to enable tenants to take on more active roles and by an unwillingness to cede power on the part of local authorities and other institutions.

**Community engagement and regeneration**

Since the mid-1990s, public participation has been at the forefront of the regeneration agenda. The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) was set up in 1994 in an attempt to streamline the regeneration assistance offered by a range of government departments. An evaluation of SRB projects found that when resources were devoted to community engagement from the earliest possible stage and throughout the lifetime of the project, there was a greater chance that projects would be robust and sustainable in the period after SRB funding ended.

New Deal for Communities (NDC) was established in 1998 and partnerships have been established in 39 deprived areas. NDC programmes are required to engage with groups that other initiatives sometimes miss out, specifically young people, faith groups and black and minority ethnic groups. The programme has not been a resounding success and has received some negative bad press. However, there are some encouraging findings and as the programme progresses some of the problems may be ironed out. In some areas, turnouts for NDC board elections have been higher than for local council elections.

There seems to be a strong case for arguing that effective regeneration is more likely to come from supporting and fostering existing communities and enabling them to develop their surroundings themselves, rather than from somewhat artificial top-down initiatives.

**Community engagement and local government**

Community participation is at the core of the local government modernisation agenda. Enhancing involvement is seen as vital for supporting the legitimacy of local government, developing community leadership and improving service delivery.

Innovative forms of public engagement, such as visioning exercises, citizens’ juries and interactive websites have become increasingly common and tend to be driven by local internal factors, rather than as a response to Government prodding.

In the first round of comprehensive performance assessments (CPAs) for single tier and county councils, 96 of 150 councils were judged to have good consultation arrangements. Numerous case studies are available to illustrate this good practice.

There is evidence to suggest that where local governments get participation strategies and openness right then communities do respond by getting involved in decision-making. The extent to which political parties; public management; and the voluntary and community sectors ask the public to participate can have a dramatic effect on whether latent social capital is mobilised or constrained.
Rousing citizens out of apathy and fostering a vibrant political society is widely recognised to be a positive good in itself. Yet it has been shown that societies that have a high level of public participation in political processes can also expect to receive an objectively better standard of local governance. By creating genuine and deliberative consultation structures, local authorities can help citizens of all backgrounds to gain the necessary confidence and political literacy to participate fully in the democratic process. By listening to and acting upon their recommendations, they can restore faith in the institutions of local governance.

**Conclusion: the need for further research**

The way that community engagement works to promote positive social outcomes is often complex and multifaceted, but research and the examples reviewed here suggest that there are at least three processes at work:

- **Socialisation:** the processes by which communities encourage the internalisation of co-operative, sociable standards
- **Guardianship:** the process by which neighbours look-out for each other and the community as a whole
- **Information flows:** the process by which communities work with public bodies, providing them with information about the way things work, and views as to how they might work better.

The evidence clearly indicates that, at its best, community engagement can empower citizens; make a significant difference to the way services are designed and run and secure widely valued policy outcomes. It evidently also works best when communities are engaged across a range of services – strongly suggesting a need for governments to develop a strategic, across-the-board approach.

Successful community engagement requires:

1) citizens willing and able to get involved
2) public organisations and services willing and able to make best use of active citizens.

We need to improve our understanding of how to bring both of these about.

As far as (1) is concerned, it is vital that citizens and communities have the capacity and inclination to engage with the public sector and organise themselves. National and local governments and other organisations have already introduced initiatives and bodies aimed at supporting active citizens, including citizenship education in schools, and myriad local authority public involvement initiatives. We need, however, to understand much more about the skills and support that citizens, potential or actual, need. This is particularly true for hard to reach groups that are currently least likely to be engaged.
As for (2), it is imperative that national and local government and the public services be configured and run so as to engage citizens in as open and constructive a way as possible. Among other things, we need to improve our understanding of:

- the capacity in which people want to be involved
- how to make the burdens of engagement less onerous
- methods of ensuring that involvement initiatives are representative
- the ways in which participation programmes can sustain themselves in the long term.

The Civil Renewal Unit is working with a number of local authorities as ‘civic pioneers’ and one of the outcomes of this initiative will be a better understanding and knowledge in this area.

The new interest in social capital, active citizenship and community engagement on the part of politicians and academics has already generated a wealth of helpful findings. Further research can build on a strong and rapidly deepening grasp of where community engagement is needed most and how it can best be effected.
Chapter 1
Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Civil Renewal Unit in the Home Office in order to:

- Explore and assess evidence for the positive results of community engagement and
- Identify further work needed to increase and promote understanding of what works.

This report will be one of the first, perhaps the first, UK attempt to collate evidence in this area. As such it does not aim to be authoritative or definitive, but merely to offer an overview of a difficult subject.

What do we mean by community engagement?

In the context of this report we understand community engagement as the opportunity, capacity and willingness of individuals to work collectively to shape public life. We are primarily interested in reviewing evidence for the benefits of engaging communities in the governing and running of public services.

It is helpful to distinguish between several different ends that this form of engagement might promote:

- More responsive public services – engaging communities in governing and running public services can ensure that services are more responsive and sensitive to the needs of those they are meant to serve
- Civil Renewal – engaging communities and governing and running public services can foster trust, generate networks, teach skills and empower those who are engaged.

Put another way, community engagement has the potential to improve the quality of the service supplied, but it can also improve the opportunities and capacities of those who rely on services, so lessening their need for them.
Policy context

Governments of different political hues, at home and abroad, have been concerned with fostering community engagement since at least the mid 1980s, but never more so than now. This is particularly true of the New Labour government elected in 1997, which has, from the beginning, pledged itself to promoting active citizenship and community engagement at all levels and in all policy areas. The Prime Minister, Tony Blair has consistently promoted the benefits of community engagement. For example, speech by the Prime Minister to the Active Community Convention and Awards, 2 March 2000

Forms of community engagement in governing and running public services and government bodies

Community members can be engaged in different ways and to different degrees. Here we identify a number of different dimensions to community engagement:

The consultation/participation dimension

Community members can be given or take on different degrees of power and responsibility. So, following Arnestein’s famous ‘ladder of participation’, it is possible to survey their opinions (research), consult them in greater depth (consultation), involve them as partners (participation) or devolve power to them (self-government).

The formal/informal dimension

Community members can have a more or less formal role in governing and running public services. They can take on a formal role, elected or appointed, as a governor of a public body or service, or they can seek to influence it as ordinary citizens, by filling in questionnaires and taking part in surveys, voting, joining organisations, writing letters, signing petitions, and attending public meetings.

The governing/co-production dimension

Community members can be engaged as citizens in governing and scrutinising a public service, or as ‘co-producers’ in the running of public services. For example, a residents’ association that works with the police to develop an anti-crime strategy for a neighbourhood is engaging in the first sense. Residents who co-operate with the police to ensure the success of the strategy, by respecting the law or monitoring and reporting anti-social behaviour, are engaging in the second.

The bottom-up/top-down dimension

Community engagement can be led from the bottom up, as when a parents’ association raises funds and manages the refurbishment of a playground, or from the top down, as when a local council consults residents on recycling policy.
its determination to ‘recreate the bonds of civic society and community’.4 The Chancellor, Gordon Brown echoed this commitment in a speech to the Charities Aid Foundation:

‘It is my belief, after a century in which, to tackle social injustice, the state has had to take power to ensure social progress, that to tackle the social injustices that still remain the state will have to give power away, not just devolving power to empower local communities, but also enabling community and voluntary organisations to do more.’5

More recently, David Blunkett, the Home Secretary has argued that ‘civil renewal’ should ‘form the centrepiece of the government’s reform agenda for the coming years’.6

Most prominently, the Government introduced citizenship education into the national curriculum and instituted a requirement that every government department create a consultation co-ordinator charged with promoting consultation and public engagement. The DfES has its own consultation unit, and the department of health has sought to promote both patient and citizen involvement in a range of ways. The Government’s Best Value regime and Community Strategy framework oblige local authorities to consult users and the wider public about service delivery. Public consultation and involvement has come to be seen as particularly important in combating social exclusion. Agencies bidding for funds from the New Deal for Communities programme, for instance, have to show how they ‘would work through local partnerships and promote and sustain community involvement’. Other initiatives like the Sure Start programme, Health Action Zones, Education Action Zones, Health Improvement Programmes, Lifelong Learning Partnerships, Early Years Development and Child Care Partnerships all similarly require evidence of ‘community involvement’.

Two developments provide a context for this concern with community engagement:

First, social scientists, politicians and commentators have become increasingly concerned with levels of community engagement, or at least some forms of community engagement over the last decades. Robert Putnam showed that from the mid-1960s onwards the US has suffered a dramatic decline in ‘social capital’ as measured by all major indices. The picture for the UK is more complex and not as dramatic. Informal social networks, membership of community organisations and voluntary groups appear to have held up relatively well, even as formal political participation and trust in political institutions and politics has fallen. Nevertheless, relative to levels of education and prosperity, we probably have seen an overall decline. Levels of social interaction and trust are often lowest among socially excluded groups, where, arguably, they are needed most.7

At the same time, we have seen a growing belief in the importance of community engagement to communities themselves and to society more generally. As researchers in this area often point out, strong social networks and high levels of trust are not always positive.8 They can be used to sustain

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4 Speech by the Prime Minister at the Aylesbury Centre, Southwark, Monday 2 June 1997, available at: http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/sec/index/more.html
corrupt ‘old-boy’ networks, to perpetuate privilege and sustain social injustice. Nevertheless Putnam is not alone in linking low levels of social capital to high levels of ill-health and fatality, crime, unemployment and poverty, unhappiness, voter abstention and poor-government.9 Many commentators have argued that government services in particular are too often remote and inflexible and need to be brought closer to users and citizens.

If it is hard to establish reliable and meaningful measures of community engagement, it is even harder to establish a firm causal chain from level of engagement to desirable social goods. This report aims to suggest what can reasonably be claimed in this respect.

Before turning to the report proper, it should be noted that there are many areas of engagement and forms of involvement which are barely touched upon here. This report says almost nothing about community engagement in planning, environmental regulation, budget setting, cultural or sporting policy, science policy, or constitutional policy, to take a few examples. We have said little or nothing about the potential of new democratic processes such as deliberative polls, open space events, electronic town meetings, youth counsels, citizen’s juries and citizen panels, and various web-based forums.10 We hope what follows will give some flavour of the sort of initiatives being under-taken, and some of the evidence for them.


Chapter 2
Findings and examples

This section identifies some of what is known about the benefits of community engagement, in a range of different policy areas.

Community engagement, crime and anti-social behaviour

Introduction

There has been a growing interest over the last few decades in the potential benefits of community engagement and, in particular, community policing in fighting crime. Chicago academics Skogan and Hartnett nicely capture some of the initiatives associated with community centred approaches to public order and crime-reduction:

- Opening of small neighbourhood substations, conducting surveys to measure community satisfaction, organizing meetings and crime-prevention seminars, publishing newsletters, forming neighbourhood watch programs, establishing advisory panels, organizing youth activities, conducting drug education projects and media campaigns, patrolling on horses and bicycles and working with municipal agencies to enforce health and safety regulations.

A fuller list would include measures aimed at boosting informal and formal community networks, whether through the physical (re)design of communities, investment in parks, playgrounds, libraries, after school clubs and other public amenities, the introduction of citizenship education, government support of volunteering and social enterprises, or the promotion of restorative justice programmes.

As with many other areas, there is a common sense case to be made for these sorts of policies. The criminal justice system will always have a vital role in fighting crime. It is clear, however, that government’s task will be vastly easier when it has the trust and co-operation of its citizens, when the police can work with local communities to identify problems and priorities, rely on residents to keep an eye on their neighbours’ property, intervene to prevent violent assaults, provide information on suspects, or stand witness in a trial.

Community involvement becomes particularly important in disadvantaged, high crime areas. For, typically, these are precisely the areas where trust and co-operation are needed most and yet are in shortest supply.

Here we review some of the evidence around the role of community engagement in criminal justice.

12 For arguments that UK criminal justice system needs to do more to involve the public see the publications coming out of IPPR’s Criminal Justice Forum: Peter Neyroud (2001) Public Involvement in Policing; Adam Crawford (2001) Public Matters: Reviving Public Participation in Criminal Justice; Sarah Spencer & Clare Sparks (2002) Them and Us? The Public, Offenders and the Criminal Justice System
Community engagement in crime prevention: the role of strong communities

Criminologists and police increasingly identify ‘crime prevention’, as distinct from the solving of crime, as a priority. At the same time, we have seen a growing appreciation of the importance of strong communities in preventing crime, whether by stopping the development of criminal dispositions or by preventing would-be criminals from committing crimes.

As long ago as the 1930s and 1940s the Chicago school sociologists, Shaw and McKay argued that one of the things that marked-out low crime from high crime areas was the presence of strong communities with extensive social networks and high levels of trust or ‘solidarity’. These, they argued, had two advantages over more ‘disorganised’ neighbourhoods.

First, they worked, largely informally, to monitor and socialise young people, preventing or punishing anti-social behaviour and in particular, discouraging the development of unsupervised teenage gangs or criminal networks.

Secondly, they could combine, more formally, to pull in public services – police patrols, fire stations, better schooling and more youth facilities – that discourage crime.

Recent work, led by Robert J Sampson, has done much to confirm Shaw and McKay’s arguments. Working in England (using the data from early British Crime Surveys, 1982 and 1984) and controlling for poverty and other factors that might encourage criminal behaviour, Sampson and Groves found areas characterised by weak local friendship networks, little informal supervision of teenage groups, and low levels of formal civic activity, were afflicted with high levels of crime and delinquency.

These findings were substantiated by a large study of 343 ‘neighbourhood clusters’ in Chicago, from the early 1990s, which 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’.

One particularly strong study linking crime with weak communities shows US states with strong social capital have low rates of homicides, itself a good indicator of rates of violent crime more generally. True, states with high social capital tend to be wealthier, better educated and so forth, but further analysis finds the relationship between social capital and safe streets is real. ‘In fact social capital ranks with poverty, urbanism and racial composition as a determinant of homicide prevalence. And social capital is more important than a state’s education level, rate of single-parent households, and income inequality in predicting the number of murders per capita during the 1980-95 period’.

Finally, new research by the Australian Institute of Criminology looked at levels of communal social activity (as measured by scout membership) and its relation to property and violent crime in Local Government Areas in the eastern Australian States. Controlling for the effect of unemployment, rates of poverty and geographic mobility, it found ‘the impact of community participation on crime rates remains statistically and substantially significant’.17

It is important to point out that those, like Sampson and Putnam, who argue social capital has a central role to play in shaping crime, do not argue it is the only or even the most important factor in preventing crime. Nevertheless, research cited above does seem to provide very strong grounds for an argument that measures which promote social capital and active communities will cut crime, a fact born out more impressionistically by many regeneration initiatives.

**The role of ‘community centred’ policing**

The effectiveness of community policing will vary from case to case, depending on the quality of the initiative in place, on the commitment of senior officers, coherence of the engagement strategy and quality of training and support for front-line police etc. For this reason, it is difficult to establish hard data. Nevertheless, there are examples where it appears to have been strikingly successful, perhaps the best-known case being Chicago.

During the mid-1990s the Chicago Police Department implemented a wide-ranging programme, the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS). This shifted the burden of maintaining public safety from police professionals to hundreds of neighbourhood level partnerships between police and neighbourhood residents. The reforms that emerged out of discussions between the Mayor’s Office, community groups and the police department, were a response to the perceived failure of established policy to turn the rising tide of crime. The programme divides the city into some 280 neighbourhood ‘beats’; the policing of each is then governed and monitored at local monthly ‘beat meetings’. From the beginning, both police and citizens were expected to take responsibility for problem-solving, and beat meetings provide a venue for everyone to review their progress and assess how well they are doing.18

The Chicago strategy is not only unusually ambitious; it has also been unusually well evaluated, with researchers at North Western University offering a yearly audit of developments.19 Their research suggests that perhaps the most impressive aspect of CAPS has been its ability to attract a high level of attendance at beat meetings over a relatively long period. Involvement in the meetings has grown slightly each year since 1995 – in 2001 Chicagoans attended 66,600 times. Between January 1995 and June 2002 more than 488,000 Chicagoans attended more than 21,000 beat meetings. ‘More significantly, attendance rates are highest in poor high-crime communities, where public safety is most at risk and the perceived quality of police service is in question’.20 Beat meetings, moreover, often serve as stepping stones into other forms of civic engagement. Here is proof that community centred policing can sustain the engagement of the community over a relatively long period of time. Other findings show that since CAPS was introduced:

17 Carlos Carcach & Cathie Huntley *Community Participation and Regional Crime*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Trends and Issues In Crime and Criminal Justice, Paper 222


19 For the evaluation programme and its findings see http://www.nwu.edu/ijr/publications/policing.html

- Crimes of almost every category have declined significantly, though against a background of national decline
- Some decline in concerns about crime, especially among African-Americans
- Significant improvement in public ratings of police performance – though with still a long way to go
- CAPS has been particularly successful at tackling drugs problems, property crime and anti-social behaviour. It has done less well in bringing down levels of violent crime
- With time beat meetings have become better run, more open and deliberative forums – the police and community leaders have learned from past weaknesses.21

The closest model to this operating in the UK is probably Police Community Consultation Groups. These were established in all force areas following non-statutory guidance given in Home Office circular no. 2/1985. This recommended that regular meetings should be held which would usually be open to the press and public. An evaluation undertaken by Robin Elliott and Jonathan Nicholls for the Police Research Group, found that they had not been a resounding success:

Even where PCCGs perform well, they only reach a small and unrepresentative proportion of the community; and there are some elements of consultation on which PCCGs intrinsically perform poorly.22

PCCGs were found to work well as a forum for highlighting urgent local issues but failed in their aim of contributing to strategic planning. Some forces got around this by holding occasional meetings that were focused very tightly on the formation of a strategic plan but only meetings which were held in response to local crises were well attended. It may well be that this is something which should be accepted by police authorities and meetings should be structured to meet the needs of the public, rather than trying to force a level of participation which people on the whole seem unwilling to make.

**Restorative justice**

Since Nils Christie’s classic 1976 article ‘Conflict as Property’, there has been widespread interest in the potential of ‘restorative justice’ programmes – programmes that seek to give victims and the public a larger role in the criminal justice processes by bringing victims, offenders and their associates together. Restorative justice approaches are thought to have at least two potential advantages over more conventional, professionally managed approaches:

- By encouraging offenders to hear the testimony of victims and their supporters and face up to the consequences of their crimes, they can change attitudes of criminals and prevent crime
- The experience of hearing offenders account for and apologise for their crimes can help victims and those connected to them, put the crime behind them, increase trust in the criminal justice system and lessen the fear of crime.

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21 For another example of benefits of community policing seems to be Newark’s Community Organising Response Team (CORT), which brought together residents and police. Independent evaluation suggested that this achieved 2 goals; it reduced the perceived social disorder in the area and improved satisfaction with the police. These findings are from a summary report and so there is no more specific information about the impact, only that it was favourable for these two goals. There were other goals, which was not successful in achieving e.g. reducing fear of crime. These results are from Pate et al (1986) Reducing Fear of Crime in Houston and Newark: A Summary Report, Washington DC: Police Foundation
Many countries have incorporated restorative justice programmes into their criminal justice systems, including the UK. Restorative justice, for instance, has been a central part of the youth justice system since the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. Here we highlight the mainly positive findings of three that have been evaluated by independent researchers:

1. Canberra in Australia has been experimenting with restorative justice since the late 1990s. An academic report by the Australian National University found that:
   - Young offenders who had committed violent crimes and who participated in restorative justice programmes re-offended at substantially lower levels than those who were subject to standard court procedures (38 fewer per hundred re-offended)
   - But restorative justice programmes had little or no effect on re-offending among young offenders who had committed property crimes or drunk drivers of any age.
   - The report concluded ‘restorative justice can work, and can even reduce crime by violent offenders. But there is no guarantee that it will work for all offence types’.

2. In 1988 Thames Valley Police launched a restorative cautioning initiative – the largest-scale restorative justice programme in the UK to date. This required police officers administering cautions to invite all those affected by the offence, including victims, to a meeting. The police officer employed a script to facilitate a structured discussion about the harm caused by the offence and how this could be repaired. Oxford University Researchers found that:
   - Thames Valley Police were largely successful in transforming its cautioning practices. Where cautioning sessions had in the past sometimes been used to humiliate and stigmatise offenders, the new more constructive script was used in over two thirds of cautions.
   - Offenders, victims and their respective supporters were generally satisfied with the fairness of the process and the outcomes achieved. By a large majority, participants believed that the meeting helped offenders to understand the effect of the offence and induced a sense of shame in them.
   - Restorative cautioning appears to be significantly more effective than traditional cautioning in reducing the risk of re-offending. Comparing rates at which offenders re-offended under the traditional cautioning regimes and the restorative one, the researchers concluded that ‘restorative cautioning halved the likelihood of re-sanctioning within a year. The researchers stressed that a larger-scale re-offending study of restorative cautioning is required to confirm the validity of this finding’.

3. A 2004 report by Oxford University on the restorative justice component of the new youth justice boards found that 79% of victims had been able to put the offence behind them and 70% thought the offender better understood the impact of the offence on the victim. Offenders have consistently high levels of satisfaction and a sense of fairness. Findings in relation to reducing offending included:
   - Re-offending rates are at least as low as for alternative approaches and considerably improved in many cases.

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Rates of completion and compliance with agreements are higher than for court-ordered alternatives.25

Despite good evaluative work done in this area, it is clear that much more needs to be done. As a recent survey of the international research concluded, restorative justice has been used much more widely with young offenders than adults and with first or second time offenders, than frequent re-offenders. But there is no research evidence that shows that restorative justice works best with these groups. In fact it might be argued that, in terms of cost effectiveness, the greatest ‘added value’ from restorative justice is likely to come by reducing re-offending among persistent or high risk offenders. We know little about the relative merits of different types of restorative justice intervention or the impact of race, ethnicity or sex on the workings of restorative justice.26

Conclusion

Some of the strongest research highlighting the benefits of community engagement comes from the criminal justice field. The work of Robert Sampson and others appears to show that strong communities with developed social ties and an intense civic life play a role in reducing crime. Various independently evaluated community policing initiatives, most noticeably CAPs, suggest that community policing can sustain the community over a long period of time and, in the processes, cut crime and improve public satisfaction with the police. Restorative justice programmes have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism and increasing trust in the criminal justice system. There is, however, much room for further research. The effectiveness of community policing does not appear to have been subject to an ambitious comparative study – at least in the UK context. More research is needed on the effectiveness of restorative justice approaches on habitual re-offenders and other groups.

Community engagement and health

Introduction

Just as the criminal justice system has recently begun to focus on the ways in which it can benefit from citizen engagement, so too has the NHS.

The NHS Plan 2000 stressed the need to move from an expert-led system of care to one based on a partnership between patients and clinicians. As well as setting up structures to increase access to knowledge for patients (through systems like NHS Direct), it became a statutory duty for NHS bodies to consult with users.27 Several mechanisms were introduced to facilitate this, including patients’ panels and public involvement in the Commission for Health Improvement.28

The ‘new’ public health agenda has been based on ‘community-based frameworks to affect the broader social, environmental and economic factors that influence and underpin relative health.’

27 Health and Social Care Bill (2001), Stationary Office
28 National Consumers Council (2002) Involving Consumers in Healthcare, see http://www.ncc.org.uk
inequalities in health'.

Health Action Zones and Health Improvement Plans are both built on this community-based model of health improvement.

The role of strong communities

A large body of research exists on the links between strong communities and good health. Many studies have linked levels of mortality, morbidity and disease to social capital of various kinds. Robert Putnam believes that ‘of all the domains in which [he has] traced the consequences of social capital, in none is the importance of social capital so well established as in the case of health and well being’. Neighbours can provide one another with support, from noticing accidents to providing informal convalescent care. The experience of living in a supportive environment can also reduce the likelihood of individuals suffering from depression related illness and consequently engaging in unhealthy behaviour, such as overeating and drink and drug abuse. Over the last twenty years, more than a dozen large studies have been carried out 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.’

Some evidence also seems to suggest that a sense of community can boost individuals’ immune systems; lower blood pressure and guard against premature ageing. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the Pennsylvanian town of Roseto, where a surprisingly low death rate was attributed to the strong community atmosphere which flourished among the Italian American population. In the UK, the Health Development Agency is currently conducting long-term studies into the relationship between social capital and health.

It is clear too, that strong communities can relieve the NHS and social services from some of the burden of looking after elderly and sick patients, so reducing waiting time. In the winter of 2000/01, Birmingham Royal Infirmary faced such a severe case of bed-lock, much of it due to elderly patients who didn’t need a hospital bed, that it was forced to cancel all elective surgery. In cases like this, the role of strong, supportive communities who can provide that sort of care is indisputable.

Using healthcare to build communities

From patient support groups to neighbourhood ‘healthy living’ initiatives, healthcare has proved to be a potent bonding tool.

A particularly strong model is the time bank. Originally developed in America, this is a means of artificially creating a mutually supportive community through the earning and redeeming of ‘time.

Sources:

29 Health Development Agency Website: http://www.hda.gov.uk
35 See http://www.hda.gov.uk
dollars’ or ‘time credits’. Common time bank activities include hospital visits, befriending, shopping and home repairs. By blurring the distinction between giver and receiver, time banks not only focus on support mechanisms but also build people’s sense of self-worth and create the sort of social networks that we know produce healthy outcomes. The emphasis is on what people can do, rather than on what they can’t. They have proved to be particularly effective for those with mental health problems, particularly depression, for this reason.

Whilst many of the stories are anecdotal, there is some concrete evidence of success. A hospital group in Richmond, Virginia found that a time bank which provided peer support to asthma sufferers reduced visits to emergency services by 39%, hospital admissions by 74% and costs by 73%. $217,000 was saved in the first two years of the programme. The Elderplan project in New York City is a social health maintenance organisation and operates a time bank known as Member to Member. In the first twelve years, volunteers donated over 100,000 hours of time. Member to Member volunteers were found to claim less on their health insurance than those who did not get involved and have been offered discounts on their insurance premiums as a result.

The first UK time bank was set up as an experiment by the King’s Fund and the New Economics Foundation in partnership with the Rushey Green Group Practice in Lewisham, South London. An evaluation by researchers at King’s College, London is still ongoing but initial findings look promising. In 2002 the time bank had 68 members, 59 of whom were individuals. The other nine were organisations, including the health centre itself and the local garden centre, nursing home, Community Health Council, voluntary society and church. Over 2,950 hours of service had been generated, with 69% of participants giving at least one hour every fortnight.

There are many individual success stories connected with the scheme. For instance, several young mothers living in the same tower block requested companionship and help with their children. They did not know each other but the time bank brought them together and they went on to form its core group, recruiting many housebound older people who had been contacted through the health visitors’ list. Dr Richard Byng, GP for Rushey Green believes that the results of the time bank have been ‘remarkable’ and that ‘this alternative method of treatment has led to a lot of patients being taken off anti-depressants’. Initial research undertaken in summer 2000 found that the time bank was ‘providing people who were suffering from depression with support as well as the opportunity to build their confidence, friendships and skills by giving time themselves’.

The effect on the surgery is tangible. The survey found that participants have come to take more responsibility for each other, reducing the burden on traditional carers. One respondent commented that ‘rather than just going to your GP, you can always go to the community time bank people’. A clinician at the practice explained how the time bank had changed their attitude to patients. They were now able to offer a friendly chat or a helping hand rather than prescribing medicine or a lengthy referral to another agency.

37 NEF (2002a) pp.14-15
38 Ibid, pp.13-14
39 New Economics Foundation (2002b) Keeping the GP Away: A NEF briefing about community time banks and health, p.3
40 Ibid, p.2
42 NEF (2002b), p.5
The time bank has broadened the view of how we as clinicians see patients; so patients get some benefit even if we don’t refer them to the time bank. We consider patients in more societal terms…Patient groups often fail because they focus too much on illness. But [through the time bank] we’ve formed a community.43

The success of the Rushey Green experiment has led to the creation of many more time banks in the UK. There are 60 time banks up and running with 31 in development. They involve over 2,000 participants who have traded over 100,000 hours.44 A two-year evaluation undertaken by Dr Gill Seyfang at the University of East Anglia, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council was very positive about the potential of time banks for building active communities and social capital. It was found that they are particularly good at attracting socially excluded groups and those who would not normally participate in voluntary projects. 16% of traditional volunteers have incomes of less than £10,000, compared with 58% of time bank participants.45

Public involvement in health policy

Some members of the public participate in the formation of health policy, at a national level. Programmes such as citizens’ juries and national involvement exercises have been shown to be mutually beneficial for health care professionals and participants. It has been shown that public participation can impact upon policy and the policy mindset.46 An independent evaluation of six citizens’ juries, undertaken by the Kings Fund, found that juries’ recommendations were taken seriously by local health authorities. Formal mechanisms were established to receive, respond to and implement the recommendations and all jurors were kept informed of the health authority’s response. Health authorities in each of the six pilot sites committed themselves to a public progress review six months after the recommendations were received.

The majority of those involved at the pilot sites thought that the citizens’ jury had influenced the decision-making process. Although the jury had only introduced new material at some of the sites, at others the recommendations had ‘added weight’ to issues which were then given higher priority than they had before.47

Equally, there is clear evidence that members of the public who participate in these programmes, particularly the longer more deliberative ones, change their attitudes as they come to hear different sides of the debate. A study involving ten groups of six people, undertaken by researchers from the University of York found that the public’s views about setting priorities in health care are ‘systematically different when they have been given an opportunity to discuss the issues’.48 About half of the respondents initially wanted to give lower healthcare priority to smokers, heavy drinkers, and illegal drug users, and a similar number wanted to give higher priority to children, disabled people and elderly people. After reflection and discussion, fewer people wished to discriminate against smokers, heavy drinkers, and illegal drug users or in favour of elderly people.

43 Ibid
44 See http://www.timebanks.co.uk
47 McIver (1997) Executive Summary, p.6
Doubts have however been expressed about the extent to which different instances of participation access a range of voices, particularly those normally excluded from policy making and public debate. There are also examples of public engagement practices being manipulated by those in power, particularly in the more discursive approaches, such as citizens’ juries. This has led to calls for engagement processes to be ‘owned’ by multiple agencies and to be grounded within local communities.

**A more local approach**

By involving communities in the formation of health policy, professionals are able to target their resources more accurately to suit the needs of their patients.

Walsall Health Authority in the West Midlands has developed a Participatory Appraisal (PA) scheme to gather information about community health needs. Local people are trained and paid to canvass opinion about local problems and the solutions which people would like to see. This allows the Health Authority to target their resources more effectively and results in better take up of services. In the last 10 years the Health Authority has measured a marked improvement in the health of the local community and believes that a great deal of this is due to PA. Over 100 of the Health Authority’s projects are now grounded in the PA approach.

Other communities have taken on this role for themselves, creating their own health services, tailored to their own needs. A group of residents from the NDC area of Kersal and Charlestown have formed the Community Health Action Partnership in Salford (CHAPS). They have spent 18 months planning and designing two new primary care centres for the neighbourhood. As well as working with NHS professionals, they employed a range of techniques for gathering information about the needs of the local community. Rather than traditional questionnaires, they adopted methods from developing countries, including PA and community visioning.

The centres have been aimed at two very different groups: older people and young families and each will have a wide range of appropriate services. CHAPS has managed to secure money to build the centres from the LIFT Company (the PPP which will rebuild and refurbish primary care facilities) and have an ongoing commitment from the New Deal and the Primary Care Trust to employ health improvement workers in the community. They are determined to use the buying power of the NHS to regenerate the local economy through procurement and employment.

**Engaging patients in their own treatment**

One particularly interesting area of research relates to the self-management of illness. Following years’ of work in the United States and some experiments in the UK, with ‘self-management’ programmes, the Department of Health set up an Expert Patients task force. Its report is based on

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52 Hazel Blears (2003) Communities in Control: Public services and local socialism, Fabian Society
a study of the literature undertaken by Professor Julie Barlow of Coventry University. According to this review, the benefits of self-management include:

- reduced severity of symptoms
- significant decrease in pain
- improved life control and activity
- improved resourcefulness and life satisfaction.

In one five-year research project, a chronic disease self-management programme was evaluated in a randomised study involving more than 1,000 subjects. It was found that people who participated in the programme, when compared to people who did not, improved their healthy behaviours (exercise, cognitive symptom management, coping, and communications with physicians); improved their health status (self-reported health, fatigue, disability, social/role activities, and health distress) and decreased their days in hospital.

Another important finding is that when patients play a greater part in managing their own conditions they place less demand on NHS services. Studies into self-management in both chronic pain and arthritis have reported a reduction in the number of visits to health professionals by up to 80%. Asthma sufferers managing their own care also visit hospital less frequently. These effects may however take some time to develop, and experts are still debating the exact relationship between self-management of chronic conditions and improved health outcomes.

In the wider context, creating ‘expert patients’ aims to improve the quality of information patients receive and to encourage more responsible use of health care. It can also be used to build patient communities based on mutual aid. Volunteers are trained to provide care for other patients, whilst remaining as active as possible in the treatment of their own condition. In Sheffield, the Expert Patient Programme has been linked to the local time bank, enabling volunteers to claim vouchers from local health centres or fresh fruit in return for their time.

**Conclusion**

Research completed in the light of the Acheson report has suggested that health inequalities are not just underpinned by poverty but also by a sense of powerlessness. Communities and individuals that are engaged in identifying and solving their own healthcare needs are able to overcome this sense of powerlessness at the same time as generating healthy outcomes for themselves. The social capital that is produced by community health projects can, in itself, be an effective preventative tool.
There have however, been very few long term evaluations of community – or citizen-oriented health policies, and those that exist have tended to focus on narrow health outputs rather than long term outcomes. Above all future research needs to:

- design projects so they can be easily compared in terms of the kinds of communities reached and the policy outcomes achieved
- commit to a longer term more complex evidence base: studies such as those currently being undertaken by the Health Development Agency in the UK exemplify longer-term evidence collection.

**Community engagement and education**

**Introduction**

There is a growing appreciation of the need for schools and educational authorities to cultivate strong relations with the communities they serve, engaging local people and local groups. Schools which understand themselves as simply agents of the state, there to deliver a service to passive parents or pupils, tend to do less well than those that actively engage parents, pupils and the community more generally in their work.

Schools have a particularly important role to play in communal life. In the first place, they are responsible for shaping the life chances and character of the children in their care. If they are to succeed in this role, it is vitally important that they do as much as possible to win the trust and co-operation of pupils and parents – especially those from marginalised and hard to reach groups. At the same time, schools are particularly prominent and widely used public institutions with enormous potential as a focus of local collective life. Where schools are open and encourage engagement; where they work with parents, students, voluntary organisations, community groups and other local bodies, they will help foster strong social networks. Schools are, for many people, their primary contact with the public sector. They can shape people’s perception of public services and the public sphere more generally, and serve as a first rung onto broader forms of civic engagement.

There are at least four benefits that can result from engaging communities in their local schools:

- it can help ensure that schools and related services understand the needs and values of parents and students, so delivering a better service to them
- It can foster social networks and social trust, with all the benefits – including increased education achievement – that these have been shown to deliver
- involving parents, pupils and locals in the decision making process can help schools to gain the trust and co-operation of the communities they serve. It may also help to ensure that school policies are understood and seen as fair and intelligent
- involving parents, pupils and community representatives in school governance encourages the habit of active citizenship.
Parental engagement in their child’s education

The role of parents in their child’s education is increasingly seen as crucial. In the words of Margaret Hodge, Minister for Children, Young People and Families: ‘The role of parents can be more important than that of the teacher. We would not be carrying out our public duties properly, if we were to ignore the clear evidence that good parenting is vital to improving children’s life chances.’

A recent DfES study bears this out. The ‘Peers Early Education Partnership’ (PEEP) is a pre-school intervention in Oxfordshire, which aims to increase the educational achievement of disadvantaged children from infancy to five years. PEEP works by forming partnerships with parents and carers and recognising and supporting their contribution to children’s learning during the formative pre-school years. The study evaluated the effects of the PEEP Project over two years following children’s entry at age three. It was shown 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 role of parents of school-age children has now been formalised by Home-School Agreements, which schools are obliged to offer but parents do not have to sign. Typical parental pledges include ensuring that pupils complete homework, wear the correct uniform, arrive punctually and respect the ethos of the school. The thinking behind this is that if a child sees that their parents are enthusiastic about education, they are far more likely to view their schooling in a positive light, and be more receptive to learning. Students may also be invited to sign HSAs themselves.

Parental engagement in school life

For many parents, schools can be hostile and intimidating places. This may stem from bad experiences with the school system during their own childhood, or from language or cultural barriers. Attempts to engage parents in their child’s education are often limited and one-way – and may focus primarily on problem situations. However a number of schools with very mixed ethnic make-ups have developed innovative methods of welcoming and involving parents in ways which are appropriate and relevant to them. They have consequently been able to create constructive relationships with parents who would otherwise have felt excluded from the education of their children. The evidence is largely anecdotal but powerful.

Some particularly successful strategies included having a dedicated link teacher who speaks the language of the local community and is able to gain their trust through a great deal of personal contact, including home visits. Welcome visits to the parents of all Year 7 children proved to be particularly useful. Parents appreciate the effort taken to involve them and are able to voice any concerns to a sympathetic and known individual away from the school environment. Inviting

62 See http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/hsa/
parents to attend school events in person, rather than through a note handed to the child, was also very much appreciated, as was a direct telephone line to contact the link teacher – without going through the school switchboard. In one southern metropolitan school (the identities were protected in the report) the link teacher was able to establish very good relations with a local traveller community and encouraged not only parents but also children and ex-students to participate in school life.

A particularly successful programme of parent interviews was developed by a northern primary school. The Home-School Liaison Teacher visited the home of each parent, inviting them to attend the interview and informing them that interpreters would be provided. She then re-visited the homes on the day before the interview to address any concerns that parents had, allowing them to use it as a ‘dress rehearsal’. Every Wednesday evening has now been set aside for parental consultations and, again, interpreters are provided. The Head believes that ‘parent interviews have been the most important thing in raising achievement.’ Creating a welcoming school culture which recognises the differing needs of families is important. For example, one school in the study displayed the canteen menus at the beginning of each week so that Muslim families could help their child choose what to eat; another held weekly open assemblies, with children taking the role of interpreters, translating their work into Bengali.

**Governing roles for parents and communities**

Chicago has the most formally participatory and deliberative scheme of community engagement in schools in the United States. 64 540 elementary and high schools are part of the Chicago Public Schools system (CPS) and are each led by a Local Schools Council, elected bi-annually. The Councils are 11 strong and include six parents, two community representatives, two teachers and the school’s principal, plus – in the case of high schools – a non-voting student.

The Council members are granted a great deal of responsibility over school affairs, including hiring and firing the principal; spending discretionary funds and developing strategic plans to cover all aspects of school life – from the curriculum to physical design. They are however, by no means left adrift. The Chicago Board of Education has supplemented the CPS with a robust programme of support, training, accountability mechanisms and disciplinary procedures. Statistics on attendance, funding, graduation rates, test scores and student demographics are all publicised and should a school fall behind in any area it will be subject to increased scrutiny which could result in active intervention or – in extreme cases – receivership.

Test scores in Chicago’s schools have improved both since the initial devolution in 1988 and since further reforms to the system in 1995. The CPS has also been subject to a rigorous assessment by Anthony Bryk et al of Chicago University. They developed a metric of school productivity to isolate factors which were controlled by the school (teaching, curriculum etc) from those which were not (e.g. the extent to which students were ‘prepared’ before they entered the school). They found that between 1987 and 1997, the majority of schools became more effective educators, despite rising levels of student disadvantage and decreasing levels of ‘preparedness’. 65

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64 The following information is taken from Fung (2003)
Whilst school governors in the UK do have the power to dismiss head teachers and make strategic and financial decisions, the structure and level of authority which individual governing bodies assume is extremely varied, with many acting as no more than a rubber stamping mechanism. An analysis of 18 schools in five local authorities across the UK identified four distinct forms of governance. The least active of these was the deliberative forum model, in which discussions are led by the head teacher, allowing parents to inquire about aspects of the school’s progress but little else. At the other end of the scale was the governing body model, on which the head teacher sits as a member and the leadership role is taken by the Chair. In this model, the governing body ‘takes overarching responsibility for the conduct and direction of the school’ and is free to override any advice offered by the head teacher. An ongoing IPPR research project is looking at the role of citizen governors in education (as well as in other policy areas) and will make recommendations on how better to recruit, train and support these volunteers in order to make full use of their potential as two-way school-community ambassadors.

Schools as community centres

Just as schools and their pupils benefit from engaged parents and communities, so parents and communities benefit from engaged – or ‘extended’ – schools.

Ysgol y Berwyn secondary school, in Snowdonia, has become a focal point for the entire community. 90% of its predominantly Welsh speaking pupils come from low income agricultural backgrounds and the school has long tailored its curriculum to meet their needs, offering NVQs in Agricultural Studies and Construction. Having become aware that many local farmers lacked the necessary administrative skills to claim the grant aid to which they were entitled, the school consulted with two farming unions and the local agricultural college to devise appropriate action. It has now begun to run a Welsh Medium ICT course in Farm Administration for the community and encourages parents and pupils to attend jointly. Through partnerships with local farms, Ysgol y Berwyn school is able to involve its pupils directly in the local economy, allowing them to gain experience in a range of farming activities and also to keep the farms connected to new methods and techniques. Many parents have also become involved – both as helpers and learners – in the school’s weekly Sheepdog Handling Course.

Whilst it is undoubtedly easier for schools in such homogenous communities to act as focal points in this way, the UK Schools Plus programme has been set up to help develop these capabilities in schools in all disadvantaged areas. The Schools Plus Policy Action Team recognised that:

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67 See http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/pics/pics_ysgol/
Both schools and the community can gain considerably from encouraging school-community links and wider use of school premises. Support from parents and local community organisations can be a crucial factor in combating social exclusion and in improving pupils’ attainment, motivation and expectations. This leads to higher standards and improved behaviour. Links with FE colleges can also help to keep young people motivated to learn and improve the chances of them going on to further education. The use of school premises and facilities by a wide range of people, for example those with disabilities, or the opportunity to see adults undertaking a range of courses, can help to promote positive images of people irrespective of race, gender or disability.68

They went on to recommend that schools should be used as centres for adult learning, childcare facilities, regeneration and community meetings and, in areas with ethnic minority populations, for mother tongue teaching and culture.69

The most recent review of the Extended School pathfinders, published in October 2003, suggests that extended schools are capable of generating positive outcomes for pupils and communities. Although evidence to date is anecdotal, ‘it is cumulative and increasingly convincing.’ Schools report improvements in school ethos, in pupil motivation and attainment, and in parental confidence and aspiration. Through multi-agency work, preventative strategies can be developed that provide positive social care for vulnerable groups; these can, in turn, impact positively on motivation and attainment.70

**SchooLets**71

The SchooLets scheme is based on a Canadian model of Local Exchange Trading Systems, initiated in 1983. Similar to a time bank, LETS involves a pooled system of credits and debits, but allows both goods and services to be traded, at a value determined by the vendor. IPPR is currently piloting LETS and time banks in a number of primary and secondary schools across England. Parents, pupils, teachers and local businesses are involved with the scheme and typical SchooLets ‘goods’ include peer mentoring, classroom assistance and after school activities. The idea is to encourage greater parental involvement in school life and children’s learning at the same time as turning the school into a community hub. It is also hoped that it will prove to be an effective way of encouraging pupils to become active citizens, with a greater sense of social and moral responsibility. The scheme was launched during the 2002/03 school year and participating schools are supported by IPPR and encouraged to share their experiences and resources. The Citizenship Foundation is carrying out an ongoing evaluation.

**Engaging with community groups**

There are many reasons for schools to engage with local bodies, especially community and voluntary sector groups. The National Foundation for Educational Research’s review of major

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69 Ibid, p.33
70 DfES (October 2003) Issues for schools and Local Education Authorities, Extended Schools Pathfinder Evaluation, DfES Research Brief No. RBX18-03
71 See http://www.ippr.org/schoolets/
policy developments in education found that education initiatives were more effective when they engaged local organisations and providers and worked with them to identify needs and priorities.\footnote{David Sims & Shelia Stoney (January 2002) \textit{New Deal for Communities National Evaluation: Domain review of Major Policy Developments in Education and the Evidence Base}, National Foundation for Educational Research}

Some disaffected young people may be more willing to join community or voluntary groups than those identified with schools or welfare systems, even when these have outreach functions. A study of New Start strategies found that community groups can:

- act as an ‘honest broker’ between the young people and the system that they have rejected
- act as mentors
- be direct providers of education or employment opportunities
- involve young people in decision-making and in participation.\footnote{Alison West & Megan Ciotti (1998) \textit{The New Start Strategy, Engaging the Community}, Community Development Foundation}

\textbf{Conclusion}

It is clear that formal and informal connections between schools and local communities can be extremely beneficial to both.

Numerous Government programmes are in hand to build these connections and linking social inclusion strategies to schools and encouraging collaboration between schools. However, much more research needs to be done. The Schools Plus report was clear that future research should focus on the impact of links on the community’, and that they should be ‘more substantial in terms of scale, scope and depth.\footnote{DfES (2000) p.83}

One major gap in the research is the role of school governors. It is remarkable that such a key example of parental and community engagement should have gone virtually unstudied for so long – all the more so, as Scotland, whose schools are not governed by individual school boards on the English model, could provide a ready point of comparison.

\textbf{Community engagement, employment and prosperity}

There is an impressive body of evidence that community engagement can promote engagement and economic growth.

\textbf{Social networks and employment}

For the past thirty years, it has been recognised that social networks correlate positively with employment opportunities. Counter-intuitively, it is not strong ties (to close friends and families), but weak ones (to former colleagues, acquaintances, friends of friends) that are of greatest significance to the job-seeker.\footnote{Mark Granovetter (1973) ‘The Strength of Weak Ties’, \textit{American Journal of Sociology} 78:6} These are exactly the sort of networks which are formed through high levels of community activity, of the sort advocated elsewhere in this report.
Extensive networks of weak ties can provide job leads, strategic advice and breadth of information. Petersen et al analysed 35,000 job applicants to one US company over a nine year period and concluded that access to and effective use of social networks was an important route to getting hired. In the United Kingdom, Perri 6 has brought together similar evidence – most notably a 1980s study of one DHSS cohort more of whom found employment through personal networks than through any other single route.77

Networks are also proven to be of particular benefit to the marginalised. Putnam presents evidence that social networks can overcome obstacles such as employer racism and low skills.78 Research published this year demonstrates that, for Mexican migrants to the US, ‘the same individual is more likely to be employed and to hold a higher paying non-agricultural job when his network is exogenously larger.’ 79

However, poorer communities tend to have less extensive networks. Recent research suggests that isolation from informal networks is one significant cause of low employability in rural Britain.80 Perri 6 has brought the problem of ‘network poverty’ into UK policy discussion. A consensus amongst sociologists holds that:

The patterns of informal sociability of the working class are more likely than those of the middle class to revolve around close contacts with kin and a small set of friends, all of whom are relatively closely connected with each other…By contrast, the social networks of the middle class tend to be much more extensive and diverse.81

Perri 6 shows that those who do manage to move up in society do so through networks based on voluntary associations, the make up of which are more similar to the middle classes they join than to the working class cohort they leave.82

**Community engagement and employment**

When communities are able to develop their own training programmes, career advice centres and small businesses, the effect on local prosperity is often far greater than when job creation or skills development schemes are imposed from above. Not only are the resulting programmes often more responsive to local needs but the engagement process works to build the networks, skills and confidence of those involved, so boosting their employability.

Firthmoor Action for Community Enterprise (FACE) FACE was created in 2000 by residents of a 1,100-home council estate in Darlington. After a successful bid for Single Regeneration Budget funding, a few residents called a public meeting on the estate, attended by 35 residents. At this meeting, six community representatives elected to sit on a FACE partnership board with three...
business experts. Set up as a limited company, FACE sees its main role as developing and supporting community businesses on the estate, creating local jobs and self-employment opportunities and building up the local skills base.

Progress has been rapid. A community catering company, initially running a sandwich service in two Darlington locations, has expanded into a range of new outlets across County Durham. A web-site design and a cleaning business have also been established, along with a handyman service on the estate – speeding up response times for day-to-day repairs on council housing. Between them, these four initial community businesses already have five permanent and 12 casual employees – all Firthmoor residents – and there are now plans for significant expansion, negotiating service level agreements with the local council and other service providers, and providing new community nursery and after-school services for local children.83

The Belle-Isle Foundation in Leeds was established in 1995 by local community groups concerned about the lack of job opportunities on the estate. A development trust was established with a resident majority and other members nominated by residents. The Foundation works closely with the Estate Management Board and runs a wide range of activities including career training advice and guidance, job clubs, IT training and a guaranteed job scheme with local employers for young people. It also runs a centre which provides residents with meeting rooms, office equipment, IT facilities and a workshop unit.84

Some of the community groups described elsewhere in this paper have also had an impact on local employment. Royds Community Association (see Community engagement and regeneration, page 38) helped develop a major new enterprise park, which created around 750 local jobs and developed a number of community businesses.85 Carol is a Director of the Association and also a member of the government’s National Community Forum. She was unemployed with two children when she first got involved:

Through the support of the Royds Community Association and the confidence they have had in me – I have got confidence in my own abilities. It was the experience that I have had here that got me onto my degree course in Community Regeneration. I can succeed if I want to. Giving people like me the chance to handle multi-million pound budgets that are aimed at helping people from the estate where I come from – I can’t put it into words what it has done for me. If people see me doing they surely think that they can too. I can be a beacon for others.86

The Homes For Change Housing Co-Operative building (see Housing, chapter X) was designed to incorporate over 15,000 sq ft of workspace, which is managed by a sister co-operative known as Work For Change. The space includes a theatre which can be used for meetings, a café, artists’ studios, workshops and offices. This space has incubated 26 small businesses and employs over 75 people.87

83 Ibid
84 See http://www.communitytakingcontrol.org
85 Ibid
87 See http://www.communitytakingcontrol.org
LETS is a particularly good model for boosting employment through community activity. By tackling financial exclusion and creating a network of trust and reciprocity, LETS schemes are able to create the kind of environment in which entrepreneurship flourishes. A comprehensive evaluation of LETS found that, as well as building networks and bridges into work, their biggest impact on employability was as seedbeds for self-employed business ventures.88

Conclusion

Extensive social networks create access to employment opportunities. Community centred training and employment schemes have been shown, at least in some cases, to be effective and efficient. Not only do they introduce those involved in them to new opportunities, they tend to encourage local wealth creation – itself an important predictor of good outcomes in health, education, crime and regeneration.

Community engagement in housing

Introduction

Community engagement has been a theme in discussions of housing policy going back at least two decades. In the 1980s, reacting against the perceived failure of the top-down modernist policies of the post war years ‘virtually all studies of housing policy and practice advocated tenant participation’.89 As a result, there is now a large base of evidence, illustrating the potential for tenant or community engagement in housing. In particular, the long history of policy initiatives designed to advance participation allows researchers and policy makers to address one of the key and under-researched issues of community engagement – sustainability over the medium to long term.90

Even if the only outcome of these initiatives were the physical regeneration of housing estates, that would be a strong enough reason to endorse them. Beyond that, the possibility of taking responsibility for their immediate neighbourhood is a powerful first step into active citizenship for many people and the skills which can be gained from positions on housing association boards are invaluable in the labour market. The sheer range of housing models now available, from tenant cooperatives to housing associations and commercial companies, represents a real ‘step change’ in the way we think about the management of social housing.

Initiatives to encourage engagement from tenants have spanned the range of types of participation, from the relatively ‘consumerist’ tenant consultation to more active community ownership and control of housing stock. As illustrated by its approach to Tenant Participation Compacts (discussed below) the current Government’s preference is for an approach to tenant participation in social and public housing that is more encompassing than the consumerist model.

The research reviewed below offers evidence that greater tenant involvement can lead to:

- increased tenant satisfaction with housing management
- improvements in objective measures of service performance
- greater trust among tenants in the management of housing estates.

**Tenant involvement in service evaluation**

The view that tenant participation in the running of social housing helps to improve service provision is backed up by numerous case studies. A recent government summary of research on tenant participation finds that:

> Overall case-study research revealed that participation had improved quality in existing services and had extended services into novel areas more focused on community development.91

However the report does go on to conclude that much of this participation has tended to remain ‘consumerist’ in nature, primarily emphasising consultation rather than making tenants strategic partners. Tenant involvement in the evaluation of service performance was often limited, but in cases where tenant involvement in service assessment was well structured the report found that the input had helped tailor service delivery and attune priorities more effectively.

One particularly effective model for tenant participation in service evaluation is the Tenant Auditors Project run by the Wrekin Housing Trust.92 The Project was designed to widen the base of tenant involvement in housing management and to reach those not engaged in formal structures, such as the executive management board or the Tenants Panel. The project was managed by a steering group, on which tenants were the majority. The auditors were trained and chose to audit three different service areas: re-lets, repairs and employee training. Their methods included work shadowing, interviewing employees, telephone call monitoring, satisfaction surveys, inspecting properties and mystery shopping. Three reports were produced and the tenant auditors gave verbal presentations on their findings and recommendations at a board meeting and management day. Managers of each of the audited teams then provided written responses, detailing how they would improve their services.

The project was joint winner in the general category of the 2001 IPPR/Guardian Public Involvement Awards. The following successes were identified:

- other managers now want tenants to audit their services and two new areas are currently being lined up for tenant audits: supported housing and customer care
- some auditors have gone on to stand in tenants’ panel elections and as board members
- new tenant auditors are now trained internally – rather than by consultants – and the Trust has been asked to train tenant auditors in other local authorities, so that the model can be replicated

92 This information is taken from the IPPR/Guardian Public Involvement Awards 2002
● both staff and tenants now report a greater understanding and appreciation of each others’
difficulties.

Despite the opportunities to involve tenants in programmes such as this one, in many areas tenant participation takes place only at a very superficial level. There are two broad ways of accounting for this. One is that participation is too much effort for citizens, i.e. that residents do not have the skills or inclination to manage their estates. The other is that local authorities are not strongly committed to participation from tenants, not structured in a way that allows easy participation or that they themselves face constraints which do not allow them to be as open as they would like. The research reviewed here suggests that although there are problems with ‘participant exhaustion’ these can be lessened by supportive and innovative approaches from local authorities.

**Tenant Participation Compacts**

One recent policy innovation in the state sector was the publication of the first National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts (TPCs) in 1999. The purpose of TPCs is to extend the tenant role to the level of ‘fully contributing’ partner with the local authority on decision making in the housing service. From 1 April 2000 all local authority landlords were expected to implement a TPC. A recent evaluation found that the implementation of TPCs has not been without problems. In some cases evidence was found that TPCs had led to the increased involvement of a small number of tenants’ representatives and that the complexity of the compacts was discouraging involvement by others. However it was also found that in many cases the introduction of the TPC was creating more equal partnerships between officers, members and tenants, and had helped to erode paternalist attitudes within housing departments. The better local authorities had ensured that the principles of the TPC had permeated throughout housing services, and were linked to improved service delivery.93

One of the first TPCs to be developed in the housing association sector was between Doxford Park Housing Estate and the South Sunderland Housing Company. This was not an easy process. It took over a year to develop the compact and there were some early problems between tenants and housing officers. It is however, now working well. Every resident of the 800 home estate is a member of the Estate Forum, which meets every six weeks and is attended by 50-100 residents. 14 elected representatives are responsible for the estate compact and it is their job to keep the other residents informed. The Company’s commitments include removing obscene, racist or sexist graffiti within 24 hours. Although only housing is formally covered by the agreement, the local police, cleansing, highways and youth services are also involved and it seems likely that the compact will soon be extended to cover some or all of these agencies.94

**Housing co-operatives**95

A more comprehensive form of participation is the establishment of housing co-operatives. These vary greatly in the level of control which tenants have over their homes and fall into several categories.

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93 ODPM (2003a) *Interim Evaluation of Tenant Participation Compacts*
94 See case studies section: http://www.communitytakingcontrol.org
95 This information is taken from the Confederation of Co-Operative Housing: http://ch.coop/coopinfo/types.html
• **Ownership housing co-operatives** are owned, managed and controlled democratically by their members and tenants, and usually all tenants are members of the co-op. The majority are at least partially funded through the Housing Corporation and are classified as Housing Associations. Most elect management committees, made up entirely of tenants, to oversee the day to day running of the co-op, and buy services from either specific housing co-op service agencies or from housing associations, but some employ their own staff directly. Some ownership co-ops are set up without public funding and raise finance through mortgages and loan stock. Ownership co-operatives are traditionally quite small, but they give the greatest amount of control to tenants of any of the tenant control models.

• **Tenant Management Organisations** (TMOs) take on aspects of the management services of tenants’ homes, while another organisation remains the responsibility of the landlord. Council tenants have a legal ‘right to manage’ and access to specific funding that enables them to set up the TMO. The TMO has a management agreement with their landlord (the council, a housing association or in some cases both) which sets out what functions of the management service the TMO will take on and what management allowance the co-op will receive to enable them to run the TMO.

There are two types of TMO:

– **Tenant Management Co-ops** (TMCs), where tenants become members of the co-op and then elect a management committee from amongst themselves.

– **Estate Management Boards** (EMBs), where the elected TMO board has a majority of tenants, alongside representatives from the local authority and possibly other organisations.

In 1998 there were at least 169 TMOs managing an estimated 68,300 council homes. Research using data collected between 1996-1999 has examined how these structures can affect service quality outcomes. Evidence was found to suggest that some local authorities had resisted devolving powers to tenants and that there had been difficulties in implementing agreements. But there was also evidence of improved resident-staff relations and a change in attitude from staff. One manager was quoted on the different way of working: ‘it’s a completely different way of doing things than the bunker mentality’.96 It was often a small core group of residents, which took on most of the activities, although in the smaller TMCs participation and awareness were higher.

In the vast majority of cases studied, TMOs were associated with an improvement in housing management performance, as compared with the situation before the TMO was established. Four indicators were used: proportion of empty homes, level of rent arrears, speed and quality of repairs and quality of cleaning and care taking, and in most cases, TMOs were performing above local authority average on at least one of those indicators.97

• **Self-build co-operatives** are housing organisations where the tenants have been involved in the building of the properties. The labour that they put into building the properties gives them a ‘sweat equity’, i.e. they own a percentage of the property and pay rent for the rest.

96 Tunstall, (2001) p.2506
97 Case studies of EMBs can be found in Clapham et al (1996) p. 28-29 (Clapton Park, Hackney) and Hawtin (1998) ‘Estate Management Boards: Their Development and Significance’ in Cooper & Hawtin (eds) *Resident Involvement and Community Action* Coventry: CiH
- **Short-life co-operatives**, most of which are in London or the South, take over properties that are in some way unlettable, for a fixed period of time which can sometimes extend for many years. The co-op does not own the properties, but has a lease with the landlord.

- **Tenant-controlled housing associations**
  There are a small number of housing associations registered with the Housing Corporation which are tenant controlled and have a majority of tenants on the board of the association alongside other representatives. There are few hard and fast rules about the make up of the board of housing associations, but some tenant-controlled housing associations hold elections for the tenant representatives on the board. Tenant controlled housing associations are often called Community Based Housing Associations (CBHAs), ‘community-based’ meaning that the organisation is geographically limited to one area.

These categories are extremely flexible and there are many examples of housing co-operatives which either straddle the boundaries or do not completely fulfil the definitions of any. The Homes for Change Housing Co-Operative in Hulme, Manchester is an example of just such an organisation. It was set up in 1987 by residents of local authority homes who wanted to manage the development of new homes and create a community-controlled asset. They worked with a local architect to design a new apartment block and the project was completed in 1996. There is no management committee and all decisions are taken at a monthly general meeting of the 100 members. The majority of members are also involved with a number of working groups on a day to day basis. This gives them practical experience of housing management issues. The project has been highly successful. There have been no break-ins or neighbour disputes in the first six years of the scheme, although the area formerly had a high crime rate. It has also spawned a number of community initiatives through a sister co-op, Work for Change (see Community engagement, employment and prosperity, page 29). Once purchase of the building is complete, members aim to expand the co-op to serve the wider community.98

**Community Based Housing Organisations in Scotland**

A slightly different form of Community Based Housing Organisations (CBHO)99 operates at the micro-level in Scotland (1500-1800 residents). The first schemes were set up in 1986 and 1987 in response to pressure from residents for improvements that the local council could not provide. By 1995 almost 13,000 houses were managed by 40 Community Ownership Organisations in Scotland. CBHOs are based on the principle of community leadership; all residents have the right to be involved in the management structure of their organisation. They have full responsibility for the housing stock that they own including development, improvement and management. They are normally highly localised and they tend to operate in very deprived areas.

Based on semi-structured interviews and household surveys in those CBHOs with the longest pedigree, research found a number of difficulties in the definition of the role of resident committee members and that the organisations were still constrained by their relations with other

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98 See http://www.communitytakingcontrol.org
institutions. A financial appraisal was carried out which concluded that community ownership did impose greater costs on the public sector than some other options.

However the research also found that the CBHOs had had important impacts. In 1989, a survey of four of the first CBHOs, including the most deprived, showed that the majority of tenants were significantly more satisfied with CBHO services than they had been with council housing services, 68% across all schemes claiming that the overall service was better. By 1994, with the exception of one project, the general consensus was that CBHO control of housing remained superior, 81% of tenants being satisfied, a nine percent increase from 1989. Indeed, 40% of interviewees from all four schemes believed that the service was improving and only 6% stated it was getting worse. Measures of management effectiveness suggested that after a year CBHOs had instigated better housing management without increasing repair and management expenses.

In the majority of the areas studied, concerns over neighbourhood problems decreased after the CBHOs were established. In the areas where it increased it may have been a result of residents transferring their concerns because their housing concerns had been addressed. Although the distribution of most popular and unpopular areas remained unchanged, measurements of location satisfaction improved in the CBHOs after they were first set up. All CBHO residents reported a drop in their levels of worry about crime but two CBHOs showed an increased concern about safety after nightfall.

Community-based housing organisations were regarded more highly than the council, only 44% of interviewees believing that the council can be ‘trusted to do what is right’ as opposed to 75% believing that of the CBHOs. Levels of attendance at AGMs were high and the leading management of CBHOs was shown to comprise of the average or near average resident in terms of social and educational characteristics.

**Conclusion**

Housing is an area that has a long history of community involvement. This is partly because it is easy to identify and communicate with potential participants, but also because the quality of housing is of central importance to most people. Two factors that limit the potential of tenant participation emerge from the research review. The first is that tenants often need training and support in taking on more active roles. The second is the willingness of local authorities and other institutions to cede power.

Arnold and Cole discuss the problems of sustaining involvement. They describe a service agreement established on the Bell Farm Estate in York. The agreement commits organisations to a certain quality of public service provision. Regular tenant association meetings monitor performance and feedback through an Estate Agreement Monitoring Group. The agreement allows community involvement in deciding the priorities of public service in their estate without the intense day to day management pressure that some approaches to participation demand.

Various initiatives to support residents taking on a more active role in housing management also

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100 Clapham & Kintrea (1994) pp.236-239
exist. Examples include the Tenant Participation Advisory Service\textsuperscript{102}, Communities Taking Control\textsuperscript{103} and Clapham et al describe the work of the Community Housing Information Project (CHIP) in Wester Hailes.\textsuperscript{104}

More difficult is the willingness of social and public housing landlords to open themselves up to tenant participation. The process can be difficult: research on TMOs found that the relationship between staff and residents deteriorated to begin with but improved after a period of adjustment – and it requires time and resource commitment from all sides.

Applied tenant participation has led almost uniformly to improved service delivery and improved tenant satisfaction. Other consequences are more difficult to assess. But it seems safe to assume that community engagement will help prevent the social decline of neighbourhoods, once investment is in place and work to extend valuable social networks builds capacities and confidence in its tenants. Finally tenant participation can start to erode paternalist attitudes in housing service providers and help them to become adaptive learning organisations.\textsuperscript{105}

**Community engagement and regeneration**

**Introduction**

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 on partnership working, preferably with a high level of public involvement.

SRB partnerships are expected to involve a diverse range of local organisations in the management of their scheme. In particular, they should harness the talent, resources and experience of local businesses, the voluntary sector and the local community. Schemes can offer support to build the skills and confidence of the local community so that they can play a key role in the regeneration of their areas.\textsuperscript{106}

The Prime Minister’s foreword to the 1998 National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, explained the beliefs underpinning these initiatives:

Too much has been imposed from above, when experience shows that success depends on communities themselves having the power and taking the responsibility to make things better.\textsuperscript{107}

Later on in the report, it was acknowledged that ‘without effective self-help, it is unlikely that any other measures of community regeneration, however well-resourced, will provide long-term solutions to long term problems’.

\textsuperscript{102} See http://www.tpas.org.uk
\textsuperscript{103} See http://www.communitiestakingcontrol.org
\textsuperscript{106} See http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_urbanpolicy/documents/page/odpm_urbpol_608001.html
\textsuperscript{107} Social Exclusion Unit (1998) *Bringing Britain Together: A national strategy for neighbourhood renewal*
Single Regeneration Budget

The Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) was set up in 1994 in an attempt to streamline the regeneration assistance offered by a range of government departments. It was administered at regional level by Regional Development Agencies and in London by the London Development Agency. Before it was subsumed into the Regional Development Agencies Single Programme in 2001, £5.7 billion funding had been allocated to over 1,000 projects.

An evaluation undertaken by DLTR found that, after a slow start, the SRB did begin to encourage more effective community participation in local area regeneration. The evaluation argued that building community capacity requires a careful strategy commencing at pre-bid stage and enshrined in a bid document, and that resources have to be devoted to community engagement from the earliest possible stage and through the lifetime of the project. Where this occurs there is a greater chance that projects will be robust and sustainable in the period after SRB funding ends.

Of the ten case studies in the evaluation, only Hangleton Knoll was community-led. An existing community group, the Hangleton Knoll Project, used the SRB to help initiate over 80 local community groups run by 180 residents of the Hangleton and Knoll estates, outside Brighton. £1.6 million was allocated to the area, which suffered from serious problems with youth crime. The local community has been directly involved in planning environmental improvements, the Opportunities Centre (a labour market intervention), the Community Festival, improvements to two community centres and the Youth Music Project.

The programme exceeded the vast majority of its targets. The Opportunities Centre has opened a second office and started to provide support for adjacent communities. A new Trust, building on the experience of Hangleton and Knoll, has been formed to operate in the wider Brighton and Hove area.

The evaluation describes Hangleton Knoll as a good example of ‘intensive community involvement in regeneration’. Its success was built on a number of factors:

- It linked SRB projects to community defined needs
- It built on existing community organisations and provided resources to help them develop
- It tried to link the two quite isolated estates into the wider Brighton and Hove labour market
- It improved amenities available to local communities.

New Deal for Communities

New Deal for Communities (NDC) is a key programme in the Government’s National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. Since its inception in 1998, NDC partnerships have been established in the most deprived neighbourhoods in England. They are designed to reduce the gaps between poor neighbourhoods and the rest of the country on five key outputs: crime education, health,
worklessness, and housing and the physical environment. Approximately £2bn has been committed so far.\textsuperscript{111}

No previous central government led area based initiative has put such great stock on community engagement as the NDC. It is one of the design features that NDC programmes should 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.

The NDC Programme places a particular emphasis on involving all elements of the local community from the outset… Plans imposed on a community that are not developed with them and do not win their support, won’t deliver lasting change.\textsuperscript{112}

It is too early in the programme to offer real evidence of outcomes but some early data on the nature of engagement is available. Despite the mixed press received by NDCs, there are some encouraging findings. There are however, clearly many problems still to be resolved:

\begin{itemize}
  \item There are resident majorities on 36 of the 39 resident boards
  \item Over half of the boards were appointed by community elections (with turnout rates varying between single figures and over 70%)
  \item Many of the boards have experienced a great deal of membership flux, placing a heavy burden on remaining board members
  \item Over half of the representatives consider the time commitment to be excessive and worsening
  \item Some boards lack specific skills in financial and project management and find it difficult to think strategically over a ten year period
  \item Two thirds of representatives consider that training is improving, as is clarity about roles
  \item Awareness of NDC partnerships within the community varied from 22\% to 87\%
  \item One third of those surveyed thought that the NDC had improved the area
  \item Levels of trust in the NDCs were similar to those in the local councils.\textsuperscript{113}
\end{itemize}

The requirement to ‘engage with the community’ has caused some problems. For instance, it is unclear whether community should be defined as local residents or whether other potential constituencies have a legitimate voice (businesses for instance). Tensions between different communities in the NDC areas have also occasionally caused problems. In many NDC areas, there is very little structured ‘community’ with which to engage. Scoping work carried out in late 2001 found that the numbers of voluntary and community organisations varied from one to 107. There is also a degree of uncertainty as to how successfully NDCs manage to engage with community groups that do exist, with partnerships reporting more optimistic figures than stakeholders.

As well as their formal purposes, it is worth asking if the NDC programmes can contribute to a revival of local democracy. In the West Gate NDC in Newcastle the proposal for community elections to the partnership board came from the community.\textsuperscript{114} It was hoped that elections would:

\textsuperscript{111} This section is based on ODPM (2003b) \textit{New Deal for Communities. The National Evaluation 2002/03: Key Findings, Research Summary 7}
\textsuperscript{112} DETR quoted in \textit{Ibid}
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Ibid}, p. 12
- Enhance the legitimacy of representatives
- Have an educative role
- Would allow direct representation of the different areas that made up West Gate
- Identify the NDC partnership, as opposed to the local council, as the key decision making body.

Turnouts were higher than in local elections, and the areas with the highest turnouts had the highest ethnic minority populations. With the time constraints the elections were relatively conventional. In future, consideration will be given to innovative approaches including allowing young people under 18 and asylum seekers to vote.

**Communities regenerating alone**

Despite some encouraging elements, the story of government-led regeneration has not been an altogether happy one. It would be wrong to claim that communities do best when they go it alone. Many clearly do not have the resources, confidence or inclination for this. It is however clear from the following two case studies that very successful regeneration projects can be developed by communities without – or even in spite of – official assistance.

**Manchester’s Gay Village**

Although the government’s focus has tended to be on geographically defined communities or neighbourhoods, one of the best known examples of community-led regeneration is the development of Manchester’s Gay Village. The village grew up organically, transforming the previously run-down area into a trendy night-spot at the forefront of the more general regeneration and re-population of the city centre.

A study of the city’s cultural quarters undertaken by researchers at Manchester Metropolitan University found that gay villages could breathe new life into urban centres and this is a view that has been seized upon by policy makers. The GLA asked the Gay Business Association to submit proposals for its economic development plan and are looking into creating a gay small business village’. Newcastle upon Tyne also included the development of a gay village in its 1999 city centre action plan and has, since then, pumped over £5million into the proposal.

However, attempts to artificially recreate the success of Manchester’s Gay Village may prove fruitless. In fact, once Manchester City Council and national businesses got involved, the village has begun to decline. Of the 32 bars and restaurants in the Canal Street area, only six are now run by and for gay people. Many gay people no longer use the village and those that do have found themselves prone to an increasing number of homophobic attacks. A research fellow from Manchester Metropolitan University describes the decline of the village:

> Now the area has become a tourist trap and gay businesses are displaced by the broader business community. This is a classic narrative of this kind of regeneration – organic cultural

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115 This section is based on C Lipman (27 April 2001) ‘Glad to be Gay’, *Community Forum New Start Magazine*, Social Exclusion Unit
and social vitality under threat from homogenous, faceless industries. The tension lies in competing motives, and managing this is very difficult.

There seems to be a strong case for arguing that effective regeneration is more likely to come from supporting and fostering existing communities and enabling them to develop their surroundings themselves, rather than from somewhat artificial top-down initiatives.

**Coin Street Community Builders**

In the 1970s a number of sites on Coin Street near Waterloo on the South Bank of the Thames stood vacant. In the community there was concern about a declining and ageing population and a lack of open public space. The sites on Coin Street in the view of community activists would suit low cost housing and public space. However, the 1969 London Strategic Plan had identified the South Bank as a preferred location for new commercial development. If Coin Street was developed as part of the commercial expansion of the City of London, the local community would certainly be displaced. After an extended conflict between commercial developers and community groups and two public enquiries, in 1983 the commercial developer dropped out and the sites on Coin Street were sold by the GLC at a discount to a newly established company – the Coin Street Community Builders (CSCB).

The CSCB developed the site for social housing, commercial premises and public space. Three housing schemes have now been completed, all are tenant co-operatives for low income residents and local workers. One won architectural awards from RIBA and the Royal Fine Arts commission. A park, a riverside walk, and a crafts market have been created. The converted Oxo Tower Wharf holds craft workspaces and retail units, a cafe, restaurants, and co-operative flats. CSCB handles all the commercial and development activities and invests the profits in a range of social and community projects. Current development includes training and leisure facilities.

As of mid 2000 the CSCB still had three major sites to develop. Although initially an oppositional organisation, the CSCB has responded pragmatically to opportunities arising from a number of developments in the Waterloo area primarily stimulated by the Channel Tunnel Terminus at Waterloo station.

**A smaller scale**

New Barracks Tenants’ Management Co-operative in Salford has taken a far more low-key and incremental approach to improving the physical environment. For the past ten years, residents have been able to earn points for activity within the co-op, such as attending meetings. In the past three years, the scheme has been extended to include any deeds which are deemed to be for the betterment of the community – and particularly for improving the appearance of the estate. Installing hanging baskets earns two points while an attractive garden design might earn 25. At the

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117 See Brindley (2000)
118 See http://www.communitiestakingcontrol.org
119 This information is taken from A Macauley (23 May 2003) ‘Points Mean Prizes’, Community Forum New Start Magazine, Social Exclusion Unit
end of the year, tenants decide whether to continue saving or trade in their points for a home improvement. Rewards include security lights, bathroom tiles, laminate flooring, new kitchens and garden improvements.

As well as improving their physical environment, the co-op has managed to create a real sense of active involvement among estate residents. In the words of its manager, Jonathan Dale:

There’s no tradition of organisation and being involved here – it’s very impoverished in terms of community activity and groups. The co-op makes a huge difference in that respect. We provide a wide range of social activities. When there are community activities [in the wider area], people from here often make up as much as 75% of the overall turnout. It shows what can be done when you have got the power locally.120

Community and government working together

Royds Community Association is an example of what can happen when local initiative does successfully join forces with government programmes. Royds is one of the largest community-run organisations in the country, with 24 staff and a board of 22 directors, 12 of whom – including the Chair and Vice Chair – are elected local residents. It was originally established to run a regeneration programme across three estates in Bradford but has now diversified to cover a wider economic and social regeneration of the area. Using SRB funds, Royd’s has managed to create around 750 local jobs and has helped establish a number of community businesses. It has also created a healthy living centre on one of the estates and is working with Bradford Vision, the local LSP, to develop a neighbourhood planning programme, which includes a pilot neighbourhood management programme. Now the SRB scheme is completed but Royds are continuing to provide services and regeneration programmes to a much wider area of Bradford, as well as to other organisations in the UK.121

Conclusion

Community involvement in regeneration has a long history but other than one-off case studies there is limited evidence for or against the effect that community engagement has on good regeneration.122 The lack of evidence is a concern given that the NDC programme has community engagement at its core. This section has presented cases where community has been involved and regeneration has been successful. More work needs to be done to assess the nature and strength of the relationship between community input and successful outcomes.

120 Ibid
121 See http://www.communitytakingcontrol.org
Community engagement and local government

Introduction

Community participation is at the core of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda, as highlighted in a consultative paper:

Increasingly, the degree to which an authority is engaged with its stakeholders may become a touchstone for the authority’s general effectiveness.123

Enhancing involvement is seen as vital for supporting the legitimacy of local government, developing community leadership and improving service delivery.124

The extent of participation initiatives

Survey and case study research carried out in 1998 provides a baseline picture of the variety of initiatives which local government has used to engage with citizens.125 The survey was repeated in 2002, giving an indication of the way in which participation initiatives are developing.126

The 1998 survey found that ‘traditional’ (such as public meetings and consultation documents) and ‘consumerist’ (such as service satisfaction surveys and complaints or suggestion schemes) forms of public engagement were well established in local government. A significant minority of local authorities had also started to work with innovative approaches including interactive websites and citizens’ panels. More specifically, the take up of more innovative methods of deliberative participation had increased in the years leading up to the survey. Visioning exercises, citizens’ juries, issue forums and community plans had all become more widely used during the 1990s. On the whole, service specific initiatives were more common than corporate applications, however innovative methods were more likely to be used to address authority wide and cross cutting issues.

There were some areas of concern. The majority of local authorities did not have a formal strategy and initiatives that did take place often relied on key individuals. An informal approach to participation sometimes left initiatives short of legitimacy and lacking robustness. Also, a lack of formal evaluation of participation initiatives prevented systematic learning by officers and members. There was agreement among officers interviewed in case studies on what the criteria for judging the success of participation initiatives should be: impact on council decision making or policy; increased understanding among the public; some degree of satisfaction with outcomes, and evidence of sustainability. But this had not been turned into systematic learning about, and development of, initiatives.

The 2002 update of the survey found that since the first survey there had been a marked increase in the take-up of some innovative and deliberative approaches, especially interactive websites,

125 DETR (1998)
126 ODPM (2002)
citizens’ panels and focus groups. For example in 1997, 55 (18%) local authorities used citizens’ panels; by 2001 this had increased to 153 (71%). Overall the number of participation initiatives had risen, across all types of authority. The report concluded that local authorities ‘are increasingly trying to involve people in local decisions and developing service delivery.’

There is some evidence to suggest that this trend is not merely a pragmatic response to Government prodding, the DETR survey found that local internal factors were driving the agenda rather than imposition from the outside.

Characteristics of effective initiatives

Evidence from the first round of comprehensive performance assessments (CPAs) for single tier and county councils also suggests that local authorities are opening themselves up to community influence: 96 of 150 councils were judged to have good consultation arrangements. A 2003 Audit Commission report also attempted an initial assessment of effectiveness. It identified five critical success factors for user focus and citizen engagement: commitment to user focus; understanding your communities; clarity of purpose; communicating appropriately; delivering change. A number of other key evaluative factors can also be identified, for instance whether the local authority has an overall corporate strategy and whether it reaches groups that do not normally become involved in local democracy. As yet there does not appear to be systematic evaluation of local government’s participation strategies, nor even an agreed framework which can be applied. In the absence of systematic research this subsection uses available case studies as evidence that elements needed for successful participation have been adopted by local authorities.

London Borough of Wandsworth

The London Borough of Wandsworth was highlighted by the Audit Commission for having many of the success factors in place. The council’s priorities are developed through consultation processes with service users and the community, including a focus on the trade-offs between cost and service level, and quality. The consultation process is tailored to the needs of particular groups, using a variety of mechanisms to understand and communicate with local communities. The results of the consultation inform the budget priorities and, in the assessment of the audit commission, successfully reflect the views of local communities. A programme of ward ‘Report Back’ meetings ensures that the results of the consultation are communicated to residents and communities.

Birmingham City Council

Birmingham City Democracy Commission is an example of a council taking a strategic approach to participation and ensuring that its own institutions are structured in order to make engagement with the public more effective. In 1997 Birmingham City Council launched an initiative with the aims of:

127 Ibid, p. 47
130 Audit Commission (2003) p.8
131 Based on a case study by IDeA, http://www.idea.gov.uk
Giving a greater role to local communities in addressing community needs

Providing a fresh partnership between the City Council and its citizens

Giving local people more influence over the Council’s activities.

This led in 1999 to the formation of a Democracy Commission, charged with making recommendations for facilitating democratic and community participation. Previous arrangements had been characterised by duplication of functions and a number of separate bodies at ward and neighbourhood level. The structure had led to overload for council representatives and confusion for citizens. The Commission suggested a number of changes: simplify local structures; improve and dedicate officer support; involve local communities in setting of service levels; and encourage the representation of communities of interest.

Four key factors were identified for the success of the overall strategy to increase democratic engagement in Birmingham:

- **Integrated devolvement strategy** – the linking of different agendas to ensure coherent and mutually reinforcing agendas. The overall budget for Birmingham and strategic decision taking will remain at the centre, but a number of local services and associated budgets will be devolved. Initially the devolved budgets will be ring fenced, but it is intended that there will be some scope for viring in the future

- **Building on what is there** – the approach adopted builds on existing structures, strengthening them and devolving a greater proportion of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund money to ward level

- **Dedicated staff and support to local structures** – a dedicated Ward Support Officer has been allocated to each ward committee to play a brokering role between different services

- **Long-termism and political commitment** – the strategy emphasises the ongoing process of reviewing structures and of building capacity.

**Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea**

The use of new technology provides an innovative method for consulting the public. A project in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea was aimed at understanding whether the internet could make gathering the views of local people easier. The goals of the project were to get the views of the community and stakeholders on e-enabled government and to evaluate the potential of internet consultation processes from the council’s and participants’ perspectives. The Borough’s resident panel was used to invite the local community and key stakeholders to take part. A website was set up where residents could read and respond to the consultation text, and after the deadline it was used to allow residents to view results of the consultation and give their views on the consultation process itself.

The results of the consultation led to significant changes in the Borough’s e-government strategy with more efforts being made to address issues of social inclusion. Other problems with using the internet were found: passwords and login procedures needed to be simplified and the site made easier to use; training needed to be provided to staff and community members; and there was a

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need for provision of kiosks with internet access that could offer privacy. But the evaluation found that the internet based consultation had mitigated the tendency for the most vocal consultees to dominate. Information feedback increased the sense of ownership for respondents and allowed them to track the effects of their inputs.

**Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council**

Knowsley MBC provides an example of a successful attempt to engage with citizens who are not normally involved in democratic processes. In 1990 the boundary commission intended to abolish Knowsley MBC and split the area between neighbouring councils until community members protested. Knowsley received a reprieve and community engagement is now key to many of the council's activities. An officer from Knowsley’s Citizens and Social Inclusion Division outlines the philosophy behind its work:

> New local government is not about doing it to people or even with them. It’s about developing the community’s skills to solve the problems themselves. Essentially what we’re doing is training the community and they’re doing the job, instead of sending the professionals to do it.133

A number of different initiatives mirror this attitude to citizen engagement, including ‘The Divert Team’ made up of 261 local residents trained by the council to mentor young people with anti social behaviour problems, and ‘The Bridges to Inclusion Mentoring Programme’ which has succeeded in increasing the school attendance record of participants.

**Further examples**

Other examples of citizen engagement resulting in positive change are provided by the Audit Commission:134

- Consultation in Hartlepool influenced decisions on housing stock, tourism sites and leisure facilities
- Issues identified through consultation in Cheshire informing elements of the council’s community strategy concerned with social inclusion, rural issues, highways and crime
- Further development of the approach to diversity and equality issues in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
- A neighbourhood warden scheme and a street cleaning programme was established by Barnet Council as a result of consultation on major programmes.

**Council initiatives and levels of community engagement**

So far this section has shown that local authorities are beginning to take on the challenge of public participation. Overall, local governments are developing more initiatives and this growth is primarily in deliberative methods of participation. It has also been shown that elements of good practice exist throughout England’s local authorities. Examples have been provided of councils

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133 From a case study by Susan Wolk for IDeA, http://www.pidea.gov.uk
with coherent and comprehensive strategies of participation, of well thought through adoption of new technology in engagement, of attempts to engage with children and teenagers, and of cases where engagement has made a genuine difference to council decision making.

A final question to be addressed is whether the initiatives and attitudes of local authorities can make a difference to the extent to which communities engage in democratic processes. There is evidence that where local governments get participation strategies and openness right then communities do respond by getting involved in decision making. Lowndes et al present evidence that what they call ‘institutional filters’ matter for participation levels (widely defined to include a number of types of involvement).135 Other factors, in particular socio-economic status, are clearly important in explaining overall patterns of public engagement but variation in the openness of government also appears to be critical.

**Political participation in Hull and Middlesbrough**

Lowndes et al use differences in the nature of the local authorities to explain the large differential in public participation between Hull and Middlesbrough, despite similar levels of deprivation and social capital. The extent to which political parties; public management; and the voluntary and community sectors ask the public to participate has a dramatic effect on whether latent social capital is mobilised or constrained. While the citizens of Hull are willing to participate to a relatively high degree in their communities, reactionary and conflict-ridden institutions have prevented them from engaging in the political process. Middlesbrough, in contrast, has a strong tradition of harnessing the social capital of its population through innovative public consultation. The city boasts a network of ‘community councils’ and an active and engaged voluntary sector, under the umbrella organisation ‘One Voice Tees Valley’.136

**Participation and better governance: a virtuous circle**

The issue of actively and meaningfully consulting citizens underpins all conclusions on engagement in the political process. The belief that the voices of individuals and of communities can be heard and will be listened to is one of the most powerful spurs to increased engagement. On a national level, high voting rates in heavily canvassed, marginal constituencies are the most visible indication of this. Citizens themselves explain non-participation in local politics in terms of a lack of information about opportunities, a belief that the council will not respond, and that participation is not for ordinary members of the public.137

Political participation is widely recognised to be a positive good in itself. Yet Putnam extends this further, showing that societies that have a high level of public participation in political processes can also expect to receive an objectively better standard of local governance. Where citizens routinely hold politicians to account, representatives perform their duties more effectively and transparently, which in turn leads to a renewed faith in the institutions of government and encourages yet more citizens to raise their voice, driving up standards still further.138

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136 Ibid, pp.17-21
137 V Lowndes, L Pratchett & G Stoker (2001)
138 Putnam (1993)
This kind of virtuous circle of participation, good governance and social trust is not beyond the grasp of even the most deprived communities in the UK, as the example of Middlesbrough (ranked nine out of 386 in the Deprivation Index) shows. By creating genuine and deliberative consultation structures, local authorities can help citizens of all backgrounds gain the necessary confidence and political literacy to participate fully in the democratic process. By listening to and acting upon their recommendations, they can restore faith in the institutions of local governance.
Chapter 3
Conclusion: the need for further research

The conclusion outlines some of this report’s findings as to the benefits of community engagement and identifies areas for further research and action.

Positive effects of community engagement

This report has reviewed evidence of the positive effects of community engagement. In the introduction three types of engagement were identified:

- informal interaction with family, friends and neighbours
- participation in formal groups and associations and
- individual or collective engagement with the agencies and organisations that deliver public services, or that are responsible for planning and infrastructure.

The way that community engagement works to promote positive social outcomes is often complex and multifaceted, but research and examples reviewed here suggest that there are at least three processes at work:

- *Socialisation*: the processes by which communities encourage the internalisation of co-operative, sociable standards
- *Guardianship*: the process by which neighbours look-out for each other and the community as a whole
- *Information flows*: the process by which communities work with public bodies, providing them with information about the way things work, and views as to how they might work better.

Individual sections of this report highlight some of the achievements of community engagement across different policy areas. We can say, by way of summary, that the research and examples outlined strongly suggest that, at its best, community engagement can:

- Empower citizens and make a significant difference to the way services are designed and run
- Secure widely valued policy outcomes – indeed community engagement has been shown, at least in some cases, to cut crime, promote health and well-being, improve public trust and satisfaction with public services
- Sustain itself over the medium to long term
- Be at least moderately representative in nature.

It evidently also works best when communities are engaged across a range of services, strongly suggesting a need for governments to develop a strategic, across the board approach.
The need for further research

At the same time, and as this survey should make clear, the evidence base in this area is far from solid. Many of the most ambitious research projects originate in the US – much of the British research is qualitative and sometimes impressionistic. As we said at the beginning, there is a strong common sense case to be made for community engagement. There are real difficulties in the way of establishing reliable measures of community engagement and its benefits. What Paul Burton has said of public involvement in neighbourhood regeneration is true in general: ‘Few studies have been able to develop robust comparative analyses of similar cases of neighbourhood regeneration in which it is possible to identify clearly what works, rather than what does not’.[139] Nevertheless, initiatives in this area have not been marked by their ambition or rigour. We note in particular:

- There is very little knowledge, in Britain, about European programmes, initiatives or research. Government might want to consider commissioning research into this area
- There is very little research on contribution that community engagement in governance and running of public services makes to social capital or community building. It is generally assumed that it makes some contribution, but little evidence as to whether investment of time and money in political engagement represents an effective way of boosting social capital.

Three ways active communities work, with reference to crime

1. Socialisation: interaction with neighbours and participation in groups and associations make individuals less likely to behave in an anti-social or criminal manner.

2. Guardianship: when neighbours know each other through formal or informal interactions they look out for each other and for the neighbourhood as a whole. In particular this can deter opportunistic criminals and low intensity social disorder.

3. Information flows: engaged residents often have knowledge that police need in order to address issues of disorder and crime in an area. Where levels of trust between authority and citizens are high this information is more likely to be passed on. There are also benefits from citizen involvement in priority setting and in evaluation of specific projects.

Analogous effects are relevant in other policy areas as well: being a member of formal and informal social networks contributes directly to the individual’s health; there is a guardianship role of friends and acquaintances who can help to spot ill health and offer support when it is needed; and development of trust in public services can mean quicker more effective delivery, with an allocation of resources that meets the wishes of citizens. The similarity of the processes involved suggests that although the policy areas covered here are diverse, there is coherence at the level of cause that means it is worth developing a common policy approach and a common research agenda.

Directions for further research

What can be done to encourage community engagement? The research reviewed here suggests that we should distinguish between supply side and demand side issues. That is, between issues around people’s willingness and capacity to become active citizens and issues around the willingness and capacity of public bodies to make best use of active citizens. Each set of issues raises its own questions.

On the supply side, it is vital that citizens and communities have the capacity and inclination to engage with the public sector and organise themselves. National and local governments and other organisations have already introduced initiatives and bodies aimed at encouraging and supporting active citizens, including citizenship education in schools, and myriad local authority public involvement initiatives. But we need to understand much more about the skills and support that citizens, potential or actual, want. It is especially crucial that these efforts do not exclude those groups that are hardest to reach and are least likely to be engaged. It is notable that while some local authorities have worked hard to engage citizens on issues of immediate concern to the local authority, few, if any, have taken a broader approach, and developed strategies to build capacity across the board.¹⁴⁰ Much the same, perhaps, could be said of central government. We need in particular, to develop a better understanding of:

- What forms of support – training, mentoring, monetary allowance, recognition in the form of NVQs – would encourage more people to take on citizen roles?
- Which groups are most in need of citizenship skills and how might they be helped to develop them?
- What strategies for developing adult ‘civic literacy’ are most effective?
- To what extent can government use educational grants, pensions and allowances to enable and encourage active citizens?
- What role can local government play in encouraging active citizens?

There is also a case for saying that we need to develop a better grasp of how we encourage the development of a culture that values and honours citizen involvement – one characterised by a widespread ‘expectation to serve’. The large, longitudinal study that the DfES has commissioned on the impact of the citizenship curriculum (NFER) should tell us something about the effect this is having on civic values, but we need to understand more about the role that might be played by (1) institutions of further and higher education, (2) the public-service media and other public institutions, and (3) the voluntary sector – especially the volunteering organisations – in fostering a more participatory culture.

¹⁴⁰ A noteworthy exception is Bradford, which is beginning to develop a strategy to support and skill all the 12,000 citizens it needs to fill all the governing positions within the local authority area.
On the demand side, national and local government and the public services need to be configured and run so as to engage citizens in as open and constructive way as possible. We clearly need to develop our understanding of how this can best be achieved. In particular, we need better answers to the following questions:

- What forms of community engagement are most efficient and effective? What has been shown to work?
- On what sorts of issues, through what sorts of organisation, and at what level do people want to be involved?
- In what capacity do people want to be involved? Do they want to be engaged as formal governors, co-producers, volunteer workers?
- How can the burdens of engagement be made less onerous? Are there, for example, alternatives to obliging lay citizens to attend marathon meetings on a Tuesday night?
- How can we bring about clearer understanding of the role that citizens can/should be expected to play? Too often for instance, the role of lay governors in schools and elsewhere is ill-defined or poorly understood. On this see Jane Steele and Greg Parston (2002) Rubber Stamped, ODPM.
- What ensures that involvement initiatives get under way and what ensures that they sustain themselves and ‘bed-down’?
- How can we ensure that community based organisations are genuinely representative of the community they are meant to serve? How should non-elected active citizens relate to elected ones?

These are clearly large questions. At the same time, however, the new interest in social capital, active citizenship and community engagement on the part of politicians and academics has already generated a wealth of helpful findings. Further research can build on a strong and rapidly deepening grasp of where community engagement is needed most and how it can best be effected.
Appendix

Community engagement in practice: some case studies

Families in Focus, Ampthill Square, Camden

Background and aims

Families in Focus is an estate-based initiative founded in 2002, centred on Ampthill Square and neighbouring housing estates in the London Borough of Camden. There was a serious escalation of youth disturbance incidents on Ampthill Square in the late 1990s. The estate had become a ‘crime hotspot’, largely as a result of rival gangs from neighbouring estates clashing on its open spaces. The estate was soaking up the time and resources of the police and the Housing Department. There were 177 reported public disorder incidents in the first half of 1999 alone and younger children from the estate were being drawn into the trouble.

The Tenants Association took the early lead and initiated its Stopping the Rot on Ampthill Square Campaign, bringing together the key agencies to work with the community. At the same time, the Council was considering important changes in its relationship with residents, proposing the development of preventative work on estates to support families before there were incidents of serious anti-social behaviour that could lead to eviction. The Prevention Sub-Group of the Area Child Protection Committee was also interested in exploring the idea of using community-based work to ‘prevent’ children coming to harm by creating child-friendly neighbourhoods. A new project was initiated, called Families in Focus, with a steering group drawn from the community but also involving key agencies, such as the Housing Department, the police, schools, the Anti-Social Behaviour Action Group, Social Services and the Play Service from the Leisure and Community Services Department. The community representation has become even stronger as the project has developed.

The project works primarily with children and young people between the ages of four and 16. The ethos and method is to start with children and young people and through them gain the trust of their families and of the community, building on strengths within the community and raising its aspirations. The project is small scale and locally based on a couple of estates and, though managed by the Council, it is very much bottom-up and community-led.

What has it done?

The project was given initial funding by Camden’s Children’s and Young People’s Strategy Group and additional funding subsequently came from the Single Regeneration Budget. Two workers were employed and began work in February 2001. The Tenants Association provided accommodation for the workers within its own hall.

142 Drawn from ‘Families in Focus’, a London Borough of Camden publication
The Steering Group defined its own objectives. These included improved levels of school achievement and reductions in youth offending, child protection referrals to Social Services, and evictions.

A wide range of services has been gradually developed and provided, including holiday programmes, guidance and advice about bullying and drugs, for example, and children’s and young people’s forums. These have proved very popular and are well-used. The project has also run more structured programmes that support individual children and young people to work on their behaviour.

A major long-term piece of work came to fruition in May 2003 with the publication and launch of the community survey of Ampthill Square residents. A group of community interviewers, supported by the project, were trained by a researcher from Thomas Coram Research Unit to develop and then carry out a survey of the residents of their estate. The survey achieved an outstanding response. 75% of the 366 households living on Ampthill Square participated, generating between them a total of 439 completed questionnaires. Copies of the summary of the survey were then delivered to every flat on Ampthill Square and a residents’ meeting was held to discuss the findings of the survey and ensure that the results were fed to key agencies, such as council departments and the police.

Young people were also trained to conduct their own survey, both about Families in Focus and life on the estate. This was launched at the same time. Following the success of this survey, a project to conduct exploratory research about the use of services and future needs of girls living in the area – Girls R Us – was begun in the summer of 2003.

The model has been successfully extended to neighbouring estates, showing the model to be not just effective, but also capable of replication. In October 2002, the project was able to take on three additional team members, using SRB funding, and established a second office in the Ossulston Street Tenants Association Hall. The project was now working with residents of a larger, nearby estate, as well as carrying out outreach work in Mayford, a third estate situated between the two offices. This had been the scene of serious anti-social behaviour by young people and Families in Focus was a member of a multi-agency group that was trying to tackle the problems. It visited parents informing them of the dangers and risks of the activity that their children were involved in and engaged young people in a programme of activities.

**What have been the outcomes?**

Researchers from the community were trained to undertake the survey and achieved a massive 75% response rate from local residents – considerably higher than anything that would have been achieved by professional researchers. Children and young people carried out their own surveys. BME groups have been successfully engaged and in the first year 35 local people have been volunteers for Families in Focus.

Because of the success of its work on Ampthill Square, in the spring of 2003 Families in Focus was appointed by the Camden Youth Inclusion Support Panel to be the local agency providing support.
to individual children and young people identified by the Panel as being at risk of or involved in anti-social behaviour.

External evaluation has been commissioned. Measuring progress was hampered, due to difficulties in data comparison (there was no estate specific evidence) and the fact that the programme is so new. But the evaluation was very positive. Anti-social behaviour is lower than on estates with similar profile. Caretakers estimate that problems of vandalism, graffiti and litter have been cut by 70%.

Success is acknowledged by the Council’s lead on anti-social behaviour: ‘The area went from being well-known for youth anti-social behaviour to being well-known for the lack of it.’ The Education Welfare Officer confirmed that the estate is unusual on account of how few referrals he gets from it.

**Slade Green Community Safety Action Zone (CSAZ), Bexley Council**

**Background and aims**

Slade Green, a deprived neighbourhood in the borough of Bexley, South East London, used to be a hotspot for car crime, burglary, domestic violence and racial abuse. The area was victimised by a local gang, residents felt unsafe after dark and, unlike surrounding boroughs, Bexley’s levels of recorded crime were on the increase.

In 1996, prior to the implementation of the Government’s Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Bexley Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) was set up to coordinate crime reduction activity between the council, police, health authority, and probation service. In accordance with the requirements of the Act, BCSP completed a Crime and Disorder Audit in 2002, identifying ‘trouble-spots’ which required an area-based approach to crime reduction. These are known as Community Safety Action Zones (CSAZ). With one third of all Bexley’s crime taking place there, Slade Green was designated as the first residential CSAZ.

**What has it done?**

A forum meeting, attended by 150 local people, was held to inform residents of the Audit’s findings and draft an outline project plan. Consequently BCSP began consultations with local schools, businesses, and community groups. The 6,500 residents of Slade Green received a survey in the ‘Bexley Magazine’ and two ‘Have Your Say’ days were held, giving residents the chance to voice their opinions and relate their experiences of crime.


http://society.guardian.co.uk/crimeandpunishment/story/0,9150,1078037,00.html


Scottish Executive, (16 June 2003) ‘Being tough on crime works’ – Press release by the First Minister


Muir, Hugh (27 May 2003) *Community that saw off the BNP*, The Guardian http://society.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4677383-1066948,00.html

Renewal.net, Case Study Submitted by Bexley Community Safety Partnership – Slade Green Community Safety Action Zone

http://www.renewal.net/Documents/Care%20Study/Sladegreencommunity.doc

Following this consultation process, a CSAZ Operations Group was formed, including members of the police, the council, housing associations, and representatives of the Community Forum and Residents Association. This group meets on a weekly basis and has overall responsibility for crime reduction strategy in Slade Green. A three-year plan has been designed to tackle community safety issues, and local groups were re-consulted six months into the project’s implementation.

CSAZ Operations Group initiatives have included:

- Obtaining anti-social behaviour orders for the six ‘ring leaders’ of a local gang, known to be responsible for many of the problems in Slade Green
- Introducing Neighbourhood Watch schemes across the area
- Providing graffiti removal kits to residents free of charge
- ‘Target-hardening’ by securing homes in those streets with the highest burglary rates
- Developing youth recreation facilities, including a youth shelter, a Football in the Community programme, and running sports activities and workshops on health and social issues.

**What have been the outcomes?**

Figures for the North End Ward, which includes Slade Green, show that between September 2001 and June 2003:

- Car crime declined by 29%
- Disorder declined by 13%
- Vandalism declined by 20%
- Street crime declined by 25%
- Street robbery declined by 85%

Alongside these falls in actual crime rates, fear of crime has also fallen. Prior to the CSAZ only 22% of Slade Green residents said they felt safe after dark, this has now increased to 93%. In addition, 98% of residents now feel that the police are responsive to community concerns, and 72% agree that the local authority is working effectively with local people.

The feeling of local residents is that, though problems still exist, they are headed in the right direction and people are less inclined to express dissatisfaction with those in authority because they feel that they are working together.
Neighbourhood renewal in Babergh – regeneration in a small rural community

Background and aims

Babergh District Council’s neighbourhood renewal approach provides an interesting example of how a small local authority can effectively tackle regeneration. The problems on the Anglia Estate in Great Cornard reflected many of those that are found in larger urban estates. It has high adult and infant mortality rates, and significant crime problems, substance misuse, vandalism and graffiti. Residents on the estate were unhappy with living there, with many putting in transfer requests. Properties that were becoming empty were difficult to re-let.

Following two fatal fires on the estate, residents formed a Tenants Action Group called the Irresistible 135 Tenants Association. Babergh District Council worked closely with this group and invited them to join the Anglia Estate Improvement Group when it was established. The local authority developed a vision for the estate in consultation with residents and local councillors. The vision aimed to make the estate a safe, secure, healthy and inclusive community. It also wanted to try and bridge the gap between the estate and the surrounding area.

What has it done?

The regeneration work has looked to involve the community at all stages of the process, from creating the vision, to developing ideas, examining plans and visiting other regeneration schemes. This has meant that residents have been involved at the macro and micro levels.

Rather than just adopting a market research driven approach to collecting tenant’s views, the local authority invested in training and empowering them so that they felt more able to play an active role in the process and be an effective participant in the regeneration partnership. To achieve this tenant representatives advised the council of their training needs. The council then provided the funding for them to attend courses, such as, ‘getting involved’ and ‘working with youths’.

The council has also tried to ensure that the public involvement process has been inclusive. Face-to-face visits were made to every household on the estate so that people with literacy and numeracy problems were not excluded. For this part of the consultation tenants were provided with detailed information and asked for their views on how the houses and the estate should be improved.

Young people were also specifically targeted for consultation. Teenagers from the estate were invited to visit and view teen zone initiatives launched in the Thames Valley area.

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To develop and improve the links between the residents of the estate the council and contractors a Tenant’s Liaison Officer was appointed. This person has ensured that residents have been consulted on a full range of issues right down to the colour of individual doors on the estate. Unlike many approaches to public involvement, the consultations with tenants have been frequent and honest. They have been asked for their input as a community and as individuals.

In 1998, Babergh supported the creation of the Anglia Estate Improvement Group. Members of this include tenant groups, tenant’s forum, owner-occupiers, the police, local parish councillors, housing associations, the local wildlife trust, councillors and officers, the Primary Care Trust and the Health Authority. The group developed a five-year estate environmental improvement plan costing £900,000 on top of housing renovation costs.

**What have been the outcomes?**

The Anglia Estate Improvement Group’s estate improvement plan has led to residents feeling more pride in their area, particularly since the house improvements had been completed. One clear sign that things have improved on the estate is that empty properties have now become easier to re-let.

Some of the main outcomes from the process have been:

- A clean up campaign that reduced rubbish and abandoned cars on the estate. 30 tons of refuse was removed from the estate in one day
- House refurbishment that has created a healthier and safer environment for families to live in
- Estate improvements that mean that young children and teenagers now have modern play facilities
- Improved community safety through adopting a ‘secure by design’ approach. Funding has also been allocated to substance misuse projects
- Road renaming and renumbering that improved the image of the estate and reduced the confusion caused by the existing layout.

The council feel that the regular consultation with tenants and the clear lines of communication through the Tenant Liaison Officer enabled the project to be completed a year ahead of schedule and under budget by £400,000 from a total budget of £5 million. The consultation process is still ongoing with residents monitoring the regeneration work that has been completed.

Babergh District Council has been awarded Beacon status for its approach to neighbourhood renewal. It was able to demonstrate good practice in:

- Developing a clear vision for neighbourhood renewal in consultation with the local community and other partners
- Listening to and then supporting local groups and community leaders who felt excluded
- Working in partnership with the local community to develop and deliver a programme of estate improvement and community building initiatives
- Utilising the increased capacity and energy of partners and the local community as a catalyst for the wider regeneration of a market town.
Lambeth Youth Council

Background and aims

Established by London Borough of Lambeth in February 2002 to involve young people in improving local services and policy and encourage them to be community leaders, the Youth Council is open to all young people aged between 11 and 24.

The group meets at least twice a week. Young people are texted, according to whether they are interested in the issue being discussed. Meetings are chaired by the council development worker who makes sure that everyone has their say.

Most projects start in discussion groups and the emphasis is very much on making a difference. The young people brainstorm the options and then decide on plan of action, for instance interviewing influential figures, consulting a wider group of young people or writing articles for the media. The local authority provides training and support.

The project organisers rejected the idea of elections and of a formal membership because they thought this would send out the signal that this is only for those who are good at school. They wanted to focus on action rather than structures at the beginning. However they are thinking of introducing more formal roles and a more formal core membership.

What has it done?

Police use of stop and search was highlighted as a major concern for young people in Lambeth. Young people from the council were initially invited to a consultative forum to give their views on police tactics. They were so well-informed and so impressive that the police carried on working with them and have now incorporated them into training. They have interviewed key figures (including Chief Superintendent, and London Mayor’s policy advisor on race); given feedback to the Home Office on new stop and search guidelines; outlined their work and proposals at the Lambeth Community Police Consultative Group; shared views at a national conference, interviewed a group of newly trained police officers on street duties training.

A Teenage Pregnancy Project was targeted at PSHE lessons in schools. Youth Council members devised lesson plans, developed a proposal to start peer education and met the borough’s teenage pregnancy co-ordinator.

Consultation and Democracy: Young people are involved in town centre forums and are training as consultants with video evidence of what local young people want.

Youth council members have proposed and are currently developing peer inspection of the provision of youth services. They also plan training and they have a page in a local free newspaper in order to raise ideas and publish discussions. There are also ideas for future work on how to nurture creative arts in the borough (DJ skills, rapping etc).
What have been the outcomes?

There have been real effects on how police are trained in stop and search and there is now a greater degree of informed debate. The police have become very aware of what is going on through the young people themselves, rather than mediated through adults. The goal is now for young people to develop training for police officers to help them conduct stop and search more sensitively.

In response to meeting Youth Council members, the local authority has funded a full-time worker to take the teenage pregnancy project forward. Some members of the panel are now training young people to run lessons for their peers.

The young people involved have developed a high level of confidence and experience, which makes them perfectly suited for future civic leadership roles.

Tenant Auditors Project: Wrekin Housing Trust

Background and aims

The Wrekin Housing Trust (a registered social landlord) already has good formal mechanisms in place for tenant involvement. Five tenant representatives sit on the executive management board and an elected Tenants Panel meets monthly and is involved in a variety of working groups. Their duties include selecting and monitoring gas contractors and reviewing repairs services. Over 1,000 tenants regularly complete postal questionnaires as members of the ‘Around the Wrekin’ consultation group and are invited to focus groups on specific topics.

The Tenant Auditors’ Project is an attempt to widen the base of tenant involvement to reach those not engaged in formal structures and to give tenants a hands-on role in monitoring Trust services. The project was managed by a steering group, on which tenants were the majority.

A great deal of emphasis was placed on bringing new tenants in and encouraging people who hadn’t previously been involved. Tactics included an article in the tenants’ newsletter; a stand in the town centre and a ‘job advert’ for volunteers in the local newspaper. The Trust ran a taster session to explore what being a tenant auditor might involve and were pleased to see a lot of ‘new faces’. Fifteen people went through the auditors training, from a range of social backgrounds and ages. Attempts are now underway to reach ethnic minority and teenage tenants.

What has it done?

Tenants chose to audit three different service areas – re-lets, repairs and employee training. Their audit methods included work shadowing, interviewing employees, telephone call monitoring, satisfaction surveys, inspecting properties and mystery shopping.
Three reports were produced and the tenant auditors gave verbal presentations on their findings and recommendations at a Board meeting and management day. Managers of each of the audited teams then provided written responses, detailing how they would improve their services.

**What have been the outcomes?**

Repairs call centre staff are now encouraged to speak more slowly and clearly, particularly for older tenants. Understaffing on Mondays (the busiest day of the week) was identified as a problem. Repairs staff are now only allowed to take Monday off as part of a whole week rather than as an ‘odd day’.

Net curtains are now put up in empty properties to make them look lived in and neighbours are informed in advance when a property is going to become empty so that they can keep an eye on it.

Other managers now want tenants to audit their services and two new areas are currently being lined up for tenant audits: supported housing and customer care.

Some auditors have gone on to stand in tenants’ panel elections and as board members.

New tenant auditors are now trained internally – rather than by consultants – and the Trust has been asked to train tenant auditors in other local authorities, so that the model can be replicated.

Both staff and tenants now report a greater understanding and appreciation of each others’ difficulties. The only concern is that this spirit of co-operation may lead to less critical audits!

**International examples**

**TOM website: Estonia**

**Background and aims**

TOM stands for Tana Otsustan Mana (Today I Decide) and was initiated by the Estonian government in July 2001. It aims to draw citizens into the legislative process, by allowing them to comment on draft laws and by submitting ideas for new laws.

**What has it done?**

By registering their names and email addresses, all citizens are able to submit proposals for new laws. Each proposal is allowed two weeks for public discussion, followed by three days in which the author is allowed to revise the submission before it is voted on. If the proposal receives more than 50% of votes cast over a three day period, it will be considered by the relevant government department. This department will then have to post follow-up reports on the TOM website.

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What have been the outcomes?

The site has 2,700 registered users and receives 190,000 hits per month. So far nine laws have been proposed and taken forward by government departments.

Porto Alegre: Brazil

Background and aims

In 1985, the Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Porto Alegre demanded a more participatory form of governance which would include some popular control over the municipal budget. Upon the election of the Popular Front alliance – headed by the PT – in 1989, the Orçamento Participativo (Participatory Budget) was established.

It was envisaged as a tool for increasing redistribution of the city’s wealth into the sprawling slums at its edges.

What has it done?

Citizens are able to participate as individuals and as representatives of community groups. Delegates are elected at neighbourhood level to form a regional council and, from there, may be elected to sit on the 42 strong Municipal Council of the Budget. The Council deliberate the process of the Participatory Budget as well as investment priorities and relay these to representatives of the Municipal Government in bi-weekly meetings.

The remit of the Participatory Budget has now been expanded to include investments in health, education, culture and social services. It has also been implemented at a state level and in over 100 other PT controlled cities.

What have been the outcomes?

Even politicians hostile to the Participatory Budget, find it hard to reject such a statement of popular opinion, as a result, its recommendations have been passed every year without major alteration. Its popular legitimacy has enabled property tax rises and higher rates of tax collection.

The redistributive aims of the PT have been met, with citizens choosing to invest the majority of public funds in poorer residential districts. In 1988 75% of residencies had running water; today the figure is 98%. Over the same period, sewage coverage has increased from 46% to 98%; the number of functioning public municipal schools is up from 29 to 86 and the number of families given housing assistance per annum has risen from 1,714 to 28,862.

The impact of the Participatory Budget on civil life has been dramatic. In 1999 over 14,000 citizens attended meetings, although in a city of 1.3 million, this represents little over 1% of the total.

population. Whilst the strongest predictor of participation was originally the pre-existence of associative networks in each district, it is now poverty. Unusually for this type of exercise, it is the wealthier citizens who are underrepresented. The levels of confidence which participants have gained is remarkable and this has manifested itself in a blossoming of new associations: in the decade from 1988 to 1998, the number of these groups grew from 300 to 540. Citizens now feel themselves to be in control of their own city and, rather than waiting for months to see a government official with a grievance, now form activist groups to take things forward themselves.

Participatory governance in Porto Alegre has now expanded beyond the budget, into social service and health provisions, local school policy and human rights. The 1997 Human Rights Municipal Conference drew delegates from each of the regions into a display of city-wide solidarity.
The benefits of community engagement
A review of the evidence
by Ben Rogers and Emily Robinson, IPPR
Published by the Active Citizenship Centre