



Removing the barriers to community participation

A report by the National Community Forum

Commissioned by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

Written by James Morris, ippr



*together***wecan**

This report is published by the National Community Forum in its role as an advisory body to ODPM. Any views in it are not necessarily those of the department.

About the authors

This report represents the views of a panel of residents and workers directly involved with neighbourhood renewal, drawn from the National Community Forum. The forum was set up by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to:

act as a sounding board for the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) and provide a grassroots, community perspective on government programmes
develop new ideas to help make government policies more effective
help promote the aims of neighbourhood renewal, increasing people's understanding and involvement.

The forum holds regular round-table discussions with senior NRU staff and ODPM ministers to alert policy makers to the gaps between Whitehall policy and implementation on the ground. They also work in small groups to address particular issues in more detail.

In June 2005, a working group was established to look at participation across government. The eight members of this group interviewed 39 experts from across Whitehall, academia, local government and community organisations.

James Morris and Miranda Lewis at the Institute of Public Policy Research (ippr) were commissioned to facilitate the discussions. James Morris wrote this report on the basis of those discussions. James is a Research Fellow in the People and Policy Team at the ippr. Recent publications include *Gateway People: The aspirations and attitudes of prospective and existing residents of the Thames Gateway* with Jim Bennet (2006) ippr; *City People: City Centre Living in the UK* with Chris Urwin and Max Nathan (2006) ippr; and *Older people's attitudes to human rights* (forthcoming), Age Concern.

The details of the panel members are as follows:

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Christopher Brown is a founder member, along with other local residents, of the Wor Hoose Community Project, which successfully fought plans to demolish the

estate and has gone on to regenerate the neighbourhood. He is on Newcastle LSP board.

Graham Brownlee chaired the Panel. He has been involved in setting up two community projects: one working with local families and children providing advice, mutual support and special events; the other employing local people and encouraging newcomers to move to and work in the local area. He has been Chair of Redcar and Cleveland LSP and the Chief Executive of the Churches Regional Commission in Yorkshire and the Humber.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ALMO	Arms-length management organisation
CEN	Community Empowerment Network
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
CPPI	Commission for Patient and Public Involvement Forums
CRU	Civil Renewal Unit
CVS	Council for voluntary service
DCA	Department for Constitutional Affairs
DEFRA	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DH	Department of Health
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
HO	Home Office
ippr	Institute for Public Policy Research
LA	Local authority
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LSC	Learning and skills council
LSP	Local strategic partnership
NAO	National Audit Office
NDC	New Deal for Communities
NDPB	Non-departmental public body
NHS	National Health Service
NMP	Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder
NRF	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
NRU	Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PPI	Patient and public involvement forum
PSA	Public Service Agreement
SCAWDI	Sparkbrook Caribbean and African Women's Development Initiative
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SSCF	Safer and Stronger Communities Fund
TMO	Tenant management organisation
TWICS	Training for Work in Communities
VCS	Voluntary and community sector

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Foreword

by Ed Cox, Advisor to the Panel

Even the most cynical community activist couldn't fail to have been excited by New Labour's promises *"to ensure that communities' needs and priorities are to the fore in neighbourhood renewal and that residents of poor communities have the tools to get involved in whatever way they want."*¹ But six years on, for many of us participation has been an experience equally balanced between grief and rewards.

You would expect that those of us fortunate enough to be appointed to the National Community Forum would count ourselves amongst community participation's winners. Indeed it has been a positive experience, and in a number of policy areas the coming together of policy-makers, practitioners and residents has demonstrated the power of more participatory approaches to democratic engagement. But the privilege of regular meetings with senior civil servants and ministers has also highlighted the gap between rhetoric and reality and an inconsistent approach to community participation across government.

At the local level, local authorities and other public agencies have interpreted guidance on community engagement loosely and at times defensively. The 'community leadership' role that was intended for New Deal for Communities programmes has led to a variety of regeneration models. However, the emphasis on delivery and spend has made it hard for community-led programmes to succeed amid traditional approaches to project appraisal, programme management and monitoring. The government's emphasis on community participation in Local Strategic Partnerships has led, in many areas, to tensions with locally elected councillors and is slowly being superseded by an emphasis on the leadership role of local authorities. There has been variability in the role of and participation in Public-Patient Involvement Forums. Many SureStart projects assert that their success is largely due to the strong emphasis on community and parent involvement across the programme.

As the National Community Forum has discussed these and other issues, it has become clear that inconsistency in the definition, interpretation and implementation of 'community participation' presents one of the most significant barriers to the achievement of empowered communities and improved public services. Having grappled with policy guidance, accreditation schemes, and performance management frameworks in a raft of initiatives, the National Community Forum finally felt that a more thorough review was required. It established a **Panel on Community Participation across Government** in order to explore the varied understandings of community participation by national government; to assess how such varied

¹ The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal

understandings impact on local implementation; and to make recommendations for future policy on community participation across government.

The Panel on Participation, facilitated by the ippr, interviewed 38 expert witnesses in order to form a unique perspective on the critical success factors enabling and inhibiting community participation at the present time. Their comments have revealed a picture of inconsistency within departments and across national government; a failure to embed a 'participation culture' within recalcitrant councils and unelected statutory agencies; and a patchy, short-termist approach to resourcing what is such a prominent cross-cutting theme.

Expert witnesses identified some fundamental issues that need to be grasped.

- Addressing the destructive impact of 'bad participation', where negative attitudes to community involvement lead to poor engagement practices, causing increased hostility, decreased trust and poor experience and outcomes not only for communities, but also for officials and politicians, thus further reinforcing negative attitudes and behaviour.
- Recognising the catch-22 faced by residents who take on responsibilities as community leaders, but find their legitimacy challenged precisely because they 'stand out' – becoming labelled as 'unrepresentative usual suspects'.
- Enabling officers to 'go out and inhabit other peoples' worlds' in order to deepen understanding and build relationships.
- Making community participation central to the delivery agenda rather than simply an added extra and treating empowerment as a key outcome in its own right.

Our experts also pointed to some ways forward.

- The need for clear and consistent national leadership.
- Greater rights, responsibilities and resources for local authorities and their partners to promote cultural change.
- A more sophisticated and trusting relationship between all levels of government and the voluntary and community sector.

Changing cultures is never an easy or linear process. But if the government's commitment to a new social contract is to be taken seriously (and not lost to vague notions such as *'trusting people'* and *'shared responsibility'*) then the issues and recommendations in this report deserve urgent attention. The Local Government White Paper, due to be published later this year, presents a significant opportunity to do this and to build upon and embed the valuable initiatives and investments that have been made to date, rather than allowing them to unravel. Capacity building for communities is like 'continuing personal development' for individuals, a lifelong process that requires ongoing investment. The Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 will be crucial if the necessary investment in capacity-building is to be found. This report needs to inform that process.

Through the National Community Forum we have had glimpses of what might be possible. Our emphasis on the need for benefits reform has helped ODPM see the importance of welfare policy for regeneration, and we have been able to inject strong practical suggestions into the debate. Our involvement in ODPM working groups on race and on neighbourhoods has put community voice at the heart of policy-making. But can we translate the precedent set by the Forum, working with the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, into coherent leadership right across government and down to the grassroots? Can we convert optimistic rhetoric into a meaningful 'right to participate' for every citizen? And can we find a vehicle to ensure the promotion, implementation, support and scrutiny that the participation agenda deserves?

Together, we believe, we can.

Executive summary

'Empowering local authorities must go hand in hand with local government empowering citizens and neighbourhoods... This means more opportunities for individuals to have influence and choice over what, where, when and by whom a service is provided.'

David Miliband, Minister for Communities, 2005²

The Government recognises that involving communities in policy design and implementation brings great benefits. Community participation is woven into many areas of government activity, ranging from the role of community members on the boards of foundation hospitals to the creation of Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) as partners in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). There is a loose but broad agenda that seeks to embed community participation in day-to-day practice, from Whitehall to the town hall.

Key recent developments in this agenda include:

- the Home Office-led 'Together We Can' initiative

- the ODPM's 'Local:Vision' work and, particularly, the proposals for more neighbourhood-level governance structures in 'Why Neighbourhoods Matter'. A white paper on the organisation of local government is expected in July 2006

- the guarantee of a community voice on LSPs when negotiating Local Area Agreements (LAAs)³

- Home Office Minister Hazel Blears' call for the creation of a "Citizens' Participation Agency charged with promoting local active engagement in decision making". This would not be "yet another unit within central government, but an organisation within every community which headhunts, trains, encourages and supports local active citizens... backed by the massive resources of government."⁴

The current policy approach is yet to fully deliver on its promise. There are many case studies of communities having a significant and positive impact on the way services are delivered.⁵ However, several recent evaluations have found only limited evidence that the new participation mechanisms are systematically increasing the extent to which communities actually influence public services.⁶

² 'Renewing our Democracy'. Speech to the Local Government Association Annual Conference, 28 June 2005.

³ ODPM (2004b), paras 16, 17, 74, and Annex B.

⁴ Foreword to Rogers (ed.) (2004).

⁵ See, among others, Gaffney (2005) and Rogers and Robinson (2004).

⁶ Healthcare Commission (2005), p33; National Audit Office 2004b; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004a), especially p20 and p53. However, see, for example, Cambridge Economic Associates (2005), p55, para 9.2, for evidence that communities are having a significant and increasing impact on New Deal for Communities.

This report seeks to explain and tackle this patchy performance. It sets out the views of a panel of community advocates and activists who worked together over a period of six months to develop the analysis and the proposals contained in this report. Their views were informed by interviews with experts on community participation from across Whitehall, academia, local government and the community and voluntary sector.

The report does not aim to re-state or analyse the case for participation as a way of approaching policy making and implementation. Instead, it takes the value of participation to be proven⁷, and looks at how this can be further developed across the public sector. The report begins by analysing the key barriers to further embedding participation in local decision making. It then provides some recommendations on how those barriers can be tackled.

Joining up policy

The panel found that approaches to participation policy are often not connected at the national, local or neighbourhood level. Each department, local authority and delivery body tends to have its own analysis of the value, purpose and best methods for participation. This has led to many different mechanisms operating in parallel, causing problems both for community members and for statutory bodies:

Participation overload – People who want to participate in local policy making can find the sheer range of structures bewildering. The productivity of community organisations and individuals is reduced as they spend time navigating the complex web of structures intended to facilitate participation.

Lack of sustainable programmes – There has been increasing recognition that participation needs to be sustainable. New Deal for Communities (NDCs), Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (NMPs), Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are all designed to be long-term initiatives. However, the panel found that often, policy is still implemented at local and neighbourhood level as a series of time-limited programmes. This drains capacity for long-term community work, as development organisations divert energy to deal with the constant search for short-term funding.

Inconsistent vocabulary – The term ‘community participation’ is understood and applied differently by different statutory bodies, and by different officers within those statutory bodies. These variations can make it hard for different bodies to work in partnership with each other and with communities.

⁷ See Rogers and Robinson (2004), Taylor (2003), Sirianni and Friedland (2001), Gaffney (2005) and Fung (2003) among others.

Tensions in policy

As with most policy areas, there are tensions with other policy agendas. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is no comprehensive government vision for community participation. The panel identified three significant areas of tension:

Local Area Agreements – The panel endorses the principles behind the introduction of LAAs. However, the shift from centrally administered single Communities Programme (SCP) funding to locally administered Safer Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF) funding means that community activity and community participation will be far more reliant on local authority support. This could limit the extent to which communities and community organisations feel able to challenge and influence local authority policies. The new arrangements will make communities and community groups more vulnerable to coercion where local authorities do not appreciate the benefits to be gained by genuinely involving citizens⁸.

The choice agenda – The panel argues that while participation and choice should work hand in hand, tensions may arise. Community members who have the choice of changing service provider may be less likely to participate in the improvement of that provider's services. This would be particularly problematic if choice policies fail to ensure equal access to the choices that are on offer.

The benefits system – There are tensions between the level of the earnings disregard for people claiming benefits and the ability of community organisations to draw on the skills of local people. The low level of the earnings disregard prevents people from using community work as a way of easing back into full-time work, as any pay would put the consistency of their benefit status at risk.

Changing culture

There are strong cultural barriers that deter government officers and elected representatives from embracing participation as part of their day-to-day practice. Often, committed officers, councillors and communities have to make the case for community involvement in the context of an institutional assumption that participation is unnecessary.

Some **local councillors** see participation as a challenge to their authority and role as community leaders. They may resent other members of the community who take on a leadership role. This problem can be exacerbated if they perceive Government programmes to be bypassing councillors in favour of dealing directly with communities.

Tensions between councillors and community activists are often most severe in councils that are heavily dominated by a single political party, and where there are few marginal wards. In such areas, councillors tend to be less open

⁸ Similar concerns also raised in National Audit Office (2004b) and UWE *et al* (2005).

to engaging directly with constituents – particular where this is likely to lead to a challenge from local people.

Many **government officers** are creating new opportunities for communities to participate. However, the panel identified three factors that explain why this is not happening everywhere:

Professional culture in many public services assumes that professional opinion is always superior to non-professional opinion informed by local experience.

There is an understandable reluctance to try community decision-making again where it seems to have failed or caused delays.

Adopting participative approaches means changing working practice.

There is a further issue around the role and legitimacy of community members who are selected to represent their communities on decision-making boards. The lack of clarity or consensus can leave community activists vulnerable to the challenge that they are not representative and lack legitimacy.

It is vital that participation structures are protected from 'capture' by narrow interest groups and that decision makers are legitimate and accountable. However, several witnesses noted that challenges to community advocates' legitimacy most often arise where those advocates question or challenge the views of elected or appointed officials. Panel members saw this as a 'participation catch 22', whereby the fact that a community member is actively engaged in decision-making brands them as 'un-representative' precisely because, unlike their peers, they are involved and are therefore seen as atypical or dismissed as the 'usual suspects'.

Standards, targets and inspection

Most of the experts interviewed by the panel argued that standards, targets and inspection for participation could be more effective.

The key points were:

There is not enough clarity about the standards that should be followed when involving communities. There is a balance to be struck between excessively rigid national guidelines and allowing so much flexibility that 'anything goes'.

It is too easy for local authorities to tick the participation boxes in their audit assessment without genuinely working in partnership with local communities.

Not enough attention is currently paid to the practice and performance of bodies other than local authorities in relation to participation.

There is a lack of systematic evidence about the effectiveness of different forms of participation. What evidence does exist can be hard to find, and is often not made available in a way that is useful to practitioners.

The importance of power relations

Unequal power relations underpin many of the problems described above. Communities that want more involvement in decision making face real difficulties where 'the system' is not open to their challenge. They are simply less powerful (particularly in terms of resources and information) than the stakeholders they are seeking to influence.

Participation in practice

Witnesses identified many practical problems that can arise even where there is a genuine commitment to participation. Participation sometimes takes place after budgets have already been set, thus limiting the range of proposals that can be considered. Sometimes, participation is not connected to decision-making – the process is merely a talking shop. At other times, statutory bodies fail to provide feedback from a consultation exercise, thus leading participants to believe that their efforts had no impact.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Government has a genuine commitment to participation, and the current policy environment offers an important opportunity to take this agenda forward. The panel, and the wider National Community Forum, hope that the recommendations below offer a way forward that will help government achieve its aim of empowering communities.

Clear national leadership for participation policy

Greater clarity and leadership from Whitehall would provide a strong signal, indicating the importance of participation to broader policy objectives. It could also provide a framework to resolve local issues around citizens' entitlement to participate, and relationships between elected representatives, officers and citizens.

Recommendations:

1. A Participation Commissioner should be appointed, with a small secretariat.
2. The Participation Commissioner should lead on the creation of a national charter establishing citizens' entitlements to participate.
3. The charter should be endorsed by the Cabinet to enforce departmental commitments.
4. The Participation Commissioner should liaise with Whitehall departments to support a cross-cutting approach to participation policy.
5. The Participation Commissioner should ensure that there are ongoing systematic reviews of the evidence base around participation.
6. Local participation and empowerment should continue to be evaluated through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), but the National Audit Office should have oversight of the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF).

Greater co-ordination by local authorities

Local authorities, as lead statutory bodies, are crucial to the success of participation, and can play a crucial role in ensuring that local mechanisms are effectively joined up. It is vital that communities are part of this joining-up process.

Recommendations:

7. Local authorities should have a duty to work with communities, community organisations and other statutory bodies to ensure that effective participation takes place in their locality.
8. Other statutory bodies should be required to work with their local authority, communities and community organisations, to develop their use of participation.
9. Local agreements on how participation will operate should be set out by the Local Strategic Partnership in a 'Community Empowerment Strategy'.
10. Where Neighbourhood Charters are introduced, they should inform and be informed by the Community Empowerment Strategy.
11. The process of agreeing community empowerment strategies should be supported by 'participation facilitators' based in government offices and charged with initiating and facilitating discussions at a local level.
12. Government offices should lead greater co-ordination of participation policy across government office regions.

Support to enable statutory bodies to change their culture and practice

Participation will only become a standard part of the policy-making process when it is embedded in public service culture. Culture change is essential to delivering long-term success and needs to be actively supported.

Recommendations:

13. Participation needs to be part of the standard way in which councillors and government officers go about their business.
14. Where negative attitudes and behaviour create a barrier to effective participation, participation facilitators should work with statutory bodies to develop culture-change programmes. These programmes should apply across occupations and sectors.
15. Participation skills should be part of the generic skill set of government officers, as taught and defined by the Academy for Sustainable Communities.
16. There should be a new qualification in participation for government officers and others who wish to develop their skills.
17. Elected representatives should be trained in the process and purpose of participation.

Long-term support for community organisations

Communities need support to ensure they have the capacity and inclination to develop an independent and effective community voice. The changes outlined above should address some of these issues by increasing the extent to which participation processes can make a real difference, but there is also a need for direct support.

Recommendations:

18. Funding for community participation is essential and should be independent of local authority influence.
19. Local government should devolve spending on community participation to the voluntary and community sector, to be administered in the same way as the Single Community Programme. This funding should be provided on a medium-term basis.
20. Authorities that choose not to do this should be required to demonstrate how their funding regime guarantees the independence of the local community sector.
21. Local and central government should invest in training in participation skills for community members.
22. A community participation qualification should be open to community activists, to improve their personal development opportunities.
23. The next phase of welfare reform should address the barriers within the benefits system that prevent full engagement in local community renewal. The panel recommends that, for a limited period of time, people who undertake work of benefit to their community should be able to receive payment for this work without loss of benefits provided the work is managed by an accredited local organisation.

1. Introduction

'The Government is committed to ensuring that communities' needs and priorities are to the fore in neighbourhood renewal and that residents of poor neighbourhoods have the tools to get involved in whatever way they want.'

Social Exclusion Unit (2001), p51

'Empowering local authorities must go hand in hand with local government empowering citizens and neighbourhoods... This means more opportunities for individuals to have influence and choice over what, where, when and by whom a service is provided.'

David Miliband (2005)⁹

'The Government will only achieve many of its objectives if it fully involves citizens and communities.'

Home Office (2004a)

The Government recognises that involving communities in policy design and implementation brings great benefits. Services become more effective, communities are made stronger, and governance is more accountable.¹⁰ There is a loose but broad agenda that seeks to embed participation in day-to-day practice, from Whitehall to the town hall. This agenda embraces measures such as the creation of Community Empowerment Networks (CENs) as partners in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), the key role for community members in New Deal for Communities (NDC) programmes and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders, and the establishment of foundation hospital boards with members drawn from local communities.

However, the current policy approach is yet to fully deliver on its promise. For example, a recent evaluation of foundation trusts found that governors drawn from local and patient communities had had little influence on strategy.¹¹ Similarly, evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships demonstrated that Community Empowerment Network representatives have had too little

⁹ 'Renewing our democracy'. Speech to the Local Government Association Annual Conference, 28 June 2005.

¹⁰ For examples of all three sorts of impacts, see, among others, Gaffney (2005), Rogers and Robinson (2004) and Taylor (2003). Focusing on specific services, see Skogan *et al* (2000) for impacts on policing and crime, and Kemshall and Littlechild (eds) (2000) for impacts on social care. For a discussion of the relationship between social capital, participation and governance see, among others, Halpern (2005). For a discussion of the potential role of participation in accountability structures see, among others, Clarke (2002), and Fung and Wright (2003).

¹¹ Healthcare Commission (2005), p33; National Audit Office (2004b); Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004), especially p20 and p53.

influence on LSP boards.¹² While 85 per cent of local councillors feel that they 'make a real effort to listen to the views of local people', just 32 per cent of the public share their view.¹³ Examples like the Morice Town Home Zone (see Case study 1) show the immense potential of community participation to transform neighbourhoods, but in many areas this has not happened.

Case study 1: Morice Town Home Zone, Plymouth

The Morice Town Home Zone was initially set up to tackle road safety as part of a successful application for Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding. The area had previously endured considerable deprivation and had no community groups. The initiative began with public meetings, 'planning for real' events held in a bus that drove round the area at evenings and weekends, and a survey. This exercise revealed significant community concerns about the council's proposals.

Independent facilitators were brought in to overcome the community's lack of trust in the council, and community members were involved in appointing them. The facilitators ran neighbourhood-level and street-level workshops with residents to develop plans for the zone. The process was supported by investment in other activities such as a community-edited newsletter.

The project has contributed to outcomes in the area that have gone beyond the original traffic calming objectives. As well as delivering a 50 per cent cut in average traffic speeds and a 40 per cent cut in through-traffic, the programme has led to a thriving community sector, a 94 per cent fall in violence, theft and damage in the year after the zone was completed, and property prices that are now 15 per cent higher than surrounding areas.

Source: Gaffney (2005)

This report seeks to explain this patchy performance. It starts from the point of view of citizens who are currently participating in localities and neighbourhoods around the country. It is based on a series of meetings of the National Community Forum (NCF). The NCF is a group of 24 residents and workers drawn from England's 88 Neighbourhood Renewal areas. A panel from the NCF interviewed experts on community participation from across Whitehall, academia, local government and the community sector. The panel members then considered the evidence they had heard in the light of their own experience as community advocates and activists with many years experience of community work.¹⁴

This report sets out the panel members' analysis of the barriers to community participation and potential policy recommendations for tackling those barriers.

¹² National Audit Office (2004b).

¹³ Base: 198 council members, 1600 members of the public. MORI (private polling).

¹⁴ For the full methodology, see Appendix 1.

The panel's discussions focused on three questions:

What are the barriers that communities and statutory bodies face when trying to establish effective participatory practices?

Are there tensions between policy formed in different parts of government, and if so, what is the impact of these tensions?

How should policy be developed to support effective engagement?

The report does not set out to re-state the case for participation as a way of approaching policy making and implementation. Instead, it takes the value of participation to be proven¹⁵, and looks at how it can be further developed across the public sector, with a particular focus on neighbourhood renewal. It presents examples of good practice, drawn from the experiences of members of the panel and from the broader literature on participation. However, inevitably it offers more examples of bad practice than good, as its focus is on identifying and overcoming obstacles to effective participation.

Issues about community participation are particularly relevant at this point in time. A number of recent or forthcoming developments will have a significant impact on the nature, scale and success of community participation in England:

The Together We Can initiative, led by the Home Office, marks a potential watershed in the Government's approach to community participation. It contains specific commitments from 12 Whitehall departments, and a method for evaluating progress against those commitments.

The introduction of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) will change the way decisions are made locally and the way community organisations are funded. In particular, Single Community Programme investment will no longer be made available directly to the voluntary and community sector (VCS), but will be merged with other funding streams to form the Safer, Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF). This funding will be allocated via Local Area Agreements.

The neighbourhoods agenda includes plans for greater direct citizen involvement in government decision making at a neighbourhood level. *Why Neighbourhoods Matter*¹⁶ discusses a range of new neighbourhood governance arrangements. These include locally agreed 'neighbourhood charters', which set out the service levels that people are entitled to expect, and the mechanisms available for community participation in service delivery and decision making. These charters will operate within the context of a National Neighbourhoods Framework, which is currently in development. A white paper on the organisation of local government is expected in July 2006.

Proposals for a Citizen's Participation Agency by Home Office Minister Hazel Blears. This body would be "charged with promoting local active

¹⁵ For references to relevant literature, see Footnote 7.

¹⁶ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister/Home Office (2005a).

engagement in decision making.” It would not be “yet another unit within central government, but an organisation within every community which head hunts, trains, encourages and supports local active citizens... backed by the massive resources of government.”¹⁷

The Labour Party manifesto¹⁸ contains a commitment to rolling out ‘trigger power’. This commitment has informed the recent Schools White Paper¹⁹, which contains proposals for local communities to be able to trigger a process that could lead to the creation of a new school.

Changes in funding, including the recent end to Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding are causing severe financial difficulties for the community sector, and are raising questions about how long term financial stability can be achieved.

The Egan review²⁰ has led to the creation of the Academy for Sustainable Communities. The academy is charged with supporting the development of the skills needed by statutory bodies and others to develop sustainable communities.

The widespread appetite for new democratic structures to tackle Britain’s so-called ‘democratic deficit’ could lead to a more systematic use of participative approaches throughout government.

The 2007 spending review could provide a platform for greater use of participative approaches at all levels of government. Preparations are under way.

These developments could lead to a transformation in approaches to community engagement and bring significant benefits in terms of improved democratic accountability and service delivery. However, this potential will only be realised if the experience and needs of citizens wishing to participate is taken into account.

The report begins by analysing the barriers to embedding participation in local decision making, and then provides recommendations to tackle those barriers.

¹⁷ Foreword to Rogers (ed) (2004).

¹⁸ The Labour party (2005)

¹⁹ DfES (2005)

²⁰ Egan (2004)

The definition of community participation used in this report

Community participation takes place where statutory bodies and communities work in partnership to develop and/or implement policy. Participative processes go beyond consultation – they enable communities to be directly involved in the decisions that matter to them rather than simply being canvassed for their opinion. It implies a shared responsibility for resolving problems.

Communities may be defined geographically, by the services they use, by gender, by ethnicity, by religion and so on. Community members can be involved as individual citizens and as members of a community organisation. Often they rely on selected individuals to act on their behalf as community representatives.

The level of power that communities hold in these processes varies. For example:

Parent governors work in partnership with other governors in school boards and have the same powers as their peers on the board.

Council tenants have a statutory right to form a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) and take over the management of their homes from local councils.

Participatory budgeting can be used in a variety of ways, from ensuring communities have a say over local priorities for spending to giving them control over the allocation of budgets.

Experts interviewed by the panel identified three sorts of aim for participative processes:

Improving service delivery. Involving communities in the design and/or delivery of services taps new sources of knowledge, skill and energy. Participatory structures can also make it easier for citizens to hold statutory bodies to account, and this can also lead to improved service delivery.

Improving governance. In a democracy, it is widely accepted that people have the moral right to influence decisions that affect them. While the ballot box remains the primary way in which this takes place, participation provides citizens with additional opportunities to exercise these rights. This aim has gained greater prominence as politicians of all parties seek to address Britain's so-called 'democratic deficit'.

Improving the social and human capital of communities. Prompting greater community activity can lead to increases in positive forms of social capital, as well as enhance the skills of the individuals who take part. This can lead to benefits such as improved social cohesion.

2. Joining up policy

The panel found that approaches to participation policy are often not effectively connected to each other at the national, local and neighbourhood level. Each department, local authority and delivery body tends to have its own analysis of the value, purpose and best method for participation. This has led to the development of many different mechanisms operating in parallel. This diversity is important, and allows for innovation and policy to be tailored to specific needs. A single approach to community participation would not be appropriate. However, the extent of diversity causes problems, both for community members and for statutory bodies.

Lack of a consistent vocabulary

'I spent an hour talking to a colleague about our plans for community participation before we realised that we were talking about totally different things.'

Senior council officer²¹

'There are different languages for communities themselves, PCTs, police, local authorities, government offices, and so on. We need to join that up.'

Civil servant

'Different departments could come from different planets.'

LSP co-ordinator

The term 'community participation' is understood differently by different statutory bodies, and by individual officers within those bodies. These variations can make it hard for organisations to work in partnership with each other and with communities. It can lead to faulty understandings of what each party means when they talk about 'participation'. The panel found these differences of interpretation to be widespread.

The problem was evident among the experts interviewed, as shown below:

One senior civil servant argued that online opinion polling is a form of participation. The other experts disagreed.

One community sector witness argued that participation was impossible unless community organisations were financially independent of government. The other experts disagreed.

Some experts considered the use of voluntary sector organisations to deliver services under contract to be an example of participation in governance. The majority disagreed.

²¹ All quotes are drawn from the interviews conducted by the panel unless otherwise stated.

Some experts considered practices that involve communities in delivering services but give them no input over policy²² to be participative. The majority disagreed.

Some saw the value of participative methodologies as consisting purely in their ability to improve service delivery. Others understood it to have value insofar as it increased social capital and/or empowerment.

Participation overload

'It's knackered just trying to work out how it's all supposed to work – let alone trying to change things.'

Community activist

'Community participation programmes are almost always in departmental silos. That has serious resource implications.'

Civil servant

'From NDCs to SRBs – each has its own requirements and mechanisms. This is ineffective for me as an officer.'

Senior council officer

People wishing to participate in local policy making can be bewildered by the sheer range of structures on offer.²³ Several independently administered involvement initiatives may be targeted to a single neighbourhood. For example, within a single neighbourhood, residents can be involved:

- as tenants in a tenant management organisation
- as parents or local community members in a SureStart programme
- as parents in elections for primary school governors
- as local people in a planning procedure
- as residents in a regeneration programme
- as a patient in a primary care trust public and patient involvement forum
- as a resident in a community policing engagement exercise

The panel welcomes the fact that mechanisms exist to allow citizens to participate in and influence so many aspects of neighbourhood-level service delivery. However, in practice, the number of separate and unconnected programmes can be problematic.

'People do not live their lives in silos.'

Community activist

²² For example, the new group of 'health trainers' about to be launched by the Department of Health will engage with individuals on issues related to their health care, but are not expected to have a role in influencing policy or supporting communities to influence policy.

²³ This is the view of the panel, but has also been found by others, for example Mackie (2002) and Kumar and Nunan (2002).

The productivity of community organisations and individuals is reduced as they spend time navigating the web of structures in place. While not every individual would want to be involved in several areas of policy, some do – perhaps where the issues they care about cross silo-boundaries. However, because often the programmes work differently, prospective participants have to invest significant amounts of time learning how each programme functions and then going along to the separate meetings, events and so on. The community practitioners interviewed by the panel described how they feel overwhelmed with guidance and information about procedures from different bodies.

'Nowadays, I feel like a community sector civil servant.'

Community activist

Working in silos makes it harder for the various organisations to make connections with each other. There are instances where the only thing joining up activity is the presence of the same community members at various meetings. The overlap also results in a waste of public funds. While the combined resources of the various bodies may well have the capacity to engage effectively with communities on a sustainable basis, each individual organisation is less likely to have that capacity in terms of skills or investment.

The introduction of LSPs and LAAs is intended to address some of these issues. However, where centrally driven policy is fragmented, this task may prove unfeasible. It may not be possible to draw disparate national policies together at a local level.²⁴

The panel is aware of good practice where a range of statutory bodies work together to develop their participation processes. This reduces the pressure on individuals and community groups, and results in a more streamlined and effective approach from the different organisations involved. For example, as case study 2 shows, one effective way of simplifying the process is to create a single participation process within each neighbourhood. Of course, this is not the only possible solution, and it risks undermining the ability of diverse communities to express different perspectives.

The organisation of participation policy at a national level is only marginally less complex than the implementation of that policy at local level. While the ODPM and the Home Office are the most active departments in this area, there is no overall lead on participation policy. The Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA), the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) are, among others, also actively developing policy

²⁴ The Audit Commission describes these difficulties as the 'Humpty Dumpty effect': 'Central efforts to promote economic growth, social justice and environmental sustainability fracture when they hit the ground in departmental silos, just like Humpty when he fell off the wall. Local leaders play the role of all the King's horses and all the King's men, as they try to put the pieces back together again' (Audit Commission, 2004).

on participation that will be implemented at both a local and national level. Many of the experts interviewed by the panel argued that this pepper-pot approach often leads to policy that is either in tension with policy developed in other departments (as an example, see the discussion below about benefits entitlements) or fails to make important connections with similar work being done elsewhere in Whitehall.

Case study 2: Babergh District Council – A joined-up participation process

The Anglia Estate faced high infant and adult mortality rates, and significant crime, substance misuse and vandalism problems.

The district council engaged residents in developing an improvement plan by visiting each household to consult with residents and establishing an Estate Improvement Group. This Improvement Group brought together local residents, the police, parish councillors, local councillors and officers, housing associations, the primary care trust, a local wildlife trust and the health authority.

The group developed a five-year estate environmental plan, which brought together all these perspectives through a single process. This led to an integrated plan resulting in the refurbishment of homes and the street-scene. This has led to:

- a healthier and safer environment for families to live in
- improved community safety through a 'secure by design' approach
- better play facilities
- a reduction in litter and abandoned cars on the estate.

Residents remain involved in monitoring the progress of the regeneration work.

Source: Rogers and Robinson (2004)

The Together We Can (TWC) initiative and action plan²⁵ looks to address some of these issues by securing specific commitments from several departments across Whitehall. The plan also includes mechanisms for measuring progress. While it is much too early to assess the impact of TWC, it is certainly a promising development.

However, the panel has three concerns about the TWC programme:

There is no mechanism to ensure a consistent cross-departmental approach to empowering communities. Instead, departments remain largely free to develop their own participation programmes each with their own staff, funding regime, definition of 'community', definition of 'empowerment' and so on.

Little attention is paid to the possibility that community priorities might be different from those of the statutory bodies that they are working with.

There is no discussion of how any tensions might be resolved.

²⁵ Home Office (2005)

The plan has a robust and iterative approach to project evaluation and policy development. However, the approach is limited to the elements of participation policy that fall within the TWC plan. This is perhaps a missed opportunity, as TWC could have provided a platform for a more systematic approach for evaluating and analysing the existing evidence base for participation policy and practice (see the discussion in chapter 4 on 'joined up evaluation').

The need for sustainable programmes

'There are some individuals that are very supportive of community participation, but they are often not in the job long enough to make permanent changes'.

Academic

There has been increasing recognition that participation needs to be sustainable. New Deal for Communities (NDCs) and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (NMPs) are intended to leave something permanent behind. Tenant Management Organisations tend to be long term and, through their management agreement, have control over a mainstream management and maintenance budget that provides long-term, sustainable funding. Most recently, the creation of LSPs should address the need for communities to have ongoing input into local strategic planning.

However, the panel found that local and neighbourhood approaches to participation often operate as a series of short-term, time-limited programmes. Many community organisations are very vulnerable to this sort of approach, as they seldom benefit from mainstream funding, and so are highly reliant on these short-term funding streams. The end of a funding stream can mean the end of a community organisation. This means that community organisations and, particularly, community 'anchor organisations'²⁶ have to spend significant amounts of time chasing new funding opportunities. Instead of focusing on what needs doing within the community, they have to place a great deal of attention on survival.

Short-term approaches to community participation can drain community capacity for future engagement (see case study 3). Community activists are frustrated and worn down by the need to spend their time constantly looking for funding rather than focussing on community needs. However well-run a programme is during its lifetime, ending a process can feel like shutting the community out. Where the end of the programme means that there is no infrastructure left to provide feedback to communities, this causes additional

²⁶ Defined by the Home Office as having four key features: they are controlled by local residents and/or representatives of local groups; they address the needs of their area in a multi-purpose, holistic way; they are committed to the involvement of all sections of their community, including marginalised groups; and they facilitate the development of the communities in their area.

problems. Communities can be left with the impression that their input made no difference – simply because the end of the programme meant that there was no one tasked with informing the community of outcomes.

The point is not that funding should be guaranteed in the long term – in most instances that is not an appropriate use of public funding. However, the panel argues that more stable and predictable funding streams will enable community organisations to be more effective.

Case study 3: The impact of short-termism: Magpie Resource Library

“Magpie Resource Library was established in direct response to local people losing a planning fight resulting in the destruction of the much-loved old town library, which had been restored from dereliction by local tenants and turned into a highly successful youth and community centre.

Despite a substantial campaign and a very strong presentation at the planning committee, the councillors decided on a vote of (literally) 2:1 to grant planning permission. This perceived failure of representative democracy provoked a strong and long-lasting reaction, and Magpie grew from a small information resource to a highly respected community outreach organisation, including leading the award-winning Get Set for Citizenship SRB programme. However, despite its track record Magpie has struggled to survive, and has been forced to use up all its reserves, both financial and good will.”

Source: Panel member’s first hand account

The panel identified four factors that tend to foster short-term approaches:

Focus on specific problems. Participation programmes are more likely to be designed to solve specific problems than to create long-term dialogue. This means that individual organisations often lack the incentives necessary to prioritise investment in building their capacity to engage with communities consistently. Many experts held up community policing as an example of how this tendency can be conquered.

Reliance on individual leadership. In many statutory bodies, participation is reliant on strong individual leadership. When these individuals move on, the impetus for participation can dry up.

The CPA cycle. Towards the end of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) cycle, local authorities may feel that they do not have time to set up proper community participation if they are to hit their targets. It is often the case that delivery ‘spikes’ can be achieved without involving the community. This may lead local authorities to avoid participative approaches when audit deadlines loom, and the slower but surer success enabled by participation can come to be seen as something of a luxury.

Fear of challenge. The panel heard evidence of LSPs and other bodies deliberately ensuring that participation programmes were short term, as this minimised the risk of participants gaining the skills and power to effectively

challenge policy. For example, one CEN officer reported that their LSP deliberately produced a stream of 'partnerships' in that area. Each was abolished whenever community or private-sector partners started to say anything that the statutory sector found uncomfortable. A new (and neutered) partnership would then be invented.

A coherent policy agenda

As with most policy areas, there are inevitably tensions between policies on participation and other agendas. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is no comprehensive government vision for community participation. Instead there are a range of policy statements setting out the role of participation in relation to specific policy agendas.

The panel highlighted three areas of policy where there are significant tensions between different agendas: Local Area Agreements, the choice agenda and the benefits system. Each of these is addressed below.

Local Area Agreements

'There are real problems for communities trying to engage through LSPs, but at least they do provide a point of contact that people are able to learn to engage with – there is a feeling of their becoming more graspable than all the disparate service providers with their separate mechanisms'

Community activist

'I don't think my being there [on an LSP board] has influenced anything. Council officers prepare a document that is presented for endorsement. We vote on it, and they win.'

Community activist²⁷

The panel widely endorses the principles behind the introduction of Local Area Agreements (LAAs). It makes a great deal of sense to simplify funding streams at a local level, create more flexibility, and bring decision makers together. Through the role of LSPs in negotiating LAAs, local communities will have a guaranteed seat at the table when strategy for a locality is being developed. The Safer Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF) is much larger than the single Community Programme (which it is replacing), so there is potential for investment in participation to increase.

Where local authorities are supportive, communities should become more engaged and empowered. However, the shift in funding structure means that communities will be far more reliant on local authority support. Given the issues discussed later in this report, it is hard to believe that this support will be universally forthcoming.

²⁷ This quote is drawn from UWE *et al* (2004), cited in Audit Commission (2004b).

The panel fears that the changes could lead to a situation where community groups that criticise local authority decisions put their funding at risk.²⁸ Were this to happen, it would undermine much of the empowerment agenda.

At present, many community groups are funded through the single Community Programme. This funding stream is independent from local government. The National Audit Office argues that this is significant for communities because 'they can express views robustly in the knowledge that doing so will not compromise their funding.'²⁹ As Single Communities Programme funding is replaced by the SSCF, this independence may come under threat. Allocations of SSCF funding will be agreed between the local council and other partners through the LSP board. As lead members of LSP boards, local authorities will be able to influence the level of funding for community groups and the choice of groups that are funded. Funding for community groups will no longer be independent of local authority influence.

These pressures already exist for community groups contracted to deliver services for local authorities. A forthcoming publication from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation quotes a CEN officer as saying that 'there are certain [community] organisations that get a local authority contract – they can't speak out critically without the repercussions coming through in terms of funding.'³⁰

One panel member who sits on an LSP board had experienced just this sort of pressure. She runs a community organisation that depends on local council funding. The local authority representative regularly contacts her to suggest the position she ought to take at board meetings. Whether intended or not, she is left with the implicit message that her organisation's funding is under threat if she does not comply.

All SSCF agreements will include mandatory outcomes relating to community empowerment.³¹ This should provide an incentive to continue to invest SSCF funding in community participation and act as a safeguard for community participation investment. However, this safeguard will not guarantee *independent* community organisations. Panel members were concerned that this could lead to councils setting up their own parallel organisations to involve communities. These organisations would be directly under the council's control and so would be less likely to challenge policy as robustly as community-owned organisations. One panel member believed that this was exactly the strategy being followed by her local authority.

²⁸ This concern is also raised in Taylor *et al* (2005), especially in Section 4.4.

²⁹ UWE *et al* (2004), cited in Audit Commission (2004b)

³⁰ Maguire and Truscott (forthcoming)

³¹ In particular, a commitment to 'increase local participation in governance', to be measured by indicators that will include the 'percentage of residents who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area'. ODPM (2005a)

Alongside independence, a second area of concern is that, in practice, communities will not have the influence over the negotiation of LAAs to which representation on the LSP board entitles them. For example, in the locality of one LSP board member, the local mayor was setting up a 'public service partnership' in parallel to the LSP, to discuss issues that they did not want to discuss with community representatives. The National Audit Office argues that 'Community Empowerment Networks have too little influence to date on the main boards of LSPs'³². The panel endorses this view.³³

This pattern is far from universal. Several panel and forum members have had influence on LSP boards, and, as the National Audit Office argues, 'CENs are influencing local public service providers directly.'³⁴ Further, there are signs that CEN influence on LSP boards is growing, as LSPs become more established and board members become used to working with community sector representatives. However, that is of little consolation to communities who live in areas with poor-performing LSPs or uninterested local authorities.

The choice agenda

While choice can be empowering, unless it is handled carefully, it could exacerbate inequalities. Providing options is not sufficient to allow choice to empower people in deprived communities – there needs to be support to enable people to make use of the choices that are on offer. People need to know and understand the different options and have the resources necessary to make use of them. For example, a choice of four significantly different hospitals is of little use if you can only afford to travel to one of them (except insofar as other people's choice to use a more distant hospital might help reduce waiting lists at the local hospital).

These equity issues have been widely discussed, so the panel focused on the interaction of choice and participation, and the risk posed by an inequitable approach to choice. The Government has argued that the current approach to choice in education (prior to the 2005 White Paper) favours the better off, and so is inequitable.³⁵ Families that can afford to live near good schools have far more choice over their children's education than families who cannot.

³² National Audit Office (2004b), p36

³³ This argument is also made in Maguire and Truscott (forthcoming) and Taylor *et al* (2005), especially p32

³⁴ National Audit Office (2004b), p37

³⁵ For example, in the following quote taken from a speech by Tony Blair to City of London Academy on 12 September 2005: 'Let's be brutally honest here. In schooling, the better off do have choice and power over the system. If they are sufficiently wealthy, they can send their children to a range of independent, fee-paying schools which, by and large, provide excellent education. Or they can move house to be next to the best state schools. Or they can buy private tuition... But for a middle- or lower-income family, whose local school is the option and which is underperforming, there is nothing they can do, except take what they are given.'

One of the results of this inequality is that parents who can afford to move away from 'bad' schools have little incentive to stay in the area and participate in school-improvement processes. Participation is left as a last resort for people who can't or won't move. Further, it may be that the sorts of parents who are able and minded to move house to secure a better education would have a lot to contribute to improving local schools should they send their children to them. Local communities could benefit from all parents sending their children to local schools. It is important that the development of the choice agenda, both in education and elsewhere, takes these concerns into account.

Disincentives in the benefits system

There are tensions between the ambitions of 'making work pay' on the one hand and building capacity in the community sector on the other. Community members on Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Income Support or other benefits can be discouraged from undertaking community work by the low level of the earnings disregard. The disregard – £5 a week for people on JSA, and £20 for lone parents – is kept at a low level to encourage people to move off benefits and into work as quickly as possible. Any earnings from community work that are above the disregard level are deducted from benefits.

The panel argue that this has a detrimental impact on local communities in at least three ways:

Community members are often concerned that community work puts the consistency of benefit status at risk. Much of the work offered by community groups is voluntary or, if paid, short term and/or part time. Concerned about making ends meet, people are loath to put their benefits at risk for this sort of work.

The system can lead to funding intended for deprived areas being diverted elsewhere, as salaries are paid to people from outside the neighbourhood. Where local people are too concerned about the risk to their benefits to take up community work, the only option is often to employ people from outside the area (see case study 4).

It limits the extent to which community work can act as a stepping stone into the labour market. The low level of the disregard means that people have no financial incentive to undertake more than around an hour of paid community work per week.

Case study 4: The impact of the low earnings disregard on a community group

One of the panel members works for a community organisation that is developing a new health and fitness scheme for the over-50s. The scheme would initially offer sessional work (five-to-seven hours a week) but, if successful, could grow and offer full-time work. None of the volunteers involved are able to take up the sessional work as it would mean a reduction in the level of benefits and put other benefits at risk. So, to allow the work to take place, the salary is likely to go to an employee from outside the area.

Source: Panel member

3. Changing culture

'In most councils, participation is still considered an 'optional extra'. We start from the assumption that there is no need to really involve the community beyond a bit of consultation. Communities or officers who disagree with that assumption have to prove the value of participation in general before they can get into the way participation will happen.'

Former local government officer

Effective participation requires willingness on the part of community members, government officers and elected representatives. They need to believe that there is value to be gained by engaging with each other. This is particularly important on the community side, where participation is voluntary and unpaid. Most people are only prepared to give up time that could be spent with friends and family or earning a wage, if they believe that their participation will make a difference.

For participation to make a difference, councillors and government officers have to be prepared to engage, and be open to changing their plans. The panel heard numerous stories of officers and councillors who had this approach. Their involvement was essential to delivering improved outcomes. These successes were often used as case studies within the locality, and led to other officers and councillors taking participatory approaches. Success breeds success.

Case study 5: The benefits of councillors adopting an open attitude

"Lewisham Council was selling Aragon Tower on the Pepys Estate to the highest bidder. A sale to Berkeley Homes was agreed for £11.5 million, but exchange of contracts was dependent on planning permission and vacant possession. In these circumstances, local people felt it was very unlikely that their concerns would be taken seriously at the planning committee. However, their heartfelt speeches and carefully prepared arguments were given a good hearing, and the councillors decided to defer the application for six weeks. This unexpected result gave some power to the community.

Residents invited Berkeley to come to the estate to talk the matter through, and an amicable agreement was reached that dealt with all the primary concerns, including removing a hated 'cappuccino podium' from the plans, providing far better public access, and agreeing to lease a substantial chunk of the ground floor to the local community development trust for 999 years. At the reconvened planning meeting six weeks later, the speech by local residents began, "We do not consider ourselves 'objectors' – we think we have been able to become 'influencers'. We want to thank Berkeley for listening, and the committee for making that happen."

Permission was granted for a vastly improved scheme and, for once, everyone was happy!"

Source: Panel member's first hand account

However, most of the witnesses also had come across people within the public sector who consistently rejected or watered down participative approaches. Unlike 'delivery', 'best value' or 'modernisation', the term 'participation' is not embedded in the culture of government. Officers, councillors and communities often have to argue for community involvement in the context of an institutional assumption that involvement is unnecessary unless proved otherwise. This section explores the underlying causes of that institutional assumption. The panel focused on local authorities, but many of the issues apply to other statutory bodies.

Authority and legitimacy

'Politicians will say that anybody who has an alternative point of view is obviously [party] political themselves, therefore they've got an agenda, therefore their views don't count.'

Community activist

'We have to break this idea that there is only a certain amount of this thing called "power", and that the question is how it is divided up. Actually, when councils and communities work together, they create more power.'

Local government representative

Some local councillors see participation as a challenge to their authority. When community activists claim to speak for the community that they have been elected to represent as a councillor, they feel threatened.

This is a particular problem for backbench councillors. Following the move to a Cabinet system, many backbench councillors are no longer clear about their role. Many of the experts interviewed by the panel suggested that backbench councillors were particularly sensitive about any activity that looked as if it might lead to a further diminution of their responsibilities. An emerging role for these councillors is 'at the heart of neighbourhood arrangements, stimulating the local voice, listening to it and representing it at local level.'³⁶ They can feel insecure when they see others fulfilling a community leadership role.

A further cause of insecurity can be the perception that the Government is actively seeking to bypass councillors' roles in favour of dealing directly with the community sector. For example, regeneration budgets of NDCs are typically much larger than the regeneration spending that councils can mobilise – sometimes as much as £24 per household per week for ten years. These budgets may be spent, in the words of one of the experts 'without so much as a "by your leave" to councillors'. This situation is unhelpful for the community sector as it further undermines trust between community activists and councillors.

³⁶ ODPM (2005) p18

While the panel welcomes the call for councillors to be an 'effective partner in relevant neighbourhood arrangements',³⁷ they fear that councillors might end up dominating local arrangements. These issues may be compounded by the call for councillors – particularly backbench councillors – to take a greater leadership role among the communities in their wards.

The culture of one-party councils

These tensions between councillors and community activists are most severe in councils that are heavily dominated by a single political party, and where few wards are marginal. In such councils, the ballot box is a very weak tool for choosing between councillors. Instead, the decision about the choice of councillor is effectively made at meetings of the local political party. Once a candidate is picked, they are often effectively assured a seat on the council.

In such areas community activists form the only real challenge to councillors' views and council policy – they effectively perform the role of an opposition party. However, unlike an official opposition, they have no formal status in the democratic system. This allows councillors to dismiss activists who oppose their views as a nuisance to be ignored rather than a voice to be engaged. While this is not true of all one-party councils, the evidence heard by the panel suggested that it is often the case.

Case study 6: An LSP meeting in a one-party council

"Early on in my involvement in the board of our LSP, I worked with community-sector colleagues on a paper suggesting that local authority community development staff should support community participation in area governance. The paper was tabled according to the agreed procedures of the board, and was formally placed on the agenda at a meeting of the board vice-chairs. At this time, the leader of the council was chair of the board.

At the start of the board meeting, the chair announced he was not willing to accept our paper, as it was 'inappropriate'. He insisted it was removed from the agenda. No vote was called. The chair took a unilateral decision. Government office representatives were in the room but failed to intervene, even after I spoke up. An extremely short meeting followed with all items being passed on the nod and with the community reps too angry to speak.

We took external advice and were told that the chair had probably acted illegally, confusing his role as chair with his role as leader of the council. We very nearly resigned en masse from the LSP as a result of this stitch up."

Source: Panel member's first hand account

Some panel members and several witnesses had experience of living in areas dominated by one-party councils. Their experiences were of a macho culture

³⁷ *Ibid*, p18

that placed party loyalty above virtually all other values. The ODPM urges 'all sections of the public' to move away from the 'perception of them [councillors] as... being primarily motivated by party political interests.'³⁸ However, in the situations described above, the panel argue that it is hard to see how this can happen without changes in the culture of the party-political system.

Government officers

'Local authorities don't necessarily want community engagement as it will change plans, and they don't have the capacity for it.'

Consultant to local authorities

'Government officers can have a very 'I know best' attitude. They can be very arrogant.'

Community activist

Many government officers are creating greater opportunities for communities to participate. They are actively seeking to empower citizens with a view to improving service delivery, building social capital and ensuring that their work is properly accountable. However, as case study 7 indicates, this is not always the case.

The panel identified three factors that explain this:

There is a professional culture in many branches of England's public services – from town planners to doctors, and social workers to environmental service officers – that assumes that professional opinion is always superior to non-professional opinion informed by local experience.

Where community decision making has been tried and seems to have failed or caused delays, council officers can be reluctant to try it again. Council officers or councillors who have participated in poorly designed and ineffective participative processes can often come to the conclusion that all participation is inherently flawed.

Adopting participative approaches means having to change working practices. It may mean having to change working hours and the places where people work, the way in which meetings are conducted, and so on. These sorts of changes can be difficult both practically and psychologically. It is hard to change behaviour to which people feel accustomed and comfortable

Efforts to increase citizen participation often run aground at the middle and lower management levels. While council chief executives and other senior officers might have a strong appetite for increased community involvement, some middle managers fail to turn that enthusiasm into effective involvement programmes on the ground. More generally, community development is often

³⁸ *Ibid.*

a low-status role. Community development officers can lack the necessary clout to influence other functions within the council or in other statutory bodies.

'We employ community development workers because we know we need to be challenged through more direct contact with communities, and then we shove them out in portacabins ... managed by people who don't understand community development, and rarely hear their voices in the planning or delivery process.'

Senior local authority official

Participation perceived as relating only to service delivery

The understandable emphasis on service delivery in public service reform has led to many government officers valuing participation purely for its impact on service delivery. The panel agrees that impact on service delivery is critical, but argues that participation is also valuable as a key part of the democratic system. Properly conducted, participation allows citizens to influence communal decision on a basis of equal power. When understood in this way, different sorts of participative process become relevant, and it becomes more important to ensure that community members have an equal opportunity to participate.

The participation catch-22

Many of these issues are manifested in the 'participation catch-22'. The catch-22 arises where community advocate's views are dismissed as unrepresentative precisely because they are the views of advocates seeking to engage with the system. The argument is run that engaging with the system is, in itself, a sign of being unrepresentative. This issue was raised by several expert witnesses, and was very familiar to the panel.

'If local authorities agree with what the community says, then everything's fine. But if they don't agree, then they call the people who come to the meetings "unrepresentative" – just because they come to the meetings! So people get involved, get disappointed, and get even less likely to do anything than before the process started.'

Community activist

In the panel's experience, this situation is most likely to occur where community representatives challenge the views of elected representatives or appointed representatives from statutory bodies. Others have also found a similar pattern³⁹. CEN representatives on LSP boards had experience of other board members refusing to listen to their opinions because they considered them to be 'un-representative'.

³⁹ Gaventa (2004).

This is not to say that there are not real problems stemming from the undue influence of individual community members. More work needs to be done on the nature of legitimacy within participative structures. This work needs to look at the potential sources of legitimacy for community members who participate in governance.

It is important to move away from the idea that community representatives are legitimate insofar as they are 'typical' of the local community.⁴⁰ Community representatives on decision-making boards are not present by virtue of being typical, but instead have a role as trustees of authentic community voice. The panel argue that like elected representatives, the role of community representatives is to deliberate and act in the interests of communities.⁴¹ As such, they can draw legitimacy from various sources. These can include:

- winning elections (as members of NDC and foundation trust boards do)
- carrying out a role in a community organisation (as is often the case for CEN representatives on LSP boards)
- having personal experience of living in a particular area
- having ability as an advocate.

Just as leaders of delivery organisations do not need to be elected to be legitimate, so community leaders do not always need to be elected to be legitimate.⁴²

As well as clarifying the nature of community advocate's legitimacy, it is important that concerns around the legitimacy of councillors are addressed, for example through measures to increase election turnout.

The importance of power relations

Unequal power relations amplify the problems outlined above. Communities that wish to become involved in decision making face real difficulties where the system is not open to their challenge, as they are simply less powerful than the body they seek to influence. For example:

Where individuals working for statutory bodies challenge community wishes, they do it as part of their day job. Where communities seek to assert their views, they have to do it on top of their day job.

Where government officers are well versed in the language of policy debates, community members have to invest their free time in getting up to speed.

⁴⁰ The idea of a 'typical individual' is problematic in any case. While a sample can be representative in of a population within a given confidence limit, in the sense that the distribution of their opinions is likely to match the distribution of the whole population, it is hard to see how that could be true for an individual.

⁴¹ The idea that this is the role of elected representatives is well established, but still contested, for example see Burke (1774), Birch (1971), Petit (1997)

⁴² Gaventa (2004).

Where councillors have a universally acknowledged role in the democratic system, community activists are frequently challenged about their legitimacy.

Where council officers have the strength of employment law defending their livelihood, community groups often survive from month to month.

Where councils can carry out many of their programmes without direct community involvement, community groups often rely on councils to carry out their plans.

While both parties need each other for effective participation, if a statutory body (or a group inside that body) wants to pursue a non-participatory approach, they have the power to do so and, in many localities, there is very little that communities can do about it.

The point is not that communities ought to have 'more' power than statutory bodies, but that where a statutory body – or even an individual officer – chooses to ignore community voices, it is extremely difficult for communities to have any influence.

4. Standards, targets and inspection

Most of the experts interviewed by the panel argued that standards, targets and inspection for participation should be more effective. The key points were:

There is not enough clarity about the standards that should be followed when involving communities.

It is too easy for local authorities to tick the participation boxes in their audit assessment without genuinely working in partnership with local communities.

Not enough attention is paid to the performance of bodies other than local authorities.

There is a lack of systematic and easily accessible information about the effectiveness of different participation mechanisms and methodologies.

Standards

There are no national standards for participation. This partly results from the view that 'one size does not fit all'. The panel agrees that participation has to take different forms in different circumstances. However, lack of standards creates problems where:

Statutory bodies are unsure how to pursue good participative practice.

Statutory bodies and communities disagree about the best approach as there are few benchmarks to judge whether processes are appropriate.

The panel believes that the lack of clear standards has slowed the rate at which good practice is spread. There is a balance to be struck between excessively rigid national guidelines, and allowing so much flexibility that 'anything goes'. There have been efforts to produce national guidelines for participation that allow for local flexibility – such as those proposed by the National Audit Office.⁴³ The final section of this report builds on this approach.

Targets and inspection

'As soon as you set a target, an industry grows up to prove that target has been met. It is the quickest way to lose focus on the principles behind the target.'

Senior civil servant

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment involves a systematic inspection of local government performance in relation to community empowerment and participation. The key lines of enquiry (KLoE) within the CPA include specific reference to community participation.⁴⁴ Instead of using quantitative

⁴³ National Audit Office (2004b), p14.

⁴⁴ One example is KLoE 1.1 within the corporate governance inspection regime, which looks for 'improvements in citizen awareness and participation' (Audit Commission, 2005b).

targets, the KLoE approach sets out qualitative criteria for 'inadequate', 'adequate', 'good' and 'strong' performance.⁴⁵ There are also quantitative local performance indicators for local authorities that relate specifically to local communities' perceptions of their ability to influence their council.⁴⁶

The panel have identified two key issues in the current CPA process:

While inspectors interview community representatives to investigate the quality of a council's involvement activity, it is the council that tells the inspectors who to interview. This provides councils with the opportunity to limit interviews to people who are favourable to council policy. In addition to the council's suggestions, inspectors have a list of standard bodies to interview – such as the local council for voluntary service (CVS) – but in many areas, these bodies do not reflect the breadth of community opinion.

Inspectors generally rely on council data to assess the quantitative aspects of the audit programme. This data is of variable quality. Where it comes from council-appointed panels, there are sometimes issues around its objectivity.

A new set of indicators for local authorities is about to be introduced. The guidance for the introduction of the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund includes a mandatory outcome around participation for all local authorities,⁴⁷ measured through five indicators. Although there is a lack of clarity around the sanctions for failing to deliver this outcome, its inclusion should help the SSCF to pick up where the single Community Programme leaves off. The panel is strongly supportive of this policy.

Beyond local authorities, the audit and inspection regime around community participation is patchy:

Public Service Agreements for central government departments⁴⁸ do not explicitly reference community participation however the ODPM and the

⁴⁵ 'They are not intended to prescribe specific standards' (Audit Commission, 2005b, p4).

⁴⁶ Notably 'percentage of residents who feel that the council takes notice of its residents' views', 'percentage of adults surveyed who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area', and 'extent and influence of the voluntary and community sector in the locality' (CPA 2002).

⁴⁷ The outcome is 'to increase the capacity of local communities so that people are empowered to participate in local decision making and are able to influence service delivery.' This will be measured through a mixture of mandatory and optional indicators. The mandatory indicators are the percentage of people involved in decisions making, the percentage of people who feel able to influence decision making in their area and the percentage of people who have worked in a voluntary capacity over the past 12 months. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister/Home Office, 2005b).

⁴⁸ HMT (2004)

HO have objectives that could be met through participative approaches⁴⁹. No other departments have PSA targets that relate to participation in government decision making.

There is no co-ordinated cross-cutting audit process for community participation programmes.

There are no targets that relate to increasing community participation for many important bodies outside the CPA regime, including the Learning and Skills Council, regional development agencies and government regional offices.

There is no statutory right to participate.

The Home Office-led Together We Can initiative may well change this picture, however as discussed above, TWC does not improve a mechanism for setting cross-departmental priorities.

Lack of joined-up evaluation

There are many data sources that relate to the outcomes of participative approaches. They include:

- Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry reports

- Audit Commission Local Performance Indicators

- The Home Office Citizenship Survey

- Various surveys and other approaches outlined in Together We Can (TWC)

- The new measures associated with the mandatory outcome on participation that will be written into the Safer Stronger Communities Fund part of LAAs

- Bespoke research projects commissioned by statutory bodies and the VCS, including evaluations of different government initiatives

However, while the Home Office leads on TWC, and the ODPM and Audit Commission lead on the data connected with local authorities, no-one draws these various data sources together to gain a holistic picture of community participation.

This lack of a comprehensive analytical approach means that it is difficult to design participation programmes on the basis of hard evidence. There are many individual research exercises that explore case studies, but these are seldom joined up to allow broader conclusions to be drawn.

It is also hard to find reliable information about what works. Practitioners and policy makers have to navigate a range of different sources. Consumers of this

⁴⁹ The Home Office is charged with securing an "increase [in] voluntary and community engagement, especially amongst those most at risk of social exclusion". The target leaves open whether this 'engagement' should be in governance or other forms of 'engagement' such as voluntary work. The ODPM is charged with "devolving decision making to the most effective level – regional, local or neighbourhood" and with "clarifying... the arrangements for neighbourhood engagement". (*ibid.*)

information need to develop their own analysis of the reliability of the studies they look at. As Hoban and Beresford argue, 'existing experience is frequently not readily accessible... even where people... are used to negotiating libraries, web sites and so on... this situation needs to be addressed urgently if participation in poverty and place is to be taken forward cost-effectively without constantly "reinventing the wheel". Knowledge that is inaccessible is effectively knowledge that is lost.'⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Hoban and Beresford (2005).

5. Participation in practice

This section briefly sets out some of the most common practical problems that were reported by witnesses. These can arise even where there is a genuine commitment to participation. They are largely easy to overcome, but occur surprisingly frequently.⁵¹

Link to decision making. Participative processes are often run in parallel to, or after, budgeting processes. When run in parallel with budget-setting, participatory processes risk being sidelined unless the time lines of the two processes are consistent. When run after budgets are set, participation is limited to developing proposals that match pre-set budgets. This is a problem when participants are not informed at the outset of the constraints on the process. Sometimes participatory processes are not connected to decision-making processes at all:

'We've spent a lot of time participating away, and then found that what we say just can't make a difference – because the budgets have already been set.'

Community activist

Lack of feedback. For community members, taking part is a time and energy-consuming process. In the long run, participating is only worth the effort if it makes a difference – but all too often, communities never find out what difference their efforts have made. Where people hear nothing about the impact of their work, they are unlikely to feel that they have been treated as partners in the project, or with the respect they deserve.

'People aren't stupid. They know that they won't always get everything they want. But they do expect to know what difference their participation has made, and if they don't hear that it has made a difference, they assume it hasn't.'

Community activist

Once decisions are made and implementation begins, officers and others moved on to other work. Sometimes no-one is left with the responsibility for providing feedback to communities. The panel heard evidence of people only finding out years after a participation programme that their efforts had actually changed the way things were done.

LSP board processes. The processes used in some LSP board and subgroup meetings were a particular issue. The panel heard of LSPs that are functioning well. On the other hand, some LSPs appear to be functioning in ways that

⁵¹ These practical issues are well covered in the Cabinet Office publication *Viewfinder: a policy maker's guide to public involvement* Available at: <http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/docs/Viewfinder.pdf>

dramatically limit the contributions of community representatives⁵². Examples include:

Documents determining multi-million pound budgets circulated during LSP board meetings rather than beforehand.

CEN representatives accused of being incompetent because they insist on reading documents circulated in a meeting before voting on them.

Community representatives not allowed to see the budgets on which other board members make their decisions.

The legitimacy of CEN representatives consistently questioned.

LSPs spending their time discussing the way that NRF money is spent at the expense of addressing more strategic spending issues involving mainstream spending.

Hard-to-hear communities. Even where participation practice is good, it can be easy to neglect certain communities – for example, children and young people have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them. Evidence from the National Youth Agency suggests that this is not a matter of course. Other groups that are regularly overlooked include rural communities and people in full time employment, who are often unable to attend meetings.

Unreasonable expectations. Taking an active part in local community life leaves people with less time to devote to their family, professional and social lives. Community activists are often expected to be available all the time. The panel heard examples of NDC board members having to field phone calls on New Year's Day. Furthermore, councils sometimes call meetings with very little notice. One activist told a story of being contacted on a Friday and asked to assemble a representative group from the community for a meeting with the council on the following Monday morning.

Meetings are often scheduled with insufficient warning, at times and venues that are hard to access. For example, a meeting that aims to involve a neighbourhood community in decisions about local health strategy ought not be conducted on a weekday afternoon in a distant hospital, and publicised solely through notices in that hospital. It is vital that meetings are well publicised and held at times and places that are convenient for communities. Many meetings are still arranged with the assumption that disabled access is not necessary.

'Sometimes it can feel like a war of attrition. They just don't understand that you can't summon up "the community" with a wave of the hand.'
LSP board member

⁵² These concerns are underlined in the report *Getting Citizens Involved: Community participation in neighbourhood renewal*. The National Audit Office recommends 'rotating chairs so no organisation dominates, meeting papers published well in advance and meetings held at times and places that enable community members to attend' (National Audit Office, 2004b, p42).

7. Conclusion and recommendations

'We will devolve more power to local authorities and local communities, giving people real power over the issues that matter most to them.'

Labour Party (2005), p103

'People are being turned off the idea of participating. They are going from being ignorant and cynical to informed and cynical.'

LSP organiser

'If people take part in something, then find it was a complete waste of time, they aren't going to do it again, are they? They are not stupid.'

Community activist

The Government has a genuine commitment to participation, and the current policy environment offers an important opportunity to take this agenda forward. However, there is a real danger that the momentum will be lost as community activists become disillusioned by the difficulties they face at a local level. While good practice can create a virtuous circle of communities that are ever more active, poor practice can destroy capacity.

Communities that have engaged with statutory bodies but feel that that engagement had no effect are less likely to engage in the future. Alienated community members stay at home rather than take part, and community advocates are 'burning out' and withdrawing from participation programmes.⁵³

Many local authorities support and respect community activism. However, in poorly performing localities the issues can stack up and re-enforce each other. A council dominated by councillors who reject participation feeds a culture among officers that rejects participation. Communities that seek to challenge the council's approach in their neighbourhood are bypassed and ignored.

As burnout takes hold, community participation shifts from a community-wide base to reliance on a smaller group of individuals. Those individuals become tarred with the 'usual suspects' label, and statutory bodies become even less likely to engage with them. Levels of mutual hostility increase, and the prospect of participating becomes deeply unappealing. As a result, the community's capacity to engage is eroded, and the changes that are necessary to renew their neighbourhood become pipe dreams.

The panel shares the Government's view that effective community participation is central to delivering change in many of the country's most

⁵³ Taylor (2003), p184; Gaventa (2004), p28.

deprived communities. If the Government's commitments to participation are to be met, it needs to take these concerns seriously.

The recommendations in this section aim to move the agenda forward. They build on existing good practice, and identify practical strategies that will help to release the potential of citizens to work with statutory bodies to change their communities for the better. In the long run, this will help the Government achieve its aim of empowering communities.

The four key recommendations of this report are:

- Clear national leadership for participation policy
- Greater co-ordination by local authorities
- Support to enable statutory bodies to change their culture and practice
- Long-term support for community organisations.

Each of these recommendations is outlined in turn below.

Recommendation: Clear national leadership for participation policy

The Government needs to set out a clearer agenda on participation. The different approaches currently being taken are causing significant difficulties for people on the ground. Together We Can goes some way to setting the strong, joined-up vision necessary to make effective community participation a reality. However, the panel believes that this alone will not be sufficient. Below we set out the panel's recommendations to help Whitehall to achieve a more coherent approach to participation.

The Participation Commissioner

While both the Civil Renewal Unit and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit play key roles in developing policy around participation, no one has an overall lead on monitoring and supporting the development of participation policy. No one is responsible for systematically challenging all government departments to support and pursue participative approaches. No one is responsible for drawing together evidence from the CPA, Home Office Citizenship survey, best value performance indicators and elsewhere to provide an overview of the progress of this policy agenda. No one is responsible for ensuring that the perspective of community activists is heard in the policy-making process.

Together We Can makes a start in addressing some of these issues. Securing commitments from so many departments is a big step forward. However, it does not encompass local government, does not seek to provide a systematic overview of the information already available on participation, and is not part of an ongoing programme of change to challenge non-participative approaches to policy making. There are no sanctions if departments do not fulfil commitments.

The panel believes that this gap should be filled by a Participation Commissioner whose role would be to make commitments on participation a reality. Rather like the Children's Commissioner⁵⁴, they would be autonomous and have a small staff that would look at policy from the perspective of local communities.

In particular, they would:

- publish an annual report on the state of participation in England
- support cross-cutting work on participation in Whitehall
- challenge policy and practice that undermines community participation
- support the Audit Commission, the National Audit Office and others in developing approaches to monitoring and evaluating participation
- proactively investigate statutory bodies that are failing to develop participative approaches
- analyse information about good practice and provide a central repository for information around good practice
- run a national good practice awards system. This could develop into a system modelled on the Investors in People awards, to allow statutory bodies to signal good performance in participation practice and policy
- liaise with national community sector organisations
- link into the new Equalities Commission, to make sure it considers inequalities in participation
- lead the development of a new National Charter on Citizens' Entitlement (see below for the details of this charter and the charter-writing process)

The Participation Commissioner would not be an ombudsman, but they would have a role to play in preventing and resolving disputes at a local level. By collating and communicating information around good practice, introducing a National Charter on Citizens' Entitlement (see below) and co-ordinating policy in Whitehall, the Commissioner should improve the quality of practice around the country and reduce the likelihood of apparently intractable problems arising.

Where local problems do arise, the Commissioner would have a role in providing information about conflict resolution methods and services. They would liaise with government offices to support their role in resolving local conflict. Government offices would, in turn, use a new group of professional 'community participation facilitators' to engage with local stakeholders (see below for the detail of the participation facilitator approach).

⁵⁴ 'Independent of government, the Commissioner's remit is to promote awareness of views and interests of children. He is expected to raise the profile of the issues that affect and concern children in England, and promote awareness and understanding of their views and interests among all sectors of society, both public and private.' Available at: www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/childrenscommissioner/

The Commissioner's annual report would also be an opportunity to highlight examples of particularly good and bad practice.

It will be important for the Participation Commissioner to work closely with the forthcoming Compact Commissioner (who will oversee the implementation of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector.) The announcement of the Compact Commissioner came after the panel had completed its deliberation, so there has been little opportunity to discuss the distinctive roles and responsibilities of these two posts. However, the panel did raise concerns about the impact of the Compact to date, and hope that the introduction of a commissioner will increase the extent to which the interaction between government and the voluntary and community sector meets the criteria laid down in the Compact.

The Participation Commissioner would report to a minister with oversight of the development of community participation. The panel believes that the Minister for Communities is probably best placed to fulfil this role, although it may be that the cross-departmental nature of the Commissioner's work would mean that the Commissioner's office ought to sit within the Cabinet Office, or perhaps the Treasury.

Clarity about citizens' entitlements

There is no consensus about the nature of community members' entitlement to participate in decisions that affect them. Questions about representation and legitimacy are important, but are sometimes used to dismiss community activists.

The panel believes that the Participation Commissioner ought to lead work that addresses these issues. This work should lead to a National Charter on Citizen's Entitlement that:

- states clearly that citizens are entitled to participate in decisions that affect the well being of their communities
- sets out principles to govern issues of legitimacy
- sets out the ethos of mutual respect that should underlie participative processes
- makes it clear that participation is of value as a democratic way of allowing citizens to make collective decisions on an equal basis, as well as a means for improving service delivery and building social capital.

The detailed content of this framework would be developed by the Participation Commissioner, in partnership with umbrella organisations for local government, other statutory bodies, and the voluntary and community sector. This document would set out guiding principles rather than rigid national standards. Participation needs to be tailored to local circumstances, and cannot be determined by Whitehall.

This national charter could form a part of the National Neighbourhoods Framework that is currently being considered by the ODPM.

The panel argue that standards are needed, but that these should be agreed at a local level through negotiations between communities, the local authority and other local partners. These standards would be set out by LSPs in local empowerment strategies and could be sections in local neighbourhood charters⁵⁵. The process of negotiating standards would be facilitated by community participation facilitators (see below). These local standards are discussed below, in relation to the greater co-ordination role for local authorities.

The role of the Cabinet

Taking the participation agenda forwards requires high-level support. Changing the cultures of local authorities and others will require political leadership. Cross-cutting working is likely to require a Cabinet-level mandate. In order for the charter to be effective, it will need to be endorsed at cabinet level.

The Commissioner's responsibility to assemble a systematic evidence base

Research into the effectiveness of participation approaches is of variable quality. It is characterised by numerous, small-scale, unconnected research projects. This is frustrating, because the complexity of communities means it can be difficult to apply lessons learned in one community to the situation in another. There are many information sources that purport to represent good practice, but it is hard to tell which sources are robust and which are less reliable.

An innovative response to similar problems in the health field has been the creation of the Cochrane Collaboration. The collaboration exists to 'help people make well-informed decisions by preparing, maintaining and promoting the accessibility of systematic reviews of the effects of interventions in health care'.⁵⁶ The panel recommends a similar systematic approach be developed for evidence around participation.

The Participation Commissioner should be responsible for ongoing systematic reviews of the evidence base around participation. These reviews should lead to accessible, high quality reports that are widely searchable and accessible and provide good-practice guides for various different situations.

Continued direct audit of central government spend on participation

The role of central government in funding much participation infrastructure through the SSCF and Home Office ChangeUp programme should be reflected in the audit trail for that funding.

⁵⁵ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister/Home Office (2005a).

⁵⁶ Clarke (2004)

Funding streams administered through local authorities are audited by the Audit Commission through the CPA while central government spends are, in general audited by the National Audit Office. When the Single Communities Programme ends and funding shifts to the SSCF, administration of the funding will shift from central government to local government (as SSCF funding will be channelled through LAAs). There is an argument that this means that SSCF funding should be audited by the Audit Commission through the CPA process, rather than by the NAO.

The panel believes that this would not be sufficient, for two reasons:

The National Audit Office approach allows the specific spend related to participation to be independently audited at a national level. The CPA process, on the other hand, would roll participation practice together with all the other aspects of local government practice that are covered under the key lines of enquiry. Instead of delivering a national overview of the effectiveness of investment in participation, there would be hundreds of reports, each of which touched on participation.

The Safer Stronger Communities Fund comes from central government, and is outside of the rate support grant. Central government should be held accountable for its use, so an audit trail needs to exist which covers that spend.

While local participation and empowerment ought to continue to be evaluated through the CPA, the National Audit Office ought to have oversight over SSCF spending.

Recommendation: Clear national leadership for participation policy

1. A Participation Commissioner should be appointed, with a small secretariat.
2. The Participation Commissioner should lead on the creation of a national charter establishing citizens' entitlements to participate.
3. The charter should be endorsed by the Cabinet to enforce departmental commitments.
4. The Participation Commissioner should liaise with Whitehall departments to support a cross-cutting approach to participation policy.
5. The Participation Commissioner should ensure that there are ongoing systematic reviews of the evidence base around participation.
6. Local participation and empowerment should continue to be evaluated through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), but the National Audit Office should have oversight of the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF).

Recommendation: Greater co-ordination by local authorities

Participation provides a way for local authorities to strengthen their communities, services and democracy. As the lead statutory body in their area, the representative body for their local community, and a key member of the LSP, it is in their interest to ensure that communities can participate in local policy making and delivery. The panel believes that local authorities are key partners in the development of better participation.

Many local authorities are taking on a leadership role, and are working in partnership with the community sector and other statutory bodies to strengthen participation in their locality. The panel believes that government should build on this good practice in the following ways:

Local authorities should have a duty to work with communities, community organisations and other statutory bodies to ensure that effective participation takes place in their locality.

Other statutory bodies should be required to work with their local authority, communities and community organisations, to develop their use of participation.⁵⁷

Local agreements on how participation will operate should be set out by the LSP in a 'Community Empowerment Strategy'.

This set of duties would provide a mechanism to stimulate the development of participative practices in all local bodies, not just local authorities. Local authorities would be empowered to ensure that other service providers adopt participatory methods. The aim is to line up local processes so that citizens and community organisations can easily understand how to get involved, and how to influence the policies that they care about. Where appropriate, bodies should rationalise the system by pooling their expertise and resources.

The details of the approach at a local level should be set out in the LSP's community empowerment strategy. Through a process of negotiation and deliberation, local councils, statutory bodies and community-sector organisations should identify the priorities and mechanisms for participation in their locality, including:

clear objectives for participation
stable, long-term and easily navigable structures that enable the widest possible cross-section of local communities to participate where they wish to do so⁵⁸

⁵⁷ This duty should apply to bodies working within the geographical boundaries of local authorities, but also to bodies such as the police force, or PCTs that might straddle more than one authority. Where they do cover more than one locality, a mechanism needs to be developed to tie them into local arrangements.

⁵⁸ This builds on the recommendations in Neighbourhood Renewal Unit research report 16 (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005b).

local standards for the conduct of participation
a set of locally agreed performance indicators (see below).

In addition, there could also be neighbourhood-level strategies, which could be incorporated into the new Neighbourhood Charters.

The process could take place in a number of ways. For example, it could be facilitated by LSP sub-committees, or operate at a neighbourhood level, through the processes leading to Neighbourhood Charters.⁵⁹ The key point is that, through a period of negotiation, there would be agreement between all the relevant parties on a set of local standards. The participatory processes used in the locality would be rationalised, consistent and agreed with communities. The ground rules would be set.

Performance indicators

Each community empowerment strategy would include a set of indicators to monitor the mechanisms put in place to enable participation. These indicators would be assessed locally, and reported to the Participation Commissioner and the government office. The indicators would play a dual role:

they would allow local stakeholders to understand the impact of participation locally and adjust policy accordingly.

They would add to the evidence base being assembled by the Participation Commissioner.

In addition, they could play a role in reducing the bureaucratic burden of the CPA. Appropriately designed indicators could be used by local authorities to demonstrate compliance with the relevant aspects of the CPA.

Local partners could agree to simply use existing indicators – such as the forthcoming indicators on participation that will be linked to the Safer Stronger Communities Fund or the Audit Commission's local performance indicators. Alternatively, they could introduce new indicators that are relevant locally but do not have national significance – for example, the extent to which different communities work together could be measured by the number of people from those communities attending a particular forum.

Community members from neighbouring localities could be involved in assessing performance against the indicators. The process would be similar to that used by tenant auditors in the social housing sector

Participation facilitators

The process of agreeing Community Empowerment Strategies, and where appropriate, neighbourhood charters, would be supported by participation facilitators. These facilitators would be based in the existing community participation teams in government offices and work with a group of local authorities. Empowered to challenge as well as support local statutory bodies,

⁵⁹ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister/Home Office (2005a).

they would bring an impartial but community-minded perspective to bear.

They would be charged with:

- initiating and facilitating discussions
- bringing relevant knowledge about how to write agreements and set indicators
- resolving conflict, using the authority of the government office as a last resort
- supporting statutory bodies and communities to ensure that the agreements are kept (this is discussed below under the panel's third headline recommendation: 'more support to enable statutory bodies to change their culture and practice').

The 'participation facilitators' approach should build on the experience of neighbourhood renewal advisors (NRAs). Indeed, NRAs could act as participation facilitators. However, whereas at present NRAs tend to be called into localities where arrangements are proving unsatisfactory, participation facilitators would have a less reactive, longer term role in fostering good relationships between partners. Where relationships are working well, the role for the participation facilitator will be smaller than where partners identify significant problems.

Many of the experts interviewed by the panel emphasised that disagreement between partners was a healthy sign, as it is often essential to delivering change. The facilitators would adopt this perspective. Their aim is not to secure universal agreement, but instead to foster high-trust relationships that allow for informed and constructive dissent and lead to effective decision making.

The neighbourhood level

It will often be at the neighbourhood level that the policies set out in the community empowerment strategy are turned into reality. As argued above, there are significant links between the development of locality wide community empowerment strategies and the development of neighbourhood charters. The panel believes that the relationship between the two tiers should be iterative, with neighbourhood charters informing locality-wide strategies and locality-wide strategies informing neighbourhood charters.

The regional level

While local community empowerment strategies should help rationalise participation at a local and neighbourhood level, many organisations operate beyond those boundaries. Bodies such as Regional Development Agencies and Learning and Skills Councils also have an impact on people's day-to-day lives. As these organisations encompass several local authorities, the panel members did not feel that it would always be practical for them to seek to line up their processes with those used in each locality in which they operate. However, there does need to be some mechanism that would play the same role of securing acceptance of the value of participation, stimulating the use of participative approaches and joining that practice up.

One option that the panel considered was the creation of similar duties at the regional level. Government offices would have a duty to ensure that participation happens in their region, and regional organisations would have a duty to work with government offices and community organisations to develop good practice. This might prove an unworkable expansion of the role of government offices, but the panel believes it is worth exploring further.

The panel raised some concerns about the capacity of GOs to drive the participation agenda. Panel members had mixed experience of the impact of government office officers, with some citing situations in which officers had allowed poor practice to continue (see case study 6), and there was some confusion amongst experts about the powers of government offices in relation to participation. This was not the focus of the panel's deliberations, but the panel highlights the need for government offices to be involved in the development of participation practice, and the need for appropriate training and support for government office staff.

Recommendation: greater co-ordination by local authorities

7. Local authorities should have a duty to work with communities, community organisations and other statutory bodies to ensure that effective participation takes place in their locality.
8. Other statutory bodies should be required to work with their local authority, communities and community organisations, to develop their use of participation.
9. Local agreements on how participation will operate should be set out by Local Strategic Partnerships in a 'Community Empowerment Strategy'.
10. Where Neighbourhood Charters are introduced, they should inform and be informed by the Community Empowerment Strategy.
11. The process of agreeing community empowerment strategies should be supported by 'participation facilitators' based in government offices and charged with initiating and facilitating discussions at a local level.
12. Government offices should lead greater co-ordination of participation policy across government office regions.

Recommendation: Support to enable statutory bodies to change their culture and practice

'Culture eats strategy for breakfast!'

Community activist

Virtually every expert the panel met emphasised the importance of culture change. New mechanisms to enable community participation will not

succeed in the long term unless they are accompanied by changes in culture. Unless the approach to empowering citizens recognises this, it will fail. The panel and the witnesses acknowledged that culture change is not an issue that can easily be addressed. Policy needs to support cultural shifts that make participation part of the standard way in which councillors and government officers go about their business.

The panel identified several themes to be key in approaching culture change around participation:

Learning from other localities – One witness with experience of local government argued that ‘the easiest way to identify a poorly performing council is to spot one that doesn’t get out much.’ Officers and councillors who are dubious about participation often have their attitudes challenged when they see it working first hand.

Learning from other occupations – The experience of different occupational groups can bring new perspectives on how best to engage with local communities. For example, several witnesses argued that the statutory ‘right to manage’ has shifted housing officers’ approach to participation in a way that has not happened for town planners.

The importance of inter-occupational approaches to professional development – This is reflected in the design of the Academy for Sustainable Communities, which was announced in April 2005. The academy aims to ‘ensure that there are sufficient people with the right skills and knowledge to deliver and maintain sustainable communities across the country.’ It will do this, partly, by seeking to ‘foster cross-occupational learning and understanding... inspiring and enabling people across different fields to work together.’⁶⁰ The panel strongly endorses this approach, and hopes that the academy will work to embed a participatory approach to the development of sustainable communities.

Working with communities – Much of the mistrust between communities and statutory bodies rests on false assumptions about each other’s behaviour and competence. Spending time together seems to have the power to challenge these assumptions. The panel heard stories of councillors and officers who were initially opposed to adopting participative approaches but became advocates after spending time with community members. Similarly, there were stories of community members who became more accepting of public servants after meeting them.

Effective leadership – Identifying and nurturing organisational leaders, from street level to board level, is vital. Much of the evidence suggested that vigorous and trusted leaders who clearly articulate the need for change are essential. Leaders need to communicate that change is urgent and necessary.⁶¹

Celebrating success – Change programmes can appear very negative. They can appear to be about stopping people doing the things they are

⁶⁰ See: www.ascskills.org.uk/who_we_are/index.cfm

⁶¹ Kotter (1996).

used to. Celebrating success is important in offering concrete examples that the change works.

These approaches are relevant both to government officers and to elected representatives.

Establishing participation skills with the generic skill-set of government officers

The Egan review recommends that 'employers should make continuous personal development training in generic skills compulsory for all staff working in core occupations'⁶² – ie in occupations that involve people spending 'almost all of their professional time in activities to do with planning, delivering and maintaining sustainable communities.'⁶³ The panel endorses these recommendations and argues that participation skills are absolutely central to the generic skills that need to be developed.

However, the Egan review does not explicitly include participation skills as an area within the generic skills curriculum. Instead, it includes participation skills under the title 'inclusive visioning', which focuses on 'the ability to vision a future state for a community' and 'get buy-in from a wide variety of people.' The panel feels that it is dangerous to think of community participation as a process for securing buy-in. They argue that a more inclusive and empowering definition of participation ought to inform the programmes administered by the Academy of Sustainable Communities. Further, the panel argues that these skills should relate explicitly to the democratic renewal and sustainable communities agendas, and not be limited to the role of participation in improving public service delivery.

It is important that any participation-skills training reflects citizens' entitlement to participate as citizens rather than just as consumers. The Egan review and the Academy of Sustainable Communities documents conflate 'citizens' and 'customers'.⁶⁴ The panel argues that equating these two terms undermines peoples' entitlement to participate in services that they do not consume. More importantly, it undervalues aspects of participation such as social capital and improved governance that do not relate to service delivery.

The development of participation skills through the academy could be linked to a new participation qualification that would enable officers to demonstrate their expertise to prospective employers. This would help raise the quality of practitioners, and could improve the status of the field. The design of the qualifications should build on work already underway – for example, the work at Community Development Exchange.

⁶² Egan (2004), p14

⁶³ *Ibid*, p 100

⁶⁴ See www.ascskills.org.uk/sites/asc/cms_resources/generic%20skills.doc

The role of participation facilitators

Culture change is a specialised area of management theory and practice. While some local bodies may have in-house expertise in this area, or have networks that allow them to access this expertise, others will not.

Participation facilitators will work with statutory bodies to support culture-change processes. This could involve working directly with them to identify their needs, sharing experience of other statutory bodies in similar situations, or supporting bodies in identifying consultants and others to help them develop detailed change-management programmes. Effective culture-change programmes are likely to require buy-in at the highest levels of the organisation's management.

In addition, participation facilitators will ensure that culture change programmes are linked to the LSP's community empowerment strategy. The process of writing the agreements could itself be part of the culture change programme, as individuals from a variety of organisations and occupations come together to reach a consensus.

Recommendation: Support to enable statutory bodies to change their culture and practice

13. Participation needs to be part of the standard way in which councillors and government officers go about their business.
14. Where negative attitudes and behaviour create a barrier to effective participation, participation facilitators should work with statutory bodies to develop culture-change programmes. These programmes should apply across occupations and sectors.
15. Participation skills should be part of the generic skill set of government officers, as taught and defined by the Academy for Sustainable Communities.
16. There should be a new qualification in participation for government officers and others who wish to develop their skills.
17. Elected representatives should be trained in the process and purpose of participation.

Recommendation: Long-term support for community organisations

Successful community participation depends on a vibrant community sector that has the capacity to engage with statutory bodies and, where necessary, challenge their thinking and plans. Some of the examples cited in this report show how draining this can be in the current system. There needs to be greater support for communities who wish to engage effectively.

Preserving independence

Where there is a healthy relationship between community organisations and local authorities, community organisations are able to freely express views that are critical of local authorities. However, as discussed in Section 3, some local authorities use their influence over funding for community groups to influence community organisations' policy-positions on LSP boards and elsewhere. The shift away from direct central funding for community groups may exacerbate these problems and undermine a community's ability to act independently of local authority influence.

The panel believes it is vital that an independent funding stream is maintained. They recommend that the ODPM sets out good practice guidance for local authorities that asks them to:

Devolve spending on community participation to the voluntary and community sector – to be administered on a local basis in the same way as Single Community Programme funding was administered

Provide this funding on a rolling medium-term basis – for example, by guaranteeing funding for three years rather than just one, with funding renewal discussed biennially to allow for managed growth or contraction. This would address some of the issues of short-termism discussed in Section 2 of this report.

Authorities not following this procedure would be asked to prove how their funding regime guarantees the independence of the local community sector.

This is only one approach to delivering independence. Others may well emerge – for example negotiations around community empowerment strategies may lead to various local statutory bodies pooling resources in such a way that community groups are independent of the control of any one body. The key is that core funding for community groups should be insulated from pressure to take particular policy positions in participative processes and discussions.

Developing the skills to participate

Just as statutory organisations need support to develop their community participation skills, so community members need support in learning how to engage effectively with statutory bodies. Such training can be provided by the sector itself – for example, Training for Work in Communities (TWICS) provides several entry-level courses. However, support and, potentially, investment from government may prove significant.

The panel recommends that this training be provided through a variety of means. Personal interaction with government officers and councillors will be key to helping community members understand how government works and see issues from the perspective of statutory bodies. It also needs to be linked to specific community participation activities. While there is some benefit to

stand-alone courses, many people will only realise the value of these skills when they actually need them. There is also potential to build participation skills and theory into citizenship education in schools.

Support and development routes for community activists

'There is a need for incentives to involve people and then keep them involved. You cannot just advertise for individual participants and hope they will keep coming.'

Academic

'Communities need to learn how to pursue win-win solutions, how to be proactive and how to take responsibility for the outcomes.'

Community activist

The panel's sessions highlighted many examples of community activists who were driving change on the ground. They were organising their local or functional communities and working with statutory bodies to make a real difference to people's lives. This sort of activity gives community activists a range of skills – not just in enabling communities to participate in governance, but also in wider community development activity. They act as catalysts for change.

The panel argues that there needs to be more support for community activists seeking to develop their skills. This could take the form of:

A qualification that makes it easier for them to work for statutory bodies that are seeking to improve their participation practices. This could build on the work underway at Training for Work in Communities (TWICS) and the Federation for Community Development Learning.

Support to enable effective community entrepreneurs to network more effectively with community organisations in neighbouring localities to share experience and good practice.

The issues around benefits discussed above⁶⁵ are a particularly important barrier to securing broad community participation. The Welfare Reform Green Paper⁶⁶ did not address the concerns raised by the panel. The panel argue that the next set of proposals should include an explicit solution to the issues identified in this report. The panel recommends a capped, time-limited earnings credit for people who undertake accredited work for identified organisations in their own communities.

⁶⁵ See p. 27

⁶⁶ DWP (2006)

Recommendation: Long-term support for community organisations

18. Funding for community participation is essential and should be independent of local authority influence.
19. Local government should devolve spending on community participation to the voluntary and community sector, to be administered in the same way as the Single Community Programme. This funding should be provided on a medium-term basis.
20. Authorities that choose not to do this should be required to demonstrate how their funding regime guarantees the independence of the local community sector.
21. Local and central government should invest in training in participation skills for community members.
22. A community participation qualification should be open to community activists, to improve their personal development opportunities.
23. The next phase of welfare reform should address the barriers within the benefits system that prevent full engagement in local community renewal. The panel recommends that, for a limited period of time, people who undertake work of benefit to their community should be able to receive payment for this work without loss of benefits provided the work is managed by an accredited local organisation.

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Appendix 1: Methodology

The model for the panel process was somewhere between a citizens' jury and a select committee inquiry. Like a citizens' jury, the panel heard from a wide variety of expert 'witnesses' over a relatively short period of time – just one week. Like a select committee, the terms of the discussion were kept very open, and those asking the questions had significant expertise in the area of policy under discussion.

The panel heard in person from 39 experts drawn from nine government departments, eight research institutions, several non-departmental public bodies, local government, and, the VCS. They were also able to draw on the experience of the individual panel members, who had each spent many years as community activists. For a list of panel members see pages ii-iii. For a list of expert interviewees see Appendix 3.

While this evidence base is necessarily limited, it allowed the panel to diagnose a set of critical issues around community participation that stretched from the neighbourhood level to the national level and across Whitehall. The author also drew on additional evidence (for example, research reports) in the drafting of this report.

The process can be outlined in terms of the following five phases:

Phase 1: Panel selection

The panel was drawn from the National Community Forum. There are 24 members of this forum with direct experience of living or working in deprived areas. They include residents who are active in their own communities, people from professional agencies and a wide range of voluntary and community sector organisations. Each year, the forum membership is refreshed as the third of members who have been on the forum longest leave, and a new cohort is recruited through open interviews. The forum members chose which of them would take part in the panel. Several factors affected the selection of panellists, including availability for the panel hearings and interest in the panel process. Forum members were paid for their attendance at the panel sessions.

Phase 2: Process design

In consultation with the panel and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) invited a broad range of speakers to attend a week-long session in July 2005. Care was taken to ensure that between the witnesses, the panel heard from people with experience across Whitehall and local government, academia and the VCS.

A meeting was held with the panel during this phase to confirm and refine the choice of witnesses and to discuss the process for the hearings. The panel selected a chairperson who chaired the meetings with witnesses.

The selected witnesses were invited to the week-long session for meetings with the whole panel that generally lasted one hour. Prior to attendance, the witnesses were given a brief background to the panel process and a set of questions to think about. For a sample of the questions that witnesses were given, see Appendix 3. Witnesses were asked slightly different questions depending on whether their principle role was as part of government or in the community sector or education sector.

Phase 3: Evidence gathering and deliberation

This phase revolved around the week of meetings held in London. Each evidence session was chaired by the panel chairperson, and began with the witness briefly discussing their overall views on community participation, guided by the questions that they had seen in advance. The rest of the session was devoted to questions and answers. The panel members were free to pose any questions they felt relevant and did not slavishly follow the pre-prepared questions. The sessions were between one and two hours long.

On average, the panel heard from six or seven witnesses each day. Witnesses were sometimes interviewed in small groups (up to three witnesses) where it was felt that this would result in a more fruitful discussion. Each day ended with a deliberation session lasting approximately an hour and a half facilitated by the ippr. At the end of the week, the panel spent half a day in a final deliberation session.

Throughout the week, the panel identified areas that they wanted to know more about. In particular, they felt that the lack of input from Department for Education and Skills, the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission during the week's hearings was likely to prove a problem. As a result, the ippr arranged follow-up interviews in the subsequent month. These meetings were run slightly differently, as fewer panel members were able to be present. Each meeting involved at least one panel member (normally three or more) and one ippr member who, between them, questioned the witness.

Phase 4: Initial write up and follow-up panel session with key stakeholders

The ippr led the write-up of the report. Panel members' individual notes, the flipchart notes collected during the deliberation sessions and the ippr note-takers' notes from the expert-witness sessions were used to put together a first draft of this report. This draft was circulated to the panel by email. Panel members fed back comments. This was followed by a period of redrafting. A second draft was then prepared and the executive summary was used as the basis for a follow-up panel meeting in September 2005.

This meeting was divided in two parts. First, the panel met to discuss the second draft of the report – these discussions were facilitated by the ippr. The afternoon was devoted to a follow-up meeting, chaired by the panel chair, with three key stakeholders: Henry Tam, Head of the Civil Renewal Unit;

Matthew Warburton, Head of Strategy at the Local Government Association; and Alan Riddell, Operations Director at the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. This session was used to 'road test' the panel's analysis and recommendations. Following this session, the ippr facilitated a session to discuss the comments raised in the previous session and to agree next steps. As with the initial panel sessions, the panel was free to reject or accept the advice of these expert witnesses.

Phase 5: Drafting the final report

Following phase 4, the ippr led on the redrafting of the report. An initial draft was produced and circulated by email to the panel for comments. An email-based discussion was facilitated, and comments were shared to ensure that all panel members had an opportunity to see what changes were being proposed. Tricia Zipfel at the ODPM was invited to comment on this draft, but as with all other expert's views, her role was purely advisory. This discussion lasted three weeks, after which the ippr prepared a further (fourth) draft. A similar process was followed for this draft. This was the final opportunity for the panel to make substantive comments. After a period of three weeks, a final draft of the report was produced. This was submitted to the panel for comments on the clarity of the language used. It was then submitted to a copy-editor for proof reading and a final edit.

Appendix 2: Experts interviewed

The panel, the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and the ippr wish to thank all the experts who gave up their time to take part in the development of this report. In particular, we would like to thank Dr Henry Tam of the Civil Renewal Unit, Matthew Warburton of the Local Government Association and Alan Riddell of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, all of whom attended a follow-up seminar and commented on an earlier draft of this report. That said, the findings in this report are those of the panel and should not be read as in any way reflecting the views of the expert participants, the ippr or the NRU.

All participants took part on the basis that their remarks would not be directly attributed to them.

Individual	Position and organisation
Bill Badham	Development Officer, Active Involvement Team National Youth Agency
Helen Barry	Manager Burnley Action Partnership
Toby Blume	Chief Executive Urban Forum
Julian Butcher	Deputy Divisional Manager, School Admissions, Organisation and Governance Department for Education and Skills
Father Paul Butler	Vicar of Bellingham and Area Dean of East Lewisham Community board member of Lewisham LSP
Gabriel Chanan	Director, Policy and Research Community Development Foundation
David Corner	Director, Regions, Regeneration and Renewal National Audit Office
Raymond Fawcett	Audit Manager, National Audit Office
Rachel Flood	Community Planning Officer Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
John Gaventa	Team Leader and Research Fellow Institute of Development Studies Participation

	Group
Kelly Groves	School Admissions Organisation and Governance Division Department for Education and Skills
Martin Gibbs	Senior Policy Development Manager, Health and Inequalities Unit Department of Health
Ian Grady	Policy and Partnership Manager Halton Strategic Partnership
Sharon Grant	Chair Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health
Helen Hughes	National Advisor, Voluntary and Community Sector Improvement and Development Agency
Neil Jameson	Executive Director, Citizen Organising Foundation Lead Organiser, London Citizens
Simon Judge	Regional Policy, Skills and Neighbourhood Issues Department for Work and Pensions
Sue Loughhead	Urban and Rural Change Team, Policy Division Department for International Development
Norman Mackie	Community Network Co-ordinator East Durham Community Network
Marjorie Mayo	Reader in Professional and Community Education Goldsmiths College
David Miliband MP	Minister for Communities and Local Government Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
John Mills	Director of Rural Policy Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Sheila Murtagh	Partnership Manager Partners in Salford

Linda Oliver	Head, Tenant Participation Branch Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Tim Oshodi	Empower Consultancy
David Prout	Director, Local Government Policy Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Maggie Rae	Programme Manager for Inequalities, Local Government, Communities and Personal Health Department of Health
Alan Riddell	Director of Operations, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Moraene Roberts	ATD Fourth World
Professor Hilary Russell	European Institute for Urban Affairs Liverpool John Moore's University
Jane Steele	Head, Public Interest Research Office for Public Management
Hazel Stuteley O.B.E	Health Visitor The Beacon Project, Penwerris, Cornwall
Henry Tam	Head, Civil Renewal Unit, Communities Group Home Office
Professor Marilyn Taylor	Director, Cities Research Centre University of West England
Janet Tonge	Neighbourhood Manager Parkfield/Mill Lane Neighbourhood Management
Matthew Warburton	Head of Strategy Local Government Association
Richard Wilson	Director Involve
Andy Zuntz	Executive Director The Metropolitan Borough of Rochdale

Appendix 3: Questions sent to experts in advance

Questions for community practitioners and academics

1. Is there an overall government understanding of community participation, or does this vary by department?
2. How does this impact upon work on the ground?
3. Do you think government understands community participation as an end in itself, or as a means to an end?
4. How might there be greater coherence of policy across government?
5. What drives policy development of community participation?
6. Is the current policy framework for community participation helpful? Specifically does it enable effective work with the most deprived communities?
7. Does government policy help or hinder the most deprived communities to participate? In what ways? What needs to be in place to ensure that the most excluded communities are able to participate?
8. What impact does the choice agenda have on community participation?
9. How prescriptive do you think the government should be in terms of the processes surrounding community participation?
10. Do we need a legal framework for effective community participation? What might it look like? What kind of minimum standards should there be?
11. What needs to happen to strengthen policy on empowerment?

Questions for government representatives

1. What does your department understand by community participation?
2. What are your policies on community participation? How do these relate to other departments' policies? Can you describe any tensions between different policy agendas and the community empowerment agenda?
3. Does your department see participation as a means to an end, or as an end in itself?
4. How important is participation to your department? Where does it fit into the departmental structure?
5. Where does community participation fit into wider departmental policies?
6. What is happening to develop implementation on the ground?
7. What drives policy development on community participation?
8. What impact does the choice agenda have on community participation?
9. Does government policy help or hinder the most deprived communities to participate? In what ways? What needs to be in place to ensure that the most excluded communities are able to participate?
10. How might there be greater coherence across government policy – should there be a clear lead department?
11. How prescriptive do you think the government should be in terms of the processes surrounding community participation?

12. Do we need a legal framework for effective community participation?
What might it look like?
What kind of minimum standards should there be?
13. What needs to happen to strengthen policy on empowerment?