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# Community Democratic Governance: Evidence Synthesis and Advice

## Briefing Note for Welsh Government

**Tony Bovaird.**

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**inlogov**  
INSTITUTE OF LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

For further information please contact:

Rhian Davies

Knowledge and Analytical Services

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Tel: 0300 025 6791

Email: [rhian.davies45@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:rhian.davies45@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

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## Executive Summary

INLOGOV has been asked to support the Welsh Government by preparing a Briefing Note for the current policy review into community democratic governance.

The brief requires an evidence synthesis and advisory note on community governance, focusing on:

1. town and community councils (especially the views of the public on these councils); and
2. the role (within principal authorities) of ward councillors, Area Committees and neighbourhood management approaches.

We have used two main approaches in preparing this research brief. First, we have carried out a thorough search of the literature to find publications relevant to these research questions. Second, we contacted a range of colleagues, both within the University of Birmingham and in other UK and international universities, research institutes and think tanks, who are represented in this literature in order to identify further research not yet published.

In the literature, two approaches to involving communities in governance can be distinguished: *governance through policy or issue communities* (or 'communities of interest') and *governance through communities of place*, including governance by neighbourhood communities. This Briefing Note focuses mainly on the latter form of community governance, although aspects of community governance through communities of interest are also mentioned in certain places.

### **Research question 1: What roles and functions should or could a tier of community democratic governance fulfil?**

Lowndes and Sullivan (2008: 57-59) provide four distinct but interlocking rationales for neighbourhood governance:

- *Civic rationale*: This rationale focuses on the possibility of neighbourhood governance allowing a much more intense and meaningful dialogue between citizens and the state, and those who provide public services. In terms of types of 'co-production', this rationale focuses more on co-deciding policies and the co-commissioning, co-design and co-assessment of services, rather than co-delivery. However, it also does not exclude the possibility that as well as commissioning some local services at neighbourhood level, neighbourhood governance might involve co-delivery by local people.
- *Social rationale*: This social rationale particularly justifies the involvement of citizens in co-deciding policies and co-commissioning, co-designing and co-assessing public services, rather than co-delivery. It also justifies neighbourhood governance becoming a prime arena for experiments with new forms of joined-up service provision to achieve holistic outcomes for citizens and new forms of citizen collective action to influence service commissioning. Even more than under the civic rationale, the social rationale suggests the importance of neighbourhood governance having the chance to influence all commissioners of public services from all parts of the public sector, not just their local authority. Moreover, it justifies a strong role for neighbourhood governance bodies in co-regulation of public service providers or in certain cases some role in their provision.
- *Political rationale*: This rationale entails citizens feeling that they know about and understand how decisions are made locally and can influence those decisions. This may well imply very small neighbourhoods. Where these conditions obtain the political rationale, particularly justifies neighbourhood commissioning of locally-appropriate services where there are differences between neighbourhoods in types of need or priorities between services, as perceived by local residents. Such neighbourhood commissioning however, also entails neighbourhood budgets, which are sufficient to cover the extra expense of locally determined priorities (over and above any minimum standards set by the principal authority to apply across the jurisdiction). In addition, it justifies involving neighbourhood bodies to give a community voice on the collective benefits and costs of infrastructure (in addition to the individual voices of those stakeholders who make representations to the principal authority on their own behalf), where the neighbourhood is but one of many affected. This means that the final decision clearly lies with the whole authority, if not regional or national decision-makers.

- This rationale does not apply where neighbourhoods are so large that citizens do not feel personally able to influence the decisions arrived at in the relevant neighbourhood governance bodies. The size of such neighbourhood governance bodies may vary significantly across the country – it is likely to be larger in areas with stable populations and strongly shared values, but be much smaller in areas with high population churn or very diverse cultures.
- *Economic rationale*: In principle, this rationale suggests the commissioning of a platform of mutually-reinforcing services which achieve outcome mixes, the desirability of which is judged significantly differently from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. There is little research directly on this topic. However, the indirect evidence suggests it is likely to be a very important factor. After all, spending patterns differ very widely between different local authorities. On the other hand, services which are subject to large economies of scale are unlikely to yield value for money when provided at neighbourhood level.

These four rationales each help to bring out different aspects of the concept of neighbourhood governance. Moreover, it is clear that choices have to be made between the benefits offered under each rationale. For example, some economies of scale may have to be sacrificed to allow services to be commissioned and/or delivered at neighbourhood level (a loss under the economic rationale) in order to ensure that local people have more commitment to the governmental system overall (a benefit under the civic rationale). Again, if we wish to reap the benefits of micro-commissioning by individuals through personal budgets for social care services (and perhaps some health, education, training and leisure services), some options for neighbourhoods' commissioning of collective services may become limited.

**Research question 2: How do the potential roles and functions of community democratic governance contrast with the roles and functions currently performed by town and community councils, and what do we understand about the factors that shape and influence those roles and functions?**

There are many different models of community democratic governance in operation around the world. Even in the UK the systems in place in the four countries display marked differences. In answering this question, we have focused first on the UK experience especially in relation to town and parish councils in England and community councils in Scotland, then contrasted this with some international experience - in particular, systems in France, Norway and the USA.

English parish and town councils have so few statutory duties and, on the basis of their discretionary powers, perform such a heterogeneous set of activities that no clear lessons emerge on how they conform to our four rationales for neighbourhood governance. However, it does confirm the unique characteristic that they are directly elected and therefore can claim a degree of democratic legitimacy which is formally stronger than that of other neighbourhood arrangements. However, the English experience suggests that there is enough flexibility within the current system for town and parish councils to be genuinely active and effective players in relation to important decisions within their area, if they so wish.

The Scottish experience with its community councils, Community Planning process and 'neighbourhood partnerships', points out the perils of seeking to bring about a wholesale replacement of one system of neighbourhood governance with another and reminds us that previous systems are likely to leave a long-lasting footprint, which need to be understood and factored into policy. It is clear that the more traditional neighbourhood focus of the previous generation of area-based initiatives, with local accountability to tenants and residents exercised through association management committees, is still strong in parts of Scotland and affects the way in which more recent neighbourhood governance initiatives are perceived and how well they can work.

Looking at the international experience, in some European countries a commitment to devolution to community level is embedded in the constitution. In Germany for example, with its 18,000 municipalities, the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) guarantees not only the right of elected councils to regulate all local affairs 'on their responsibility', but also their financial autonomy including "the right of municipalities to a source of tax revenues based upon economic ability and the right to establish the rates at which these sources shall be taxed".

Elsewhere, Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) suggest the move to community governance has taken place in specific local authorities in response to particular local circumstances. For example, in the 1980s Barcelona's decentralization to districts emerged out of the lobbying of an active neighbourhood movement in the city (Blakeley 2002). In the Netherlands the focus of municipalities on 'interactive governance' from the 1990s, reflected a new orientation of political elites toward the direct participation of citizens and other stakeholders in local decision-making, frequently combined with a neighbourhood approach (Denters and Klok 2005).

Some US cities have responded to citizen pressures in the last two decades through charter reform to incorporate neighbourhood groups into city governance - for example, in the neighbourhood council model adopted by the city of Los Angeles. More recently, Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) point to evidence from the US suggesting that an already highly decentralised system has become more so, partly due to the growth of 'special purpose' governments covering much smaller populations, which are valued by citizens because of their efficient service delivery regardless of reduced accountability. A different direction has been given to community governance by the movement towards 'private neighbourhoods', i.e. collective ownership of residential property, including homeowners' associations, condominiums and co-operatives – this constitutes a privatising of the American neighbourhood over the past 40 years and suggests the direction in which neighbourhood governance might go if government does not take appropriate steps.

**Research question 3: What can we learn about effective approaches to community democratic governance, such as area committees and neighbourhood management approaches both within the UK and elsewhere in the world, which might be of interest to Wales?**

As well as formal, democratic structures for community governance, there are many informal mechanisms such as area committees, neighbourhood management arrangements, tenant management organisations, area/community forums, residents' and tenants' associations and community associations. Although advocates of parish councils and in a city context, of neighbourhood councils, often deprecate the lack of a directly-elected leadership in such non-governmental mechanisms, this is also seen by others as a decided advantage.

Clearly, a key issue is how community governance is viewed by local people. The Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy in Scotland has reported the findings of a recent survey into the public's perception of neighbourhood governance and highlights many of the challenges and opportunities in respect of local democracy. First, the problems. It is disturbing that 6 in 10 adults said that they do not feel part of how decisions which affect their community are made - an opinion shared among those of all ages and from deprived and affluent neighbourhoods alike. Moreover, fewer than half of adults (44%) and only a third of young adults (34%), feel clear about who makes decisions on how local services are delivered in their area. The majority of people (60%), believe that decisions about public services are taken too far away from where



they live and more than half (54%) think that central government controls more decisions about local decisions than it did in the past.

However, there were also some positives. There was a clear desire to have more involvement in improving the quality of life in their community - the vast majority of people (82%) agreed that they would like more say in how services are provided in their neighbourhood (42% strongly agreed). This desire to have a say in service provision is equally strong among those in Scotland's most deprived communities (83% agreed), in spite of the assumption often made that people in these communities feel more disengaged and less willing to participate. Again, more than three-quarters of respondents said that they would get more involved in their local community if it was easier to participate in the decisions that affect it, a figure that rose to 87% among those living in the most deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland.

Neighbourhood regeneration initiatives have typically sought to improve community governance, but one lesson which appears to emerge from the long history of such initiatives is that the more central government pushes for neighbourhood regeneration bodies to 'involve the local community', the less easy central government finds it to meet its objectives for programme since these do not always equate with what local residents want to do.

There is evidence in the literature to suggest that the traditional role of elected members as a two-way conduit between the local authority and the community, is often broken or in disrepair and that a substantial number of issues needs to be addressed if local government is to attract a wider range of members, who can take on the key roles needed to make community governance a convincing process to the public.

Given that there are many different meanings to the concepts of 'community' and 'neighbourhood', it is not surprising that there is a strong strand in the literature which argues the case for 'variable geographies' – in other words, that there should be no single model for devolution to neighbourhood level. This argument justifies not only variation between local authorities in how they establish neighbourhood arrangements, but also to variations within local authorities of how they deal with different types of neighbourhood – the so-called 'double devolution' policy. However, in making community governance more appropriate and relevant, 'variable geographies' reinforce the concern that the current governmental and governance system is over-complicated and confusing, so that public do not know 'who does what', which makes it more difficult communications with citizens and may also undermine accountability.

It is not easy to spell out how to offer citizens 'equality of community governance opportunities' in terms of their democratic rights, in the context of a 'variable geography' – the 'minimum standard of involvement or influence in relation to local decision-making' which will be enshrined in the overall governmental system.

There is another danger to democracy from current trends - the reallocation of local government activity to other bodies, as part of a wider public management reform process, may result in big public bureaucracies being replaced by smaller single-purpose agencies operating at arm's length to elected political control, from local government to local governance. Skelcher (2003: 10) argues that: "The council may be fiscally efficient as a result of competitive tendering and contracting-out but allocatively inefficient due to the loss and fragmentation of services". How can this danger be avoided? One key mechanism to maintain proper accountability in such a fragmented governance system may be much more public involvement – what Skelcher and Torfing (2010: 84) define as 'democratic ownership'. They stress that democratic participation must be holistic – it must run through the whole experience which citizens have with the state, since the citizens' experience of participation at one level is also likely to affect their participation at other levels.

### **Options for community governance**

National policy, encompassing both central government and the overall local government system, with its national leadership, could take a number of stances in relation to community governance, ranging from principled non-interference to a nationally-imposed system. Options would include:

- *Constitutional independence* – possibly based on a strong National Charter of Local Self-Governance, which would allow local areas complete freedom in the community governance arrangements which they choose.
- *Local devolution* - passing responsibility for community governance arrangements to local authorities, with or without guidelines (this would conform to the position which DCLG in England has claimed to take on 'localism' since 2010).
- *Do nothing* – maintaining the current approach to community governance.

- *Covert tinkering* - pretend to ignore community governance but dabble in a piecemeal way (which could be seen as the default policy of most national governments, in between major system reconfigurations) - this might for example include extending community councils to parts of Wales currently without them.
- *New national central-local compact* - setting up a new national system, agreed between the national parliament and the local government sector (the 'disruptive innovation' scenario in the recent report of INLOGOV and Grant Thornton, 2014).
- *New national framework* – with central government imposing upon local authorities the need for an explicit community governance system meeting certain guidelines, but passing responsibility to local authorities for how this is designed in their area.
- *New imposed national system* - with prescribed structures and political and management processes (a new local government 'reform' or 'reorganisation', such as occurred in Wales in 1974 and 1998), with the attendant dangers of alienating existing institutions of local governance and arousing resistance rather than support.

## **Assessing policy options for community governance**

The choice of options is clearly a political issue. However, we can suggest some criteria to be taken into account in choosing between different approaches to community governance. We have approached this assessment from two standpoints – community governance rationales and principles.

Drawing from the literature on community governance considered earlier in this Briefing Note, one approach to setting appropriate criteria would be to focus on the ***rationales*** of community governance, along with the outcomes which are hypothesised as likely to flow from them, following the analysis of Lowndes and Sullivan (2008), namely citizen participation and active communities (civic rationale); citizen well-being and stakeholder collaboration (social rationale); accessibility, responsiveness and accountability (political rationale); and efficiency and effectiveness (economic rationale).

This approach does not provide a fully validated evaluation of the options, but rather shows how key elements of these rationales would be affected by adopting each of the options. For example, the constitutional independence option seems likely to out-perform the local devolution option on all criteria, as it seems much more likely to result in greater citizen commitment to community governance, given that principal authorities have in the past been less than wholehearted in their support for neighbourhood-based arrangements. On the other hand, the ‘Do nothing’ and ‘Covert tinkering’ options are, by definition, unlikely to make much change to the outcomes experienced in the current system.

The options which involve significant shaping through national policy – either agreed or imposed – all seem likely to score well on the social, political and economic rationales but not so well on the civic rationale, since they do not necessarily change the incentives or put in place the locally appropriate structures and processes to encourage citizens to engage more actively in community issues – these are things which are more appropriately decided at neighbourhood level, not in the national policy arena. Finally, the option of an imposed national system seems likely to score less well than the ‘new national central-local compact’ or the ‘new national framework’, since imposed systems tend to be strongly resisted by local government institutions. The one exception is in relation to the economic rationale, where an imposed system might be able to offer greater efficiency in service provision at community governance level, e.g. through larger community councils or compulsory arrangements for shared services, etc. This, of course, would only be relevant if service provision (rather than simply service commissioning) were to be at significant levels in the new system.

A second way of assessing the options is to consider how well they are likely to embed key principles of community governance. Here we draw upon and extend the set of governance principles developed from the literature by Bovaird and Loeffler (2003):

- *subsidiarity* (van Kersbergen and Verbeek, 2004) - devolution of decision-making to the lowest practical level;
- *citizen engagement*, allowing a proper level of dialogue between communities and the governmental system;
- *transparency*, ensuring that decisions and behaviours in the public realm are visible to citizens and their organisations (while ensuring privacy and freedom from intrusion for decisions and behaviours not in the public realm);
- *accountability*, ensuring that decisions and behaviours in the public realm can be questioned and, if appropriate, challenged by citizens and their organisations;

- *the equalities agenda and social inclusion* (relating to gender, ethnicity, age, religion, etc.) – so that decision-making reflects the diversity of the communities involved;
- *ethical and honest behaviour*, so that the representatives of community governance institutions can be trusted to carry out their tasks;
- *equity* (fair procedures and due process), *respect for the rule of law* and *freedom from harassment or coercion*, so that the formal rules and regulations of community governance institutions can be trusted by citizens;
- *ability to compete* in their environment, so that the institutions and organisations of community governance are efficient, based on appropriate scale, scope and funding;
- *ability to work effectively in partnership* across public, private and third sectors to mutual advantage, within supportive networks; and
- *sustainability*, so that the community governance system is long-lived (justifying the original costs involved in setting it up) and changes only slowly, so that citizens do not have significant transaction costs in adapting to its changes.

No community governance option is likely to be dominant, in the sense that it scores better or just as well as all other options in terms of every one of the evaluation criteria. In any case, although all of these governance principles are likely to be strongly upheld by at least some stakeholders, it is highly unlikely that they can all be achieved at once - this is the Governance Impossibility Theorem (Bovaird and Löffler, 2009). Consequently, they may have to be prioritised and the weights attached to these principles will be important in determining which option appears most attractive.

In practice, these governance principles operate mainly at a relatively micro-level – the actual levels of citizen engagement, transparency and accountability will depend on the finer details of the community governance system adopted, rather than simply on whether the approach is based on constitutional independence, local devolution or a new form of national system. The only governance principle which distinguishes clearly between the options is subsidiarity, which is the defining principle behind the constitutional independence option, although the local devolution option and the three national system options could also embody subsidiarity, if designed to do so.

The other governance principle which is particularly likely to be important in choosing between the options is *equity* (fair procedures and due process). Given that each of the options involves a different relationship between citizens, their community and the higher levels of government – and that under many of the options this relationship will differ across the country - it is important to ask to what extent citizens can be said to have ‘equality of community governance opportunities’ under each of the options? A different interpretation of this ‘offer’ applies under the various options:

- *Constitutional independence and local devolution*, where local authorities have freedom in the community governance arrangements which they choose - every citizen would simply have the right to choose, with other principal authority voters, which, if any, community governance system to have in their authority.
- *Do nothing and covert tinkering*, where the current approach to community governance is maintained or only modified ‘under the counter’ - citizens would have no explicit rights in terms of the community governance system which they would experience.
- *New national central-local compact or framework*, where a new national system is agreed – citizens would have the right to live within a community governance system which meets certain guidelines and a right to vote in their principal authority on how this approach is actually designed and implemented.
- *New imposed national system*, where structures and political and management processes of community governance are centrally prescribed – here, citizens would have the right to the same form of community governance wherever they lived.

# 1 Introduction

INLOGOV has been asked to support the Welsh Government by preparing a Briefing Note for the current policy review into community democratic governance.

The brief requires an evidence synthesis and advisory note on community governance, focusing on:

1. town and community councils (especially the views of the public on these councils); and
2. the role (within principal authorities) of ward councillors, Area Committees and neighbourhood management approaches.

The brief suggests that the key contexts which should be examined include community action and regeneration. The Briefing Note should examine research on the whole system of community governance, its component parts and their interaction, with a view to understanding the potential development of a new and integrated approach to community governance, which would have the potential to 'slice through the complexity' of current governance arrangements, eliminating unnecessary or dysfunctional parts of the present system, and enabling a clearer articulation of the citizen voice in local democracy and decision making and a genuine co-production approach. This will link with the Briefing Note on local authorities and co-production, which is being published separately (INLOGOV, 2014).

Key issues to be explored include:

- What roles and functions should or could a tier of community democratic governance fulfil?
- How does this contrast with the roles and functions currently performed by town and community councils and what do we understand about the factors that shape and influence those roles and functions?
- What can we learn about effective approaches to community democratic governance, such as area committees and neighbourhood management approaches, both within the UK and elsewhere in the world?

The brief requires the evidence review to characterise, compare and contrast different approaches, models and mechanisms of community governance within the UK and internationally which might be of interest to Wales. It is therefore expected that the literature reviewed will be international in scope but will pay particular attention to literature from the UK, Australasia, Scandinavia (e.g. the Norwegian democracy programme) and the USA (e.g. neighbourhood governance in New York).

As recognised in the brief, we have found that the evidence is patchy and has not been able to answer in satisfactory form all the research questions. As well as providing some outline recommendations on the basis of the evidence uncovered, we have therefore also made some recommendations on areas for further research which could develop the evidence base further. Moreover, where this study has uncovered evidence of issues not raised in the research questions, but which we deem to be important, we have included these also in the review.

## **Methodology**

We have used two main approaches in preparing this research brief. First, we have carried out a thorough search of the literature to find publications relevant to these research questions. Second, we contacted a range of colleagues, both within the University of Birmingham and in other UK and international universities, research institutes and think tanks, who are represented in this literature, in order to identify further research not yet published.

In searching the literature, we broke the research issues up into a number of sub-themes, as shown below. As expected, it proved difficult in some cases to find good quality and relevant evidence on some of these themes.

**Research Question 1:** What roles and functions should or could a tier of community democratic governance fulfil?

### **Sub-themes:**

1. Community governance as neighbourhood governance.
2. Community governance as governance of communities of interest.
3. Neighbourhood charters to establish citizen rights and responsibilities in community governance.



**Research Question 2:** How do the potential roles and functions of community democratic governance contrast with the roles and functions currently performed by town and community councils, and what do we understand about the factors that shape and influence those roles and functions?

**Sub-themes:**

1. How does community governance operate in practice in other contexts?
  - England
  - Scotland
  - Internationally
  
2. In these other countries, are there specific case studies of revealing practice?

**Research Question 3:** What can we learn about effective approaches to community democratic governance, such as area committees and neighbourhood management approaches, both within the UK and elsewhere in the world, which might be of interest to Wales?

**Sub-themes:**

- Area committees, neighbourhood management and other ‘indirect democracy’ arrangements – relationships with public and with principal authorities.
- View of the public on their role in neighbourhood governance.
- Roles of councillors in neighbourhood (or community?) governance:-
- Effectiveness of elected members in representing a community voice.
- How effective are community councils in engaging with citizens?
- Does this vary with population or area, budget, urban v. rural, political control etc?
- Do clusters of community councils tend to engage better or worse with citizens?
- What role does social media play?
- Are there any specific case studies of revealing practice?
- How effective are other forms of community governance in engaging with citizens?
- Does citizen engagement vary with forms of community governance?
- Does effectiveness vary with population or geographic size, budget, urban v. rural, political control etc?
- Does effectiveness vary with the state of the third sector in an area?

- What roles are most effectively played by bodies which exercise community governance – e.g. ‘advocates’ or ‘advocates with teeth’, etc.?
- Is there evidence that these levels of community engagement might justify devolving more decisions over local public services to local and community government?
- How effective are community councils compared to other neighbourhood arrangements at engaging with principal authorities? Are there any structures or engagement mechanisms that seem to work particularly well?
- Relationship between the ‘size’ of democratic units and their effectiveness?
- Capacity and capabilities of different size of democratic unit?
- Ability to mobilise community action?
- Economies of scope or scale in service commissioning?
- Economies of scope or scale in service delivery?
- Other factors through which size affects effectiveness?
- Need for variable geographies in neighbourhood governance.
- Neighbourhood governance as an antidote to ‘single issue’ government?
- Evidence on the most appropriate services to devolve to a tier of community governance?
- For which services do local priorities vary most between areas or communities?
- Are there some services with large variations in how local people want to exercise accountability?
- Are there some services which are especially likely to prompt a high level of community engagement (including co-delivery)?

## 2 Context: What do we mean by 'community governance'?

As Somerville and Haines comment (2014: 1), 'community governance' is a term that has come into widespread use over recent years but its meaning has not always been as clear as it could be - perhaps because it compounds the vagueness of 'community' with that of 'governance'.

First, it is important to distinguish 'community governance' from the more general categories of 'citizen governance' (John, 2009) or 'citizen-centred governance' (Andrews and Shah, 2005) – in these latter concepts, individual citizens have a key role in governance mechanisms (e.g. as service users or 'armchair inspectors'), whereas in 'community governance' the role of citizens is exercised through collective activities.

In the literature, two approaches to involving communities in governance can be distinguished:

- A. *Governance through policy or issue communities* (or 'communities of interest') (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992) - characterised by a specific kind of community, namely a community that has emerged around a particular policy issue or policy sector. This can be seen as a form of network governance with close relationships among the actors and a relatively high degree of consensus and shared values (Bevir and Richards, 2009; Marsh and Rhodes, 1992), which enables the governance of a policy sector to be organised by this policy or issue community.
- B. Governance through communities of place , which can take two forms:
  - a. *Governance involving communities of place* (Woods et al., 2007) – this is ultimately aimed at facilitating the governance of society by a network of stakeholders (Stoker, 2004) or by the state (Woods et al., 2007), with government organisations and partnerships (often from different sectors) engaging communities in decision-making processes. Here, the range of issues involved can be very wide and important (often including highly strategic decisions) but the level of community influence over these issues may be very restricted.
  - b. *Governance by communities of place (geographical or neighbourhood communities)* (Ostrom, 1986) – here, the community organises itself within its own neighbourhood (Bowles and Gintis, 2002), basically through self-organisation, so that different stakeholders within the community jointly develop strategies, following agreed rules which govern how they make decisions – this is the most community-led form of community governance. However, it often only has powers to intervene in a very restricted range of issues.

This Briefing Note focuses mainly on the latter form of community governance, although aspects of community governance through communities of interest are also mentioned in certain places.

Internationally, governance through communities of place has been a key policy instrument from the 1960s to the present. John (2009: 21) stresses that community empowerment has been a cross-national phenomenon (although more pronounced in Anglo-American democracies), encompassing for example participation experiments in many US cities (see Tate, 2013), and moves towards participation forums in many less developed countries (see Gaventa and Goetz, 2001), where they may compete with locally elected organisations. Generally they were associated with area-based initiatives (ABIs), which often sprang from initiatives to tackle inequality in specific policy areas, such as education, health or housing. Right from these early roots, community governance has brought together a wide range of practices in public governance and management. It has been especially closely linked to community development and urban and rural regeneration. Most of these links will be explored only briefly in this Briefing Note but the links with co-production of public services and outcomes are explored in some detail in a further Briefing Note (INLOGOV, 2014).

In practice, community governance in the UK has taken a number of forms from directly-elected parish and town councils, through devolved decision-making and elected members of principal authorities holding meetings as a committee in their electoral districts, to citizen forums and co-option of community leaders onto council decision-making bodies (Salzstein et al, 2010).

Interest in a more extensive system of directly-elected forms of community governance in the UK, goes back over 40 years. Even as early as the late 1960s, the Redcliffe-Maud Commission put forward the idea of community councils, which would supplement in urban areas the system of parish and town councils which was already in place in rural areas, and would be a more democratic complement to the quite centralised principal local authorities (Cockburn, 1977: 105-106). An Association of Neighbourhood Councils was set up in 1970 as a pressure group but it failed to get urban neighbourhood councils included in the Local Government Act 1972, although community councils were provided for in the Welsh and Scottish legislation at that time. Nevertheless, a number of areas decided to experiment with 'unofficial' (but elected) neighbourhood councils (e.g. in Kensington, Lambeth and Liverpool).

The new Labour Government of 1974 issued a consultation paper asking for advice on whether to make neighbourhood councils available, as of right, to any community of 3,000-10,000 who might petition for one (Cockburn, 1977: 107). The aims for these councils were:

- to organise or stimulate self-help within the local community to improve the quality of life for the residents as a whole;
- to help those in the community in need of special facilities (e.g. through playgroups);
- to represent operational organisations (e.g. central or local government or local firms) the needs and wishes of the local community; and
- in doing all of these things, to foster a sense of community responsibility in the residents particularly for children and adolescents whose potential for idealism it may help to harness.

More recently, there has been increased interest in some cities in setting up directly-elected neighbourhood councils – e.g. in the London Boroughs of Westminster (which now has one parish council) and Tower Hamlets. In Birmingham, which already has one parish council, essentially as an accidental by-product of consolidation of a rural part of a neighbouring borough in the late 1980s, a major part of the city Sutton Coldfield, is now seeking formal parish council status. However, this Birmingham example may be a one-off, as it is widely regarded as a ‘thin end of the wedge’ tactic, which would allow the area (previously an independent Royal Borough before the English local government reform of 1974) to eventually seek fully independent status.

In recent years however, most of the interest in community governance has focused on non-elected bodies, drawing up concepts of participative rather than representative democracy. This Briefing Note seeks to show the implications of following both pathways to community governance.

### **3 Research question 1: What roles and functions should or could a tier of community democratic governance fulfil?**

We have considered this research question from two standpoints - community governance as neighbourhood governance and community governance as governance of communities of interest.

In exploring these issues, we have sought to identify some roles and functions which community governance could essentially take over from political Executives in principal authorities; some roles which they could share with Executives; and some roles which they should not play. In considering the relevant range of roles or functions that community governance might perform, we need to be clear about which rationale of the several potentially underlying community governance that we wish to espouse. Some roles and functions which can be justified under one rationale do not make any sense under other rationales.

#### *Community governance as neighbourhood governance*

Four of the 30 contributors to the recent report *The Future Town Hall* (LGIU, 2014), saw the future of local government being rooted in neighbourhood governance. Lord Shipley, Government Cities Advisor, suggested for example: “Local government will be firmly rooted in neighbourhoods with parish and town councils at the heart of local democracy ... They will procure neighbourhood services from wherever they wish and they will decide levels of council tax” (LGIU, 2014: 45). Indeed, given the strong movement over the past 10 years to micro-commissioning in the form of personalisation, we might expect a similar drive towards community commissioning - if individuals can commission their own individual services, why not neighbourhoods commissioning their own collective services?

Lowndes and Sullivan (2008: 57-59) provide four distinct but interlocking rationales for neighbourhood governance. In this section, we set out these rationales and explore what they imply in terms of the potential roles and functions of neighbourhood governance:

- The civic rationale: citizen participation and active communities

The civic rationale is based upon the proposition that neighbourhood units of governance give more opportunity for citizens to participate effectively in decisions, building on the classic arguments of Mill (1869) and Rousseau (1993) in favour of local self-government. This is a logical extension of the European Charter of Self-Government, which commits states to the principle of subsidiarity, although it is often applied mainly in relation to principal local authorities, rather than at 'neighbourhood' level.

The argument here is that neighbourhood governance is geographically more accessible to citizens and that neighbourhoods have fewer citizens. Consequently, direct participation is more feasible - it is easier to inform people about chances to participate and to tell citizens about the potential options and their likely outcomes. In addition, citizens have incentives to engage because it is at the neighbourhood level that they use many of their most important public services, and experience the issues which are most likely to mobilise them. The neighbourhood may therefore be more than just the most appropriate space within which to exercise 'voice and choice' - it may be a space within which they 'co-produce' the policies and services that mean most to them.

Pushing this argument further, we might see the neighbourhood as giving rise to a new kind of citizen – the 'everyday maker', who actively pursues community well-being in the neighbourhood but outside established political notions of 'citizenship' which emphasise relationships to the state (Bang, 2005).

Normatively, neighbourhoods are more likely than larger units to encapsulate homogenous communities and to be characterised by shared values, beliefs and goals, so it may be easier to address 'collective action problems'. It may also be easier under such circumstances, for citizens to perceive a relation between their own self-interest and the public good, reducing the costs associated with official enforcement.

*Roles and functions appropriate for neighbourhood governance under this rationale:* This rationale focuses on the possibility of neighbourhood governance allowing a much more intense and meaningful dialogue between citizens and the state, and those who provide public services. In terms of types of 'co-production', this rationale focuses more on co-deciding policies and the co-commissioning, co-design and co-assessment of services, rather than co-delivery. However, it also does not exclude the possibility that as well as commissioning some local services at neighbourhood level, neighbourhood governance might involve co-delivery by local people.

*Roles and functions that community governance need not undertake under this rationale:* As this rationale focuses on the neighbourhood as an arena for engagement, it does not itself necessitate that any services be provided at neighbourhood level. Indeed, it might be argued that citizens will be more able forcibly to express their views about service provision if the neighbourhood is not implicated in this provision.

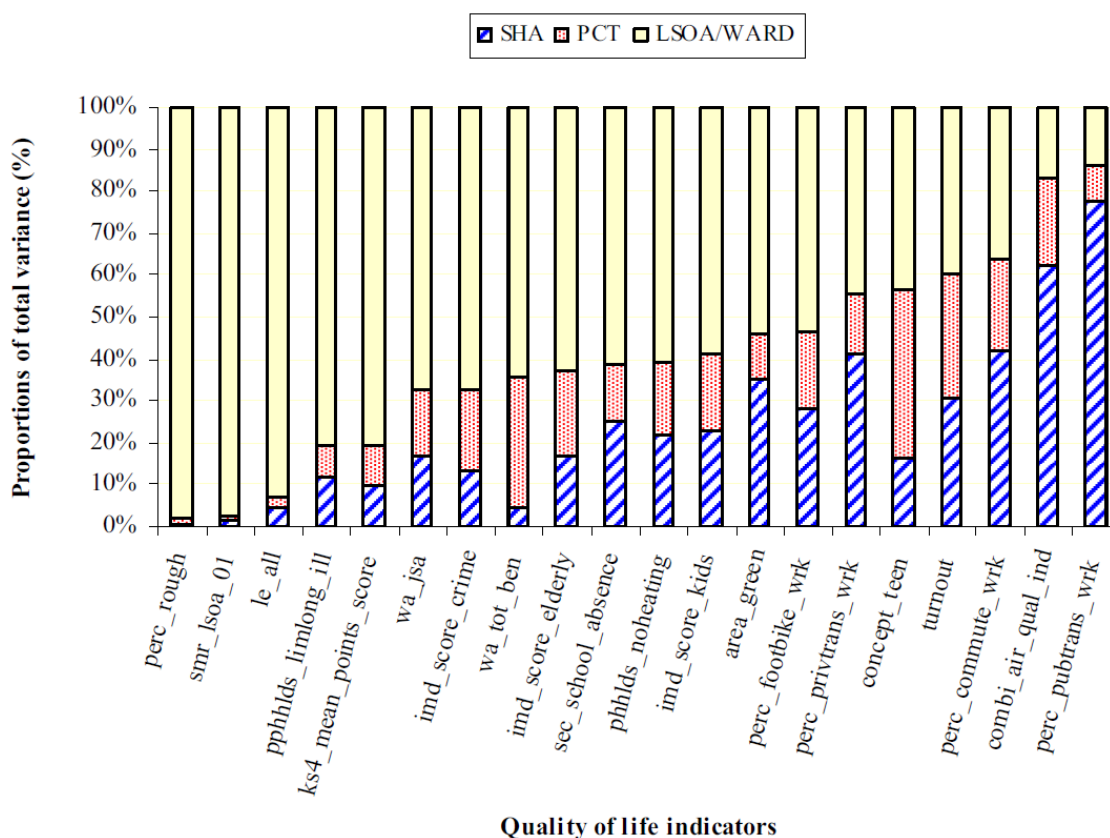
- The social rationale: citizen well-being and stakeholder collaboration

Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) suggest that the social rationale is based on two propositions about why neighbourhoods are a suitable arena for local governance. First, the neighbourhood is where the family or household ‘touches’ the realm of governance, seeing what works but also locating the blockages and disconnects arising from fragmentation in service delivery and decision-making. Moreover, neighbourhood governance offers the best prospect for ‘joining-up’ local action to provide a more integrated approach to citizen well-being. Since neighbourhood governance has available to it the personal experience of citizens and understanding of their holistic well-being as a result of public interventions, it is an important arena for innovation in the design of public services and of collaborative decision-making (through multi-agency and community-led partnerships).

An interesting illustration of the potential for neighbourhood intervention is given in Figure 1, which shows that most of the variation across areas in 2001 in quality of life variables such as life expectancy (*le\_all*), standardised mortality rate (*smr\_lsoa\_01*), educational achievement rates at Key Stage 4 (*ks4\_mean\_points\_score*) and local crime rates (as recorded in the Index of Multiple Deprivation) (*imd\_score\_crime*) was at the small area level (‘lower standard output area’ or ‘ward’ level), whereas for teenage conceptions (*concept\_teen*) it was much more at SHA or PCT levels, suggesting that public service organisations at these levels had more chance to influence outcomes on the latter variable than on the former variables (Jacobs et al., 2009: 16).



**Figure 1: The proportion of variance in quality of life indicators attributable to Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs), Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and small areas (intra-class correlation coefficients) (Source: Jacobs et al., 2009: 15) <sup>1</sup>**



Under this rationale, neighbourhood arrangements enable pursuit of the long-term strategic policy goals in society where there are particular benefits from a holistic and inclusive approach to achieving quality of life improvements for citizens. Again, neighbourhood action can help to build associative or stakeholder democracy which may operate outside state-initiated governance networks, in new politico-social communities that are in contact with but not conditioned by the state. Moreover, neighbourhoods are more likely to give rise to both common identities, which may foster loyalty and emotional commitment so that citizens are more likely to harbour positive emotions in relation to community matters and also community cohesion, reducing the costs associated with official enforcement (although Lowndes and Sullivan actually treat both these advantages of neighbourhoods under the civic rationale).

<sup>1</sup> Key can be found at Appendix A

*Roles and functions that could be devolved to neighbourhood governance under this rationale:*

As with the civic rationale, the social rationale particularly justifies the involvement of citizens in co-deciding policies and co-commissioning, co-designing and co-assessing public services, rather than co-delivery. It also justifies neighbourhood governance becoming a prime arena for experiments with new forms of joined-up service provision to achieve holistic outcomes for citizens and new forms of citizen collective action to influence service commissioning. Even more than under the civic rationale, the social rationale suggests the importance of neighbourhood governance having the chance to influence all commissioners of public services, from all parts of the public sector not just their local authority. Moreover, it justifies a strong role for neighbourhood governance bodies in co-regulation of public service providers, or in certain cases, some role in their provision.

*Roles and functions that community governance need not undertake under this rationale:* Under this rationale, as with the civic rationale, there is no implication that any public services be provided at neighbourhood level. However, in divided local authorities where principal authorities are believed by some communities or social groups systematically to ignore their needs and interests, this rationale would justify self-organising by such communities both to commission and deliver services more appropriate to their overall well-being. However, such activities cannot be interpreted entirely positively since they arise from the deficiencies of political representation in the principal authorities, rather than simply from the advantages that can be reaped from neighbourhood governance which in this instance might be regarded as the 'second-best' solution.

- The political rationale: accessibility, responsiveness and accountability

The political rationale suggests first that citizens can access neighbourhood governance more easily and are more knowledgeable about the issues at stake. Second, leaders at the neighbourhood level are more likely to be responsive to citizen views, and to have direct experience of the matters at hand. Third, citizens are better able to hold leaders to account because leaders' deliberations and actions are more visible to citizens, as are the consequences of their decision-making (e.g. the outcomes in the locality). These benefits derive from neighbourhood units being accountable to a smaller citizenry and physically closer to them. As a result, citizens are likely to have first-hand experience and knowledge of the issues at

stake, so they can both co-produce policy by making informed inputs into policy-making and also hold the services to account. Moreover, they are also more likely to know local leaders personally and have more opportunities to interact with them.

*Roles and functions appropriate for neighbourhood governance under this rationale:* The political rationale entails citizens feeling that they know about and understand how decisions are made locally and can influence those decisions. This may well imply very small neighbourhoods. Where these conditions obtain, the political rationale particularly justifies neighbourhood commissioning of locally-appropriate services, especially where there are differences between neighbourhoods in types of need or priorities between services, as perceived by local residents. Such neighbourhood commissioning however also entails neighbourhood budgets, which are sufficient to cover the extra expense of locally determined priorities (over and above any minimum standards set by the principal authority to apply across the jurisdiction). In addition, it justifies involving neighbourhood bodies to give a community voice on the collective benefits and costs of infrastructure (in addition to the individual voices of those stakeholders who make representations to the principal authority on their own behalf), where the neighbourhood is one of many affected. This means that the final decision clearly lies with the whole authority, if not regional or national decision makers.

*Roles and functions that community governance need not undertake under this rationale:* This rationale does not apply where neighbourhoods are so large that citizens do not feel personally able to influence the decisions arrived at in the relevant neighbourhood governance bodies. The size of such neighbourhood governance bodies may vary significantly across the country – it is likely to be larger in areas with stable populations and strongly shared values but to be much smaller in areas with high population churn or very diverse cultures. In this latter case, community governance through communities of place may simply be inappropriate, so that mechanisms to promote community governance through communities of interest (which may have little or no relation to place) become of central importance (see next section).

- The economic rationale: efficiency and effectiveness

The economic rationale suggests that neighbourhood governance can make more efficient and effective use of available resources. This can be driven by several factors. From the services demand side, it is easier at the neighbourhood level to identify diverse citizen needs and to provide appropriate services. Moreover, from the citizens' point of view, small units of governance may actually be more efficient than larger ones because they offer citizens a range of tax/service deals and citizens can move to another jurisdiction if they prefer its 'deal' (Tiebout, 1956). Moreover, digital communications enable the neighbourhood to act as an effective commissioner of services without the constraints of direct service delivery (Bovaird, 2003; Bovaird and Loeffler, 2010).

From the side of local public service costs, there has been a longstanding focus by economists on economies of scale. This has been reinforced by the reluctance of many mainstream services in principal authorities to provide costings for more neighbourhood-oriented service delivery approaches (e.g. the potential costs of a 'minimum standard' of service which has to be delivered authority-wide, with costings for higher standards which could be commissioned by neighbourhood bodies). The downside of economies of scale, namely services appearing (and often being) remote from citizens, has less frequently been quantified (Bovaird, 2013). Moreover, it is easier in neighbourhoods to identify and limit wasteful organizational processes, which do not contribute to value added at local level. Again from the cost side, some service delivery can be done more efficiently at neighbourhood level, where local people can carry out jobs that require low expertise at lower costs and with greater speed than organisations which have been commissioned through large-scale, inflexible procurement and contracting processes. It is also important to recognise that such local service delivery, even if it turns out to do some things inefficiently, is unlikely to affect council spend much, while being more responsive to local needs and giving local people more commitment to the governmental system overall (which is seen as a benefit under the civic rationale, rather than the economic rationale).

Rather than economies of scale, neighbourhood governance bodies deliver economies of scope – i.e. the benefits which come from 'bundling' those services which belong together at the point of delivery – strangely, these economies of scope have generally been under-researched by local government economists, even though they constitute the main rationale for local government from the economics perspective (Bovaird, 2014).

There is a natural tendency to identify 'neighbourhood governance' with collective arrangements, such as neighbourhood committees or boards, community councils, etc. However, many of the functions which are required to fulfil the economic rationale could be carried out by a single person in a street or neighbourhood (the 'street warden', 'community warden', 'neighbourhood champion', 'local area co-ordinator', 'village agent', etc.). There have been many such experiments, which have generally be evaluated to be successful and to have provided value for money (Wilson et al, 2008) but they have generally not been sustained. Most recently, the coalition government in Westminster has launched 'community organisers', which have been claimed to share many of the same aims as these local area coordinators but as there is only approximately one community organiser for every five principal authority councillors, their ability to mobilise action at neighbourhood level seems likely to be limited.

*Roles and functions appropriate for neighbourhood governance under this rationale:*

In principle, this rationale suggests the commissioning of a platform of mutually-reinforcing services which achieve outcome mixes, the desirability of which is judged significantly differently from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. There is little research directly on this topic. However, the indirect evidence suggests it is likely to be a very important factor. After all, spending patterns differ very widely between different local authorities – something which has brought many comments from the various external audit bodies. More particularly, spending patterns tend to vary significantly between parishes, even adjacent parishes (Ellwood et al, 1991; Pearce and Ellwood, 2002).

*Roles and functions that community governance need not undertake under this rationale:*

Services which are subject to large economies of scale are unlikely to yield value for money when provided at neighbourhood level. This is likely to apply to all services delivered through a costly infrastructure of networked channels – e.g. utilities, highway construction etc. However, the rationale for economies of scale in all local public services is now coming under question (Bovaird, 2014), as modern technology tends to be much more flexible than previously and local public services are understood to be more about co-production of public outcomes with service users and less about delivery of pre-determined services to users.

- Overall issues arising from the four rationales for neighbourhood governance

These four rationales for neighbourhood governance are a crude but hopefully productive way of illustrating the different perspectives from which neighbourhood governance can be approached, each providing a different set of potential benefits and disbenefits.

When considering community governance from the neighbourhood perspective, we have to be aware of the limitations of the concept of 'neighbourhood'. Bailey and Pill (2011: 940) point out that the neighbourhood is a geographical definition of space which confers identity and meaning for residents and other stakeholders, but which then takes on an administrative, political and sometimes socially constructed reality. Indeed, neighbourhood is often defined more on the basis of administrative convenience and political representation than on social relationships or the ability to achieve economies of scale. Although neighbourhoods can contain many sub-groups and some dysfunctional features, this is often overlooked in the interests of delivering a relatively standardised set of policy objectives. Moreover, neighbourhood-based policies often disregard wider, structural processes which influence education, employment opportunities, health, life chances, etc. While evidence suggests that successive government programmes of complex intervention in the most deprived areas have had only limited impact in changing deep-seated inequalities, community engagement has brought positive outcomes in many locations. However in the UK in the period from 2010, neighbourhood policy while remaining a locus for policy, has shifted fundamentally away from redistribution towards a philosophy of self-help with few if any additional resources.

The four models presented above each helps to bring out different aspects of the concept of neighbourhood governance. In practice of course, there are considerable overlaps between e.g. both the civic and social rationale's focus in particular on the role of citizen voice, although the former emphasises the value of citizen voice in making collective decision-making work better, while the latter emphasises the role of citizen voice in making services more cost-effective in terms of citizen outcomes and public value achieved from public spending.

Moreover, it is clear that choices have to be made between the benefits offered under each rationale, e.g. some economies of scale may have to be sacrificed to allow services to be commissioned and/or delivered at neighbourhood level (a loss under the economic rationale) in order to ensure that local people have more commitment to the governmental system overall (a benefit under the civic rationale). Again, if we wish to reap the benefits of micro-commissioning by individuals through personal budgets for social care services (and perhaps some health, education, training and leisure services), some options for neighbourhoods commissioning of collective services may become limited. These choices are considered in more detail when we examine the options for different approaches to community governance towards the end of this Briefing Note.

*Community governance as governance of communities of interest:*

*Communities of interest* are groups of people who share an identity (e.g. Welsh language speakers), an activity or experience (e.g. choral singing) or a common aim (e.g. improvement of rural transport services). The successful functioning of these groups do not, in general, depend on physical proximity of the members to each other, although members may indeed come together in a single location from time to time. They generally work through networks, which may or may not have formal organisational structures and processes.

Complex personal identities, shared experiences and shared aims can have an important influence on how individuals want to engage with the public sector and shape local decisions. Engagement with citizens based solely on the neighbourhoods in which they live, may not be meaningful for everybody – for many people, belonging to their community of interest may matter much more than belonging to their neighbourhood, so working with them will necessitate engagement with their communities of interest. Because such communities tend to be well-connected, they can usually be reached quite easily, albeit not face-to-face, in exercises to co-commission and co-design local public services. For example, the Young Lambeth Co-operative is involving young people at ward level to assess local needs, as part of its co-commissioning approach (see: [www.younglambethcoop.co.uk](http://www.younglambethcoop.co.uk)).

This may be especially true for communities of interest who are minorities (or even almost invisible) in their neighbourhoods, so that they might otherwise find it difficult to influence decisions, e.g. ethnic minority groups, people with disabilities and the lesbian and gay community. Encouraging greater active participation in local decisions and community life through engaging with communities of interest may be a first step to broader bridging between

different communities (DCLG 2009). For example, the successful Village Agent project in Gloucestershire has been extended to create a network of six Community Agents working with specific black and minority ethnic (BME) communities dispersed throughout the county (Willis and Dalziel, 2009).

Communities of practice form one particular type of community of interest – these are “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (<http://wenger-trayner.com/theory/>).

Even in small communities of place, overlapping communities of interest can be formed. Given the huge expansion of digital communication, communities of interest can span the world with little difficulty, never mind the neighbourhood. In today’s world it also seems more common for people to have a sense of identifying with several communities of interest than in earlier ages, although people have never been limited to a single interest (Scottish Environment Link, no date). This means that local community decision-making may need to consider the interests of people who do not live locally but who definitely feel themselves interested in decisions which might be made locally. For example, decisions made by Natural Resources Wales on whether or not to notify areas as Sites of Special Scientific Interest can give rise to representations from the international scientific community, as well as people who came from that area but now live in faraway parts of the world.

In spite of the examples presented here of how such communities of interest can be involved in community governance, some limitations have to be acknowledged. Given that there may be no practical way of determining the ‘boundaries’ of communities of interest and practice – anyone who wishes to join is likely to be able to join – the role and functions which such communities can contribute to the overall picture of community governance, may be more limited than with neighbourhood-based communities. In particular, communities of interest may be very effective in mobilising action, where their networking is well co-ordinated and the level of commitment of members is high but they may not be able to claim any degree of ‘representativeness’ or legitimacy, other than in terms of the views of their current membership. At an informal level of course, ‘representatives’ of communities of interest (as with representatives of communities of place) emerge through a wide variety of mechanisms, often with purely informal but very real, assent from their community (Scottish Environment Link, no date) – however, they generally cannot prove how representative they are, so that other levels of governance cannot treat them as fully representative.



Finding mechanisms for providing a wider and deeper role for communities of interest in the decisions of principal authorities was a major rationale for the move to Local Strategic Partnerships in England after 2000 (driven originally by the requirement to have such partnerships in Neighbourhood Regeneration Areas), followed by Neighbourhood Partnerships in Scotland and Local Service Boards in Wales. However, it also provided a major challenge to which convincing answers were not found in many principal authorities (Russell et al., 2009; Audit Commission, 2010). However, one advantage which these local authority-wide partnerships have is that they can engage in meaningful discussion with major third sector organisations, which do not have a strong place-based element to their work (e.g. the ‘nationals’ such as Age UK or Barnardo’s). Eliminating such authority-wide mechanisms, as has largely happened in England since 2010, has the corresponding disadvantage of diminishing the voice of these large third sector organisations.

*Neighbourhood charters to establish citizen rights and responsibilities in community governance:*

One way to make clear the purposes, priorities and constraints associated with community governance is to set out its principles in neighbourhood charters. (This is also potentially possible in dealing with communities of interest but we have not found literature on this topic.) Such charters are voluntary agreements involving residents, service providers, elected representatives and other bodies with an interest in a defined locality, working together to improve conditions through a process of negotiating, agreeing and monitoring a charter, which provides a structure in which all the benefits of place-based management can be realised (Neighbourhood Management, 2009). In the Neighbourhood Charters pilot programme run by the National Neighbourhood Management Network on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government, 12 neighbourhoods demonstrated that “local charters can be a driving force for positive change in local communities” (Neighbourhood Management, 2009: para 8.1), residents and service providers engaging in a two-way dialogue to improve local services from both a user and a supplier perspective.

An evaluation of the benefits from the adoption of these neighbourhood charters, conducted by the Institute for Political and Economic Governance, University of Manchester (IPEG, 2010: 3) concluded that “A combination of service accountability, performance monitoring, and intelligence gathering about local needs and priorities resulted in improvements to services and neighbourhoods. There were many examples of improvements to service delivery and to the neighbourhoods, including efficiency gains, mostly focused on environmental services and conditions, as a result of contracts”. However, this evaluation was not able to consider the longer-term outcomes of the charters.

The concept of neighbourhood charters could be developed to extend to a wider range of community rights or entitlements, this time from the point of view of residents rather than local authorities. For example, it could include the community right to challenge or to bid, as in the Localism Act 2011 in England. Indeed, it could even go further to give a right to community influence over local government spend, e.g. by voting regularly on the proposed local authority budget, as in Switzerland. Alternatively it might give communities the right to challenge in the courts within a given time, any decision made by their neighbourhood council or board as in Sweden. In such a system, it would be important to have arrangements which are likely to avoid ‘vexatious complaints’, perhaps through a different kind of scrutiny board at local level.

#### **4 Research question 2: How do the potential roles and functions of community democratic governance contrast with the roles and functions currently performed by town and community councils and what do we understand about the factors that shape and influence those roles and functions?**

There are many different models of community democratic governance in operation around the world. Even in the UK, the systems in place in the four countries display marked differences. In answering this question, we will focus first on the UK experience, especially in relation to town and parish councils in England and community councils in Scotland then contrast this with some international experience - in particular systems in France, Norway and the USA.

Lowndes and Sullivan (2008: 62) propose that there exist in terms of real-life observable structures and processes in the English urban context, four ideal types of neighbourhood governance: (1) neighbourhood empowerment; (2) neighbourhood partnership; (3) neighbourhood government; and (4) neighbourhood management (see Table 1). While developed explicitly to explain the English situation, this table neatly sums up the neighbourhood governance arrangements which are found in many other parts of the world as well. In exploring Research Question 2, we will pay special attention to the neighbourhood government approach, which generally operates through directly-elected councils at neighbourhood level.

**Table 1: Forms of neighbourhood governance: four ideal types**

	<b>Neighbourhood empowerment</b>	<b>Neighbourhood partnership</b>	<b>Neighbourhood government</b>	<b>Neighbourhood management</b>
<b>Primary rationale</b>	Civic	Social	Political	Economic
<b>Key Objectives</b>	Active citizens and cohesive communities	Citizen well-being and regeneration	Responsive and accountable decision making	More effective local service delivery
<b>Democratic device</b>	Participatory democracy	Stakeholder democracy	Representative democracy	Market democracy
<b>Citizen role</b>	Citizen: voice	Partner: loyalty	Elector: vote	Consumer: choice
<b>Leadership role</b>	Animateur, enabler	Broker, chair	Councillor, mini-mayor	Entrepreneur, director
<b>Institutional forms</b>	Forums, Co-production	Service board, mini-LSP	Town councils, and committees	Contracts, charters

*Source:* Lowndes and Sullivan (2008: 62).

### *Community government in England*

In England, parish and town councils (called 'local councils' by the National Association of Local Councils, which represents most of them) cover much of rural England and some urban areas. They may resolve to style themselves 'parish', 'town', 'neighbourhood', 'community' or 'village' councils (and indeed a small number are known as 'city councils', in areas which have been granted city status by royal charter e.g. Salisbury, Truro, Ripon). In total, there are some 9,500 parish and town councils in England, some 730 community councils in Wales, and some 1,200 community councils in Scotland (but no equivalent organisations in Northern Ireland). NALC estimates that parish councils cover some 35% of the population of England, while Sandford (2014) states Welsh community councils cover 70% of the population of Wales (where they exist throughout the country with the exception of some urban areas in South Wales).

NALC (2013) highlights the contrast between Weston-super-Mare Town Council (North Somerset), which represents over 70,000 residents, and Hutton-le-Hole Parish Council (North Yorkshire), which has around 200 residents, pointing out that the annual budgets of local councils can range from just a few hundred pounds to several million pounds. However, as the representative body for town and parish councils in England, NALC naturally stresses that even a council with a limited budget can still be a vital focal point for the community and can provide it with a stronger voice in articulating its needs to partners such as principal authorities. As Sandford (2014) notes, both the current Government and its predecessors have spoken favourably of parish councils. The 2006 local government white paper, *Strong and prosperous communities* stated:

We will make it clear that there will be a presumption in favour of the setting up of parish councils so that local authorities will be expected to grant communities' requests to set up new parish councils, except where there are good reasons not to, and that existing parish councils are not to be abolished against the wishes of local people.

The Coalition Government's 2013 consultation paper on setting up new parish councils said:

We believe that localism is best achieved when it is led by the local communities themselves. We see town and parish councils as playing a vital role in helping local people to make this happen; it is for this reason we want to support those neighbourhoods who want to set up a parish council.

In spite of these positive statements, in practice an English parish or town council has very few statutory duties and those which it does have relate to the way it does its business – e.g. holding of meetings, the management of its finances and the preparation of annual accounts – rather than the services in which it becomes involved.

Its discretionary powers are generally concurrent with those of district councils, but in practice most lack the capacity to undertake the provision of public services, and concern themselves with local environmental, community and amenity issues (Sandford, 2014). Indeed the only power available *exclusively* to parish councils and not to other tiers of government, relates to getting land for allotments. However, it does have the discretion to exercise a range of statutory powers related to the provision or support of certain services or facilities which benefit its area, and/or the residents who live there (NALC, 2013: 6-7).

Alan Pike (2006: 4) shows how much can be done on this basis if a parish works closely with the local authorities in its area: “Lichfield City Council describes its role as working with Lichfield District Council and Staffordshire County Council to ‘provide and supplement local government services within the city.’ It provides these services to almost one-third of the district council’s total population, and they include maintaining parks, open spaces, highway verges and footpaths; allotments; markets; a museum; street furniture; community halls; grants; twinning and Christmas lights.” In addition, under the *Localism Act 2011*, a parish council may use the General Power of Competence but must first formally resolve that it is an ‘eligible council’. Under this Act, parish and town councils may also develop a ‘neighbourhood plan’, which must be in broad conformity with the local structure plan. After its development in consultation with the community, this plan must be subjected to an examination in public, then subject to a local referendum, and if a ‘yes’ vote is obtained it will become the land-use plan for the parish area. By February 2014 seven areas had passed the referendum stage and seen their plans adopted, with some 500 further areas believed to be developing plans (Sandford, 2014: 11). Neighbourhood plans may also be developed by neighbourhood forums where no parish council exists. Although explicitly land-use in their orientation, these plans can naturally become a focus for more general strategic thinking about the priorities in an area and therefore boost the status and ability to mobilise change of the organisation which is taking the lead on them.

In the exercise of its statutory duties and discretionary powers, a parish council has the right to employ staff, own and manage premises, enter into contracts and provide services. It can generate income from renting premises, or from the services or facilities which it provides (e.g. sports facilities, off street car parks) or by receiving grants for projects – however, its main source of income is normally the precept levied on the residents in its area (and incorporated into a local resident’s council tax bill).

Moreover, a parish council is able receive 15% of the revenues from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) arising from a development that they have chosen to accept (25% in areas with a neighbourhood development plan in place), to be spent within five years. Under these proposals this money could be used by councils for community projects such as re-roofing a village hall, refurbishing a municipal pool or taking over a community pub (Sandford, 2014). Where no parish or town council exists, DCLG guidance states that the local planning authority should retain this money and spend it in accordance with the wishes of the community. Ministers have suggested that this could become a significant extra source of funding for parish

councils. However, according to data from Planning's CIL Watch update service (Dunton, 2014), just 44 local authorities in England and Wales had adopted charging regimes by mid-2014, and more than half of eligible councils had yet to even publish plans for consultation. Whereas early expectations had been that some parish councils might receive receipts of several million pounds from new development, in practice parish councils had only reported CIL payments ranging up to £7,000, although several said they were expecting a significant rise due to proposed housing developments (Dunton, 2014).

NALC (2013: 28) provides an overview of the possible benefits of local councils:

- A local council has statutory powers which, if exercised, benefit its area or residents.
- Its councillors have a local connection to the area.
- Money raised is spent locally to address the priorities of the local council's area and residents.
- It may provide support to voluntary bodies.
- It may have access to grants to support the work it does.
- Its work is driven by committed councillors and delivered or supported by its staff.

In practice, it seems that the English parish and town councils have so few statutory duties and on the basis of their discretionary powers perform such a heterogeneous set of activities, that no clear lessons emerge on how they conform to the rationales set out for neighbourhood governance in the previous section, other than confirming the unique characteristic that they are directly elected and therefore can claim a degree of democratic legitimacy which is formally stronger than that of the other neighbourhood arrangements in Table 1. Even this claim is contested however, by those who accuse this level of government of being moribund, pointing out that electoral turnout can be very low in parish elections and that most seats are uncontested. Data here is very sparse but both Pearce and Ellwood (2002) and Pike (2006) observe that turnout in parish council elections in England is actually similar to turnout in elections of other types of local authority. This mirrors the findings of Waterston (1991) that turnouts of 40–45 per cent were the norm in the early 1990s, similar to those achieved in elections to the principal authorities serving rural areas. Uncontested seats however, are indeed at a high level - according to Woods et al. (2002: 5), elections only occurred in 28% of wards in parish, town and community in 1998-2000 where seats fell vacant.

However, it would be possible to examine the potential of this level of local government by seeing how the most active parish and town councils make use of their permissive powers – if significant cases could be found of high level achievements in terms of the benefits suggested above by NALC, then the case for exercising community governance through elected place-based councils would be reinforced. Unfortunately, we could find very little research along these lines. We will report here on one research exercise which partially took this approach although it was not designed with this purpose in mind, namely Bennett (2006), who conducted a study of the role and effectiveness of parish councils in Gloucestershire. The study consisted of a structured survey of all 292 parish clerks (with a response rate of 50%), semi-structured interviews with a sample of parish clerks and observations at a range of parish meetings (in the same parishes as the semi-structured interviews), as well as drawing upon other supplementary material. The conclusions on overall effectiveness and community participation include the following (Bennett (2006: 171-172) :

- The effectiveness of parish councils in Gloucestershire is extremely varied and often piecemeal in nature.
- Parish council meetings across the county are characterised by low attendance and a very narrow cross section of the community.
- Variations in the type and level of participation by individuals in community leadership are influenced by both individual factors and wider factors, such as the opportunities to pursue self-interest.
- The emergence of new organisations and actors in rural community governance has generated only a moderate shift in the way parish councils operate.
- Parish councils perceive a variety of functions and responsibilities. Their most shared perception is that they should represent their parishioners' views (86% of respondents). They further perceived they should: Improve the parish (80%), Maintain the parish (77%), Act as planning/legislative mediator (74%), Lead by example (66%), Protect the built environment (over 50%), Improve social welfare (34%). Taking these roles together, three different types of parish council can be identified - 'empowered parish councils' (particularly evident among the larger market towns), 'mediatory parish councils' and 'symbolic parish councils' (especially the smaller 'honey pot' villages in the Cotswolds).
- Parish councils consider that they have very little influence in the broader sphere of rural governance decision-making.



- The interaction of parish councils with local and central governmental bodies varies considerably – some have substantial interaction, at least with their district and county councils, others have very little or mainly negative interaction.
- Recent (i.e. pre-2006) government legislation on community involvement, partnership and participation has been slow to filter down to a large number of parish councils.
- The geography of partnership initiatives across the UK has emerged as a very uneven map of rural governance. This “map” is mirrored in the incidence of effective partnerships within rural politics in Gloucestershire.
- Many partnership initiatives in Gloucestershire still relied on a hand-picked elite, usually decided by the county or district council and ‘freezing’ out key community actors – indeed, there was often little involvement of the ‘community’ at any level, including formal involvement of the parish council.

These conclusions do not suggest that the current system of parish councils in Gloucestershire is adding much in general, to the governance of key issues in the county, although it may help to act as a watchdog over parish interests and provide a symbolic sense of identity to some residents. Nevertheless, they highlighted that there is enough flexibility within the current system for parish councils to be genuinely active and effective players in relation to important decisions within their area, if they so wish. This conclusion is in line with the conclusions of the Village Agent project in Gloucestershire, a successful project at parish level, where the contribution of the parish councils was hardly mentioned by the evaluation reports (Wilson et al., 2008; Willis and Dalziel, 2009), although the support of the county-wide Rural Community Council is acknowledged.

#### *Community government in Scotland*

Scotland has around 1,200 community councils, established under the *Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973*. They have no defined functions, although Section 51 (2) of the 1973 Act specifies that:

In addition to any other purpose which a community council may pursue, the general purpose of a community council shall be to ascertain, co-ordinate and express to the local authorities for its area, and to public authorities, the views of the community which it represents, in relation to matters for which these authorities are responsible, and to take such action in the interests of that community as appears to it to be expedient and practicable.

There is surprisingly little academic literature on the functioning or effectiveness of Scottish community councils – and very little evaluative material even in the ‘grey’ literature. The most systematic critique of the issues around neighbourhood policy in Scotland which we have been able to find comes from Peter Matthews (2012). This critique is in the context of regeneration and the contrast between area-based initiatives (ABIs), which were the main regeneration tool from the 1960s up to 2000 and the Community Planning approach which is local authority-wide, with its own ‘neighbourhood partnerships.’ Therefore has tended to pay much less attention to neighbourhood structures, such as community councils or specific types of regeneration boards. Matthews (2012: 19-20) writes: “In comparison to the local action of ABIs, community planning existed at a ‘strategic level’, as with LSPs in England, joining up large public sector organisations across a large area to focus broad strategic issues (Munro, Roberts and Skelcher, 2008). This strategic role was formalised in the 10-year Community Plan and the Single Outcome Agreement (Scottish Government, 2007). This difference between the local action and strategic policy became apparent as both local authorities in the two case studies undertaken developed neighbourhood governance structures. These new Neighbourhood Partnerships (Edinburgh) and Local Area Committees (Renfrewshire) struggled to engage neighbourhoods because of institutional barriers (Coaffee and Healey, 2003) and, as the interpretive approach suggests, different meanings of the local and the strategic. For example, in a meeting of Edinburgh’s strategic partnership Neighbourhood Partnerships were described by one manager as ‘delivery arms’ of the central partnership. This was a very different view from that of the nascent Neighbourhood Partnerships. They were struggling to have an impact on local policy implementation and actively change strategic policy, such as funding and transport priorities, to help their neighbourhoods.”

Matthews gives a very interesting example of the consequences emerging from these very different approaches to neighbourhood governance, which we will quote at length here.

*‘clean renfrewshire’*

The different understanding of the nature of policy action manifested itself in the everyday power dynamics and clashes of community planning. An example of this was the launch of the *clean renfrewshire* campaign. The Renfrewshire CPP had carried out a series of consultation workshops and a key issue raised was problems with littering (Renfrewshire Council, 2008). The local authority developed a strategy to tackle the problem which sought to change the culture of Renfrewshire residents. As was explained in presentations to community planning meetings, the campaign's slogan 'do your bit' reflected the desire of the local authority to work in 'a partnership with you, the community' and that the policy would lead to 'civic and economic regeneration'. This was the strategic meaning of *clean renfrewshire*, it would build on existing partnerships and help support the strategic aim of regeneration across the local authority.

At successive meetings, community activists understood one aspect of the policy very differently as it had a local meaning. Since 2003, Renfrewshire had employed Neighbourhood Wardens in deprived neighbourhoods to tackle anti-social behaviour. A key part of the implementation of *clean renfrewshire* was that these Neighbourhood Wardens would now become Community Wardens. In this new role they would work throughout Renfrewshire and their powers were extended to fining people for littering. The local experience of activists was that Wardens developed trusting relationships with local communities, including the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour. These Wardens were tangible regeneration. The concern of activists was that these good relationships would be eroded by this new enforcement role. Officers gave repeated reassurances that Wardens would be trained in conflict resolution, but these failed to appease the very concerned activists. From the strategic level, the local authority maintained that *clean renfrewshire* would be effective and that this was a priority that could not be disagreed with. Community activists understood *clean renfrewshire* as an imposition of control that would be resisted by people in their communities. They welcomed the wider campaign, but vociferously opposed this part of the proposals, fostering conflict. ...

... The *clean renfrewshire* policy was linked to a very nebulous idea of what 'regeneration' was – as a partnership between public authorities and communities working to tackle wicked issues and meeting the aims of the Community Plan. Strategy was attempting to close down conflict and debate as nobody could argue that tackling litter was a bad thing. However, the tangible action for local activists was the changed role for Neighbourhood Wardens, which could make their everyday lives worse, not better. Source: Matthews (2012: 20-21)

Not only does this point out the perils of seeking to bring about a wholesale replacement of one system of neighbourhood governance with another, it reminds us that previous systems are likely to leave a long-lasting footprint, which need to be understood and factored into policy. Indeed, it is clear that the more traditional neighbourhood focus of the previous generation of ABIs, with local accountability to tenants and residents exercised through association management committees, is still strong in parts of Scotland. For example, in Glasgow, these organisations now constitute the city's largest social landlord grouping, owning some 50,000 units, just over half the city's entire social housing stock (Robertson, 2014: 5).

Moreover, there are still strong voices suggesting that the new mechanisms may be ill-thought-out or simply superfluous. Bonney (2004: 45), for example, sees the Social Inclusion Partnerships in Scotland as explicitly Scottish Executive initiatives, established separately from local authorities although seeking (limited) local authority involvement. He suggests that they are a direct indication of a lack of faith by central government in local authorities and an attempt to work partly independently of them. They involve the establishment of ostensibly independent grant-holding voluntary bodies, constituted as companies limited by guarantee and with management boards purporting to represent local interests. He suggests there are question about the quality of their links to local communities (as well as their financial procedures and administrative competence). He also poses the question (p. 49) as to why local authorities in Scotland choose to consult the public through innovations like area forums and other devices, when there is already a systematic structure of statutory neighbourhood community councils charged with representing views of local residents to the local authority.

It is therefore not surprising that a recent report of the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy (2014: 15), which is closely associated with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, has recently concluded that the political culture in Scotland at local as well as national government, ensured that “far less decentralisation of political structures and empowerment of communities took place than was actually possible”. It suggests that Community Councils and the third sector have often been seen simply as local delivery mechanisms rather than as genuinely independent partners. “Concern for efficiency, and economies of scale, often prevented the localisation necessary to be effective through engaging and working with communities on their own terms. Decisions about the design and delivery of service were often national and local government down, rather than community up.” However, the Commission does not advocate specific measures to strengthen community councils at this stage – instead, it recommends a more far-reaching and in-depth review to put right the problems which it has identified in current democratic structures and processes in Scotland. It makes clear that it believes that the emerging solutions will involve a much stronger and deeper involvement of communities in governance in Scotland – but it leaves the shape of that new system to be worked out in the review process which it recommends.

#### *International experience with community government*

In some European countries a commitment to devolution to community level is embedded in the constitution. In Germany for example, with its 18,000 municipalities, the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) guarantees not only the right of elected councils to regulate all local affairs ‘on their responsibility’ but also their financial autonomy, including “the right of municipalities to a source of tax revenues based upon economic ability and the right to establish the rates at which these sources shall be taxed” (see <http://www.iuscomp.org/gla/statutes/GG.htm#28>). In France, all ‘territorial communities’ (which includes local communes and the higher level departments and regions) “may take decisions in all matters arising under powers that can best be exercised at their level... [T]hese communities shall be self-governing through elected councils and shall have power to make regulations for matters coming within their jurisdiction” (see [http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=898a00bd-182f-40f9-a690-c2fab883515&groupId=10180](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=898a00bd-182f-40f9-a690-c2fab883515&groupId=10180)). Although most European countries have now signed the *European Charter of Local Self-Government*, which defines and enshrines the principles of local self-government and of subsidiarity, this does not have the same force as constitutional protection for local government – Wilson and Game (2011: 167) point out that the Charter has no significant enforcement mechanisms and even if the UK is indeed non-compliant with several of its Articles, as has been suggested this will have no consequences of note. In France, under their constitutional protection, principal local authorities are often very local, exemplifying the characteristics of community governance - indeed 76% of the 36,565 (almost 1,000 times more than in the UK) municipalities contain populations of under 1,000. The concomitant is the very different approach to service delivery taken by French communes, where individual communes group together to develop the economies of scale to deliver services (Bevan, 2003: 28) – an approach similar to the ‘clustering’ by some UK parish and town councils, which has still not gone very far (CRC and NALC, 2009). Bevan points out that the commune is the basic unit of administration in French local government. While each commune serves a population which is, on average, about 1,600 people (but can often be much smaller), it has responsibility for a much broader range of local public services than the lowest tier of government in England. These responsibilities include water and gas supply, disposal of waste, maintenance of local highways, provision of nursery schools, running of primary schools, social security payments, employment of local police officers, drawing up local and land use plans, issuing planning permissions, environmental protection, social services, civil registry of births, marriages and deaths and running training programmes for the unemployed (Bevan, 2003).

However, many of the services are actually delivered by a large national provider (of which there are several in France), through a separate public private partnership with each cluster of local communes (West, 2005).

Elsewhere, Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) suggest the move to community governance has taken place in specific local authorities in response to particular local circumstances. For example, in the 1980s Barcelona's decentralisation to districts emerged out of the lobbying of an active neighbourhood movement in the city (Blakeley 2002). In the Netherlands the focus of municipalities on 'interactive governance' from the 1990s, reflected a new orientation of political elites toward the direct participation of citizens and other stakeholders in local decision-making, frequently combined with a neighbourhood approach (Denters and Klok 2005 ).

Aars (2003) has reported on the Norwegian democracy programme managed by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities. Twenty local authorities took part in this programme with various projects aimed at strengthening political involvement and activity among local residents. An invitation was sent to all Norwegian local authorities to submit project proposals. The democracy programme ran from 1996 to 2000. The participatory projects that comprise the programme "Democracy, participation and government" can be grouped into seven main categories:

- 1) Political parties.
- 2) Initiatives aimed at specific groups.
- 3) Community processes.
- 4) Participation for sustainable development.
- 5) User surveys as tools of democracy.
- 6) Information and communication technology (ICT) in local democracy.
- 7) Deliberative hearings.

One of the lessons learnt was that popular participation is to be regarded as a resource for a political system. Aars concluded that elites take part in a struggle to get ordinary citizens to confirm their elite positions and actively support the work that they do in this new policy area, called “democratisation policy”. A possible consequence is that ‘democracy’ and ‘public participation’ are not treated as integrated parts of the political process. Instead, democracy is conceived as a sector of its own. Thus, to local political elites public participation is only desirable as long as it does not influence actual political outcomes. Aars concluded that it was just as important for those local authorities that initiated democracy experiments to steer and delimit popular participation, as it was to stimulate that participation. Despite the diverse projects contained in the democracy programme, Aars suggested that efforts to enhance public involvement had been strictly directed by the political and administrative elites. The constant lament of the political elite about the lack of popular involvement could often be interpreted as a wish that more people would show interest in the important work which it performed. Thus, “to local political elites public participation is only desirable as long as it does not influence actual political outcomes” (Aars, 2003: 21).

Salzstein et al (2010: 161) argue that in the US, concern with community governance has a long history, in which a new version of political reform emphasised methods of electing more diverse city councils, increasing the use of those that mirror city populations and creating community-based government. Interest groups associated with the civil rights movement pressed for changes in representation (*City of Richmond v. U.S.*; *City of Mobile v. Bolden*). The courts became major players in these changes by looking closely at elected representation and hiring and promotion practices, frequently ruling in the direction of increased minority representation. Some cities created advisory neighbourhood councils, and administrators increased their sensitivity to neighbourhood concerns through decentralised city halls and community-based policing. DiGaetano and Strom (2003: 389) comment that in spite of the movement in US cities to corporatist governance forms such as PPPs, urban populism prevailed in some cities like Boston in the 1980s. This created a contrasting governance form because mayors and community activists put great stock in creating participatory mechanisms that allowed for grassroots mobilisation in the governing process.



This vision has motivated more recent changes. Beginning in 2000, some cities have changed their charters to something approaching a mayor–council system in which a full-time mayor is the chief executive and is not a member of the city council. The formation of political groups in neighbourhoods has also become much more common. Some cities responded through charter reform to incorporate neighbourhood groups into city governance -for example, in the neighbourhood council model adopted by the city of Los Angeles (Sonenshein 2004). (Salzstein et al. 2010: 167).

Although such neighbourhood arrangements often have mainly advisory functions, they can be influential. For example, in 1975 New York City established 59 community districts, spread citywide over the five boroughs ranging in size from less than 900 acres to almost 15,000 acres, and in population from fewer than 35,000 residents to more than 200,000 ([http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/neigh\\_info/nhmap.shtml#](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/neigh_info/nhmap.shtml#)). Each district has a community board composed of 50 volunteer members, appointed for two-year terms by the Borough President, one-half of whom are nominated by the New York City Council members from that community district. Board members must reside, work or have some other significant interest in the community. Community boards wield no official authority but advise on a range of matters, including land use and zoning, identifying community needs as part of the City's budget process and working with government agencies to improve the local delivery of services. Indeed, they can concern themselves with any other matter relating to the welfare of the district and its residents. Each community board is led by a District Manager who runs the district office and implements procedures to improve the delivery of City services to the district. The main responsibility of the board office is to receive complaints from community residents, but it also undertakes local duties such as processing permits for block parties and many boards provide additional services and manage special projects, including organising tenants' associations, co-ordinating neighbourhood clean-up programs, and more (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/cau/html/cb/about.shtml>). Marcuse (1987) concluded that community

boards up to that point had exercised some real influence on the proposals by real estate developers to restructure parts of their neighbourhoods for commercial purposes, and had in this way redirected power to lower-income groups. More recent studies of regeneration and gentrification in New York have not appeared to study specifically the role of community boards. However, these findings have more recently been reinforced in the study by Musso et al. (2007) in Los Angeles, which concluded that “neighborhood councils have the potential to change elite-dominated governance through several network effects: development of bridging social capital-network relationships that cross-cut traditional community cleavages, broadening of horizontal networks that improve information required for collective action, and creation of new ties that elevate previously peripheral groups in the system of political communication”.

More recently Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) point to evidence from the US suggesting that an already highly decentralised system has become more so, partly due to the growth of ‘special purpose’ governments covering much smaller populations (Savitch and Vogel 2005), which are valued by citizens because of their efficient service delivery, regardless of reduced accountability (Foster 1997).

A different direction has been given to community governance by the movement towards ‘private neighbourhoods’, i.e. collective ownership of residential property, including homeowners’ associations, condominiums and co-operatives. This privatising of the American neighbourhood over the past 40 years has been described by Spiegel (1998) as “a large-scale, but piecemeal and incremental, privatisation of local government”. In a homeowners’ association, each person owns his or her home individually, while the association (which any new entrant into the area is required to join) is a separate legal entity that holds formal title to the “common areas” such as streets, parks, etc. It also enforces neighbourhood covenants with respect to the allowable uses and modifications of properties. In a condominium, all the individual owners have title to their own personal units and, as “tenants in common”, automatically also share a percentage interest in the “common elements”. In a co-operative, which is more likely to be a single building the entire property including the individually occupied housing units, is owned jointly. Nelson (2005) estimated that between 1970 and 2005 about one-third of all new housing units in the United States, were built within a private community association. About 10% of these housing units were in what are commonly referred to as ‘gated communities’. By 2012, such ‘private neighbourhoods’ contained 25.9 million homes and 63 million Americans (Community Associations Institute - <http://www.caionline.org/info/research/Pages/default.aspx>) and very often these private

communities were of neighbourhood size (Nelson, 2005). Although neighbourhood associations can only be created in new housing developments where homebuyers must agree to the association's legal authority as a condition of purchase, Nelson (2005) suggested that many established neighbourhoods might benefit from a private neighbourhood association, if a 'supermajority' of current property owners voted for it, arguing that gaining more secure control over the surrounding environment would potentially benefit many inner-city neighbourhoods that have physically deteriorated and suffer from crime, drugs and other social problems. However, this proposal does not appear to have been adopted anywhere in the USA and perhaps is most useful as a reminder of the direction in which neighbourhood governance might go if government does not take appropriate steps.

A further example of 'private neighbourhood governance' is provided by Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), which started in the USA but are now widespread internationally. Within the jurisdiction of a BID property, owners and/or occupants pay a compulsory special assessment to finance the provision of services additional to those of the general-purpose local government in which they are located (Justice and Goldsmith, 2008). The constituents of the BID determine (or at least acquiesce to), the choice of services and the allocation of their costs shares. As Helsley and Strange (1998) argue, private governments such as 'private neighbourhoods' and BIDs are a logical part of the larger polycentric context in which the provision and production of public goods and services is undertaken by general public governments and specialist, member-oriented private government. However, private governments become a matter of more-than-private concern when their decisions and actions have broader, 'public' implications. Moreover, these 'private governments', as non-governmental bodies, have been accused of being undemocratic – 'private neighbourhoods are said to give powers to their boards of directors, the use of which are not as strongly regulated as they would be if they were governmental bodies (Horn, 2008), while some BIDs are managed by externally appointed or self-perpetuating boards and allocate votes among members other than through a one-person-one-vote mechanism (Durose, et al., 2014: 8).

### **5 Research question 3: What can we learn about effective approaches to community democratic governance, such as area committees and neighbourhood management approaches, both within the UK and elsewhere in the world, which might be of interest to Wales?**

#### *Area committees, neighbourhood management and other 'indirect democracy' arrangements*

There are many different mechanisms for bringing communities into local governance structures and processes. The need is for a coherent, but not necessarily a single conduit, for bringing citizen voice into community governance. Indeed the process for parish council review in England, explicitly mentions that principal councils must also consider other (non-parish) forms of community governance when conducting a review (Sandford, 2014: 10). These may be seen either as alternatives to, or stages towards, the establishment of a parish council. The guidance mentions the following alternative forms of governance:

- Area committees.
- Neighbourhood management arrangements.
- Tenant management organisations.
- Area/community forums.
- Residents' and tenants' associations.
- Community associations.

Such mechanisms are now widespread in local government, both in the UK and internationally. Alan Pike (2006: 5) has described the situation in London: "A majority of London boroughs now have some form of area, neighbourhood or community council structure. Not all were set up for precisely the same purpose and they consequently differ considerably in structure and powers. Some are chaired by councillors, others by local residents. Some are part of a council's formal decision-making structure, others are purely consultative. Some are restricted to the council's responsibilities, while public services such as the NHS and Metropolitan Police participate in others. Regardless of such differences, however, London borough area forums have some similarities to parish councils."

Although advocates of parish councils and in a city context of neighbourhood councils, often deprecate the lack of a directly-elected leadership in such non-governmental mechanisms, this is also seen by others as a decided advantage. Considering the London situation again, Alan Pike (2006: 7) points out: "In its final report, the Commission on London Governance

acknowledged that urban parishes could bring benefits to communities in terms of representation, but questioned whether there would be real value added from introducing another tier of government into London. Specifically, some Commission members argued that:

1. Many roles and responsibilities of parish councils were already managed by area committees and neighbourhood arrangements in the boroughs.
2. There would be confusion over roles and responsibilities of parish and ward councillors.
3. There was evidence from other parts of the country of antagonism and negativity between the tiers, turf wars and a refusal to compromise.
4. The structure empowered 'Nimbyism' and could undermine attempts to equalise access to local services and advice across London.
5. There would be significant capital and running cost implications.
6. In terms of capturing communities, some inner London wards were only a few streets big and the Boundary Commission already took into account cultural factors and geographical boundaries when setting up ward boundaries.”

#### *The view of the public on their role in neighbourhood governance*

Pearce and Ellwood (2002) have highlighted that local councils have increasingly become proactive in seeking the views of residents and representing these views to other bodies, principally through the use of village appraisals and surveys of housing need. DEFRA has noted that an important element of achieving Quality Parish status will be that local councils should be representative of all parts of their communities (Bevan, 2003: 29).

However, these efforts are not always appreciated by local people. The Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy in Scotland appointed Ipsos MORI to undertake a telephone poll of a representative sample of 1,000 Scottish citizens around issues of local democracy. The findings (MORI, 2014) provide some valuable insights into the public's perception of neighbourhood governance and highlight many of the challenges and opportunities in respect of local democracy.

First, the problems. It is disturbing that 6 in 10 adults said that they do not feel part of how decisions which affect their community are made - an opinion shared among those of all ages and from deprived and affluent neighbourhoods alike.

Moreover, fewer than half of adults (44%), and only a third of young adults (34%), feel clear about who makes decisions on how local services are delivered in their area. The majority of people (60%) believe that decisions about public services are taken too far away from where they live and more than half (54%) think that central government controls more decisions about local decisions than it did in the past.

However, there were also some positives. There was a clear desire to have more involvement in improving the quality of life in their community - the vast majority of people (82%) agreed that they would like more say in how services are provided in their neighbourhood (42% strongly agreed). This desire to have a say in service provision is equally strong among those in Scotland's most deprived communities (83% agreed), in spite of the assumption often made that people in these communities feel more disengaged and less willing to participate. Again, more than three-quarters of respondents said that they would get more involved in their local community if it was easier to participate in the decisions that affect it, a figure that rose to 87% among those living in the most deprived neighbourhoods in Scotland. (Full results at [www.localdemocracy.info/scottish-public-opinion-survey](http://www.localdemocracy.info/scottish-public-opinion-survey)).

If we look at voter turnout as another indication of the public's perception of the mechanisms for neighbourhood governance, similar patterns emerge. Experiments in recent years with various local-level elections have not succeeded in bettering the local government performance on turnout (Pike, 2006: 13-14). The report of the evaluation of New Deal for Communities, Sheffield Hallam University (2005) showed that average turnout in New Deal board elections in 2003-04 was 23% (and these elections sometimes took place on wider franchises than the electoral register). As a proportion of the total electorate, participation in the early NHS foundation trust elections was exceedingly low. Clearly there is far more to the painstaking, long-term task of promoting community involvement than simply creating new institutions.

#### *Lessons from neighbourhood regeneration experiences*

As Paul Lawless (2006) has commented, UK governments for four decades have sought to tackle problems of urban deprivation through the designation of area-based initiatives (ABIs), which have typically been time-limited programmes designed to address either a particular issue, or a combination of problems, impacting on pre-defined urban or rural localities. In his detailed study of one set of ABIs, namely the New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative over 2000-2004, he found that NDC spending in the local area tended to go up when the local NDC

Board had a higher representation from local agencies and lower representation from local residents (Lawless, 2006: 2000). He explained this by suggesting that local residents on these Boards tended to get bogged down in detail (and often to revisit issues already decided). Neighbourhoods with more overlapping ABIs tended to be more successful in spending up to their allocated budgets, as this encouraged the joint planning of interventions. However, the larger the local authority the lower the amount which the 22 Round Two ND partnerships were able to spend. From the qualitative evidence, Lawless explained this on the grounds that NDCs in larger cities and authorities may be perceived as simply one initiative amongst many, whereas in smaller towns they tended to have a higher profile and higher-level political support (page 2,000). Finally, Lawless (2006) suggested that there has always been an inherent contradiction in the design of the NDC programme, in that the more central government pushed for NDCs to 'involve the local community', the less easy central government would find it to meet its objectives for programme, since these did not always equate with what local residents wanted to do.

The comparison of two approaches to residential renewal by Peter Matthews (2012), namely ABIs versus the council-wide strategic approach, supports the suggestion that engagement will be more effective at a local scale, taking advantage of neighbourliness and domesticity, particularly in deprived communities with strong bonding social capital. However, he suggested that the strategic approach could work if it focused on practical, tangible improvements – e.g. improvements to the stressed-built environment or environmental servicing. Rather than a time-limited ABI package that aims to “turn around” neighbourhoods and then is wound up, this strategic approach would then be a long-lived ABI that supported residents remaining for long periods in the neighbourhoods, while providing opportunities for those using the neighbourhood as an “elevator”. Regeneration could then be reinvented as positive state intervention into neighbourhoods, rather than state-led gentrification. However, this study by Matthews therefore suggested that neighbourhood programmes, supported by neighbourhood governance arrangements, could possibly be substituted by council-wide policies if they were sensitive to the needs of different neighbourhoods.

Pares et al. (2012: 27) conclude from an analysis of 10 case studies in Catalunya, that there has been an increasing acknowledgement of the need to create participatory mechanisms where citizens can take part in the diagnosis, design, monitoring and implementation of regeneration programmes. In addition to the 'classical' co-ordination arrangements such as

regeneration councils or committees, municipalities are increasingly experimenting with innovative participatory methodologies. The participatory forums and processes have gradually opened up to a wider range of stakeholders and has contributed to a more comprehensive approach to regeneration policy, as citizens tend to express a more holistic vision of the problem. However, they stress that in practice, stakeholders in the governance network frequently use channels of influence beyond formal structures (bilateral meetings, contacts, calls, official requests etc.) (Pares et al., 2012: 9).

### *The role of councillors in neighbourhood (or community) governance*

Local authority councillors in the UK are elected to 'represent their wards', which means they are already part of a 'local placed-based' community governance system. What should be their role in this system? This must depend to some degree on their capacity – there clearly needs to be some balance between the remit given to councillors and the resources which they have to undertake their role. While there have been many voices in recent years arguing that the UK is 'over-governed' with too many politicians, it has more citizens per politician than almost any other country in Europe, with 2,603 people per councillor compared to 118, 209 and 256 people per councillor in France, Austria and Sweden respectively (Wilson and Game, 2011: 247). Indeed these figures mask the size of the task facing English councillors, where in 2005 county councillors each had to represent on average over 10,300 electors, while Metropolitan and London Borough councillors had over 4,000 electors each on average (Purdam et al., 2008: 25). There are only about 22,700 councillors in principal local authorities in the UK (see [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/8147353.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8147353.stm)). Of course, for a fair comparison with other European countries it could be argued that we should add in the number of councillors in parish and town councils, of which there are probably just under 100,000 (see [http://www.nalc.gov.uk/About\\_NALC/What\\_is\\_a\\_parish\\_or\\_town\\_council/All\\_about\\_local\\_councils.aspx](http://www.nalc.gov.uk/About_NALC/What_is_a_parish_or_town_council/All_about_local_councils.aspx)) – which would bring the total to 120,000. This would work out at over 500 people per councillor, still very high by the standards of many European countries. However, if all urban areas were to have neighbourhood councils, as some have proposed, this might well bring the English level of population to councillor to the same levels (or even lower) than in most other parts of Europe.



White et al. (2006: 7) suggested from an extensive UK and international literature review and 17 case studies, that effective links between elected representatives and neighbourhood arrangements are essential for re-engaging citizens with government. They found evidence of success in involving councillors of principal authorities in neighbourhood arrangements across a broad area of activity (but with some tensions), both through councillors forming parts of horizontal interlinked local networks and through vertical integration, with councillors providing effective bottom-up and top-down links between neighbourhoods and the corporate centres of local authorities. Their evidence indicated that success of ward councillor involvement in neighbourhood working depended on:-

- councillors are not too wedded to the previous 'way of doing things';
- partners from all sectors, officers and councillors are clear about councillors' role in the neighbourhood and councillors are willing to take a backseat if necessary;
- there are no local rivalries about which institutions represent the neighbourhood;
- councillors and partnerships have officer support to improve services at the neighbourhood level;
- there is a clear delivery mechanism for delivering action plans;
- there is proactive, widespread and creative community engagement; and
- councillors have been supported by training and development programmes.

However, other researchers have highlighted some of the potential weaknesses in the current role of elected members in community governance, including:

- the poor links which the public have with elected members, both because they are not aware of them and because they do not know how to contact them;
- deficiencies in the systems in local authorities for councillors to pass on information which they believe to be germane to community governance and to get action taken – both because the current systems in principal authorities are not responsive to neighbourhood issues and because 'backbench' elected members have little power to get things done, compared to Executive members;
- the need for councillors to be more diverse, to represent the community (so that they link more directly to the main communities of interest in the local area);
- the need to find a wider range of interesting roles for backbench members, which go further than 'scrutiny', so that more people are prepared to come forward as elected members;

- the inappropriate importation of ‘Westminster’ models of political organisation in local government (e.g. the ‘overview and scrutiny’ role which apes Select Committees, but without their powers);
- the declining ability of political parties to support their members with information, training and co-ordination in policy matters;
- the low power which backbench members have to ‘make a difference’, relative to the role of activists in the local community; and
- the lack of neighbourhood level support systems for most councillors, which requires back-up from ‘community organisers’ on a much wider and more numerous basis than those currently being recruited in initiatives by central government.

The first two problems suggest that the traditional role of elected members as a two-way conduit between the local authority and the community, is often broken or in disrepair. The following problems suggest a range of issues which need to be addressed if local government is to attract a wider range of members, who can take on the key roles needed to make community governance a convincing process to the public.

#### *The need for variable geographies in neighbourhood governance*

The definition of a ‘neighbourhood’ varies significantly in different policy contexts and from place to place in the UK. This is highlighted by White et al. (2006) who include as ‘neighbourhoods’ a range of different local areas, including:

- the streets and blocks of about 50-300 residents where association, informal social control and mutual aid are key governance tools;
- ‘home neighbourhoods’ or proximity neighbourhoods of *circa* 500-2,000 residents, bringing together a few blocks;
- public or strategic neighbourhoods of 4,000-15,000 residents where more structured governance starts to make sense; and
- neighbourhood partnerships – for example, neighbourhood management covering a range of populations, from 5,000-20,000 people.

This flexibility in the definition of ‘neighbourhood’ is supported by a strong strand in the literature which argues the case for ‘variable geographies’. This was put especially well by the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy in Scotland (2014): “In our view, as a nation we have accepted too readily that the job of local democracy is to receive devolved powers from a

‘higher’ tier of government and that those powers can only be exercised in the same way, with the same authority and the same structures wherever you are in the country.” The Commission went on to say (pp. 29-30): “Delivering solutions that work locally must surely also mean owning the powers needed to shape and resource them, and accepting that these powers and functions must vary depending on the distinctive operating context or the distinctive needs of local populations, rather than trying to make the differing needs of different local communities fit the straight jacket of a single common approach. We have heard that much smaller units of local democracy in place in many other countries can connect better in that regard, and about ‘differential devolution’ of powers and resources according to the appetite and capacity of communities to exercise them. None of this is to suggest that different areas deserve different standards of public services, but rather that different forms of government should exist to meet the specific needs of local populations. Stronger local democracy will in all likelihood be messy, but that is also its strength”.

One of the early and highly visible advocates of ‘variable geographies’ was David Miliband, who indicated during his Ministerial spell at DCLG in Westminster that there would be no single model for devolution to neighbourhood level. In a speech to the New Local Government Network conference he said: “In some areas and circumstances residents just want a bigger say in how services are delivered. In others they want far more active control over services. It is not possible – sitting in Whitehall – to say what approach will work for what community under what circumstances. That is a matter for councils and other public service providers in consultation with residents.” This was later amplified in a DCLG White Paper (*Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*): “It would be wrong for Government to be prescriptive about the forms of neighbourhood arrangements or about the circumstances where such arrangements should exist”.

More recently, this argument for ‘variable geographies’ has been put differently by Somerville, et al., (2009: 25), who has concluded from his research: “The variety of neighbourhood governance is increasing, and this can be interpreted either as a problem (e.g. of ‘fragmentation’) or as a welcome sign of diversity. Measures to give residents greater powers and responsibilities can be seen as genuinely empowering or as increasing the burdens of those who are already oppressed and over-laden. If the aim is to do the former, then the argument in this paper suggests that instruments enabling residents to participate need to be developed on the neighbourhood scale, taking into account the extent of social cohesion, the composition of the

neighbourhood population, the structure of any residents' associations, and the extent of the residents' trust in national or local policy – joining together the links in what Simmons and Birchall (2005: 277-8) call the 'participation chain". This argument therefore justifies not only variation between local authorities in how they establish neighbourhood arrangements but also to variations within local authorities of how they deal with different types of neighbourhood – the so-called 'double devolution' policy.

However, what has not yet been spelt out is how to offer citizens 'equality of community governance opportunities' in terms of their democratic rights, in the context of a 'variable geography' – the 'minimum standard of involvement or influence in relation to local decision-making'. What can be devised as a coherent (but not necessarily single) conduit for bringing citizens into democratic decision-making?

However, an important argument against the 'variable geographies' stance is the concern that the current governmental and governance system is over-complicated and confusing, so that the public does not know 'who does what'. This is particularly important in terms of the communications arrangements between citizens and local governance bodies and in terms of accountability. Peter Somerville et al. (2009) argue that, without appropriate neighbourhood governance institutions issues of accountability and legitimacy tend to be blurred or confused. In these circumstances, accountability upwards to authorities and agencies outside the neighbourhood tends to contradict and override accountability to those living and working in the neighbourhood. Subsequently, neighbourhood improvements are at risk of being reversed and resources devoted to such improvement tend to be captured by organisations that are not neighbourhood-based. They suggest that residents should have the main say in deciding the future of their neighbourhood, and this can only be safeguarded where appropriate neighbourhood governance structures are in place - structures which are, so far as possible, decided through open negotiations with all residents in each neighbourhood. However, such local negotiation is likely once again, to open the door to the need for 'variable geographies'.

### *Neighbourhood governance as an antidote to 'single issue' government?*

There is another danger to democracy from current trends, which is clearly set out by Chris Skelcher (2003: 9): "The reallocation of local government activity to other bodies is part of a wider public management reform process termed 'hollowing-out'" (Peters, 1993; Rhodes, 1994). It results in big public bureaucracies being replaced by smaller single-purpose agencies

operating at arm's length to elected political control. The consequence is a transition from a unitary to a multiple system for governing local communities - from local government to local governance.” Later, he goes on to argue: “The council may be fiscally efficient as a result of competitive tendering and contracting-out but allocatively inefficient due to the loss and fragmentation of services” (Skelcher, 2003: 10).

How can this danger be avoided? One key mechanism to maintain proper accountability in such a fragmented governance system may be much more public involvement. Skelcher and Torfing (2010: 84) define ‘democratic ownership’ as the participants’ feeling of being an integral part of the formulation and implementation of policy solutions. They argue that this democratic ownership comes from “participants’ (i) confidence in their own ability to influence decisions (internal efficacy); (ii) perception of the political system’s responsiveness (external efficacy); (iii) assessment of the fairness of the participatory process (procedural justice); and (iv) commitment to the implementation of joint decisions, despite eventual conflicts and grievances (program responsibility)”. They stress that democratic participation must be holistic – it must run through the whole experience which citizens have with the state: “The citizens’ experience of participation at one level is also likely to affect their participation at other levels. For example, negative experiences of participation at the local level will either discourage further participation or encourage the citizens to seek other venues for political influence at the regional, national, or transnational levels” (Skelcher and Torfing, 2010: 85).

### **Options for community governance**

The analysis in this Briefing Note suggests a series of options for future arrangements in respect of community governance – these options apply both at the levels of national policy and local government as a whole and for individual councils.

#### *Options for national policy*

National policy, encompassing both central government and the overall local government system with its national leadership, could take a number of stances in relation to community governance, ranging from principled non-interference to a nationally-imposed system. Options would include:

- *Constitutional independence* – possibly based on a strong National Charter of Local Self-Governance, which would allow local areas complete freedom in the community governance arrangements which they choose.

- *Local devolution* - passing responsibility for community governance arrangements to local authorities, with or without guidelines (this would conform to the position which DCLG in England has claimed to take on 'localism' since 2010).
- *Do nothing* – maintaining the current approach to community governance.
- *Covert tinkering* - pretend to ignore community governance but dabble in a piecemeal way (which could be seen as the default policy of most national governments, in between major system reconfigurations) - this might for example, include extending community councils to parts of Wales currently without them.
- *New national central-local compact* - setting up a new national system, agreed between the national parliament and the local government sector (the 'disruptive innovation' scenario in the recent report of INLOGOV and Grant Thornton, 2014).
- *New national framework* – with central government imposing upon local authorities the need for an explicit community governance system meeting certain guidelines, but passing responsibility to local authorities for how this is designed in their area.
- *New imposed national system* - with prescribed structures and political and management processes (a new local government 'reform' or 'reorganisation', such as occurred in Wales in 1974 and 1998), with the attendant dangers of alienating existing institutions of local governance and arousing resistance rather than support.

#### *Options for individual local councils*

A parallel set of options can be developed for how individual local authorities might take forward the community governance agenda. These options will of course, be influenced by the national policy decisions which are made in relation to the options set out in the previous section. This set of options would therefore include:

- *Community autonomy* – e.g. a local charter of community self-governance, which would allow neighbourhoods (but probably not communities of interest) complete freedom in the community governance arrangements which they choose, including community councils, neighbourhood forums, residents associations, etc.
- *Do nothing* – maintaining the current approach to community governance in the principal authority (which would therefore maintain the current system of community councils).

- *Covert tinkering* - pretend to ignore community governance but dabble in a piecemeal way (which could be seen to be just as much the default policy of most local authorities as national governments, in between major system reconfigurations) – this might, for example, include extending community councils to the rest of the authority, where this is currently not the case.
- *New principal authority – neighbourhood compact* - setting up a new local system, agreed between the principal authority and the community tiers of governance (both the formal town and parish councils and the informal neighbourhood forums, etc.).
- *New local framework* – with the principal authority imposing upon communities the need for an explicit community governance system which meets certain guidelines, but passing responsibility to those communities for how this is designed in their area.
- *New imposed local system* - with prescribed structures and political and management processes for government and governance at community level – e.g. designating one elected member in each ward as the ‘local mayor’, while giving other ward councillors different roles in the council.

## Assessing the options for community governance

The choice of these options is clearly a political issue. However, we can suggest some key criteria to be taken into account in choosing between different approaches to community governance. We approach this assessment from two different standpoints – community governance rationales and principles.

### *Assessment based on community governance rationales*

Drawing from the literature on community governance considered earlier in this Briefing Note, one approach to setting appropriate criteria would be to focus on the **rationales** of community governance, along with the outcomes which are hypothesised as likely to flow from them, following the analysis of Lowndes and Sullivan (2008). namely citizen participation and active communities (civic rationale); citizen well-being and stakeholder collaboration (social rationale); accessibility, responsiveness and accountability (political rationale); and efficiency and effectiveness (economic rationale).

In Table 2 we illustrate how the options for community governance may match against the four rationales identified earlier. This is by no means a fully validated evaluation of the options, but rather shows how key elements of these rationales would be affected by adopting each of the options.

**Table 2: Match between community governance options and rationale for community governance**

	<b><i>Civic rationale:</i></b> <b>More citizen participation and active communities</b>	<b><i>Social rationale:</i></b> <b>Increased citizen well-being and stakeholder collaboration</b>	<b><i>Political rationale:</i></b> <b>More accessibility, responsiveness and accountability</b>	<b><i>Economic rationale:</i></b> <b>Increased efficiency and effectiveness</b>
<i>Constitutional independence</i>	Promotes participation structures and processes which suit local circumstances	Embeds neighbourhood priorities for outcomes and quality of life in jointly agreed programmes of action	Promotes political voice of neighbourhood, allowing them to hold accountable other tiers of government	Promotes identification of local priority outcomes and mobilisation of local resources
<i>Local devolution</i>	May promote participation structures and processes which suit local circumstances	May embed neighbourhood priorities for outcomes and quality of life in jointly agreed programmes of action	May promote political voice of neighbourhood, allowing them to hold accountable other tiers of government	May promote identification of local priority outcomes and mobilisation of local resources
<i>Do nothing</i>				
<i>Covert tinkering</i>				
<i>New national central-local compact</i>		Increases likelihood of joined up working by all agencies seeking specific outcomes	Assures political voice to neighbourhood, allowing them to hold accountable other tiers of government	May promote identification of local priority outcomes and mobilisation of local resources
<i>New national framework</i>		Increases likelihood of joined up working by all agencies seeking specific outcomes	Assures political voice to neighbourhood, allowing them to hold accountable other tiers of government	May promote identification of local priority outcomes and mobilisation of local resources
<i>New imposed national system</i>		Encourages joined up working by all agencies seeking specific outcomes	May promote political voice of neighbourhood, aiding accountability, but may be for inappropriate local organisations	May promote identification of local priority outcomes and mobilisation of local resources  May make economies of scale more likely in neighbourhood service provision



In Table 2, the constitutional independence option seems likely to outperform the local devolution option on all criteria, as it seems much more likely to result in greater citizen commitment to community governance, given that principal authorities have in the past been less than wholehearted in their support for neighbourhood-based arrangements.

The 'Do nothing' and 'covert tinkering' options are, by definition, unlikely to make much change to the outcomes experienced in the current system.

The options which involve significant shaping through national policy – either agreed or imposed – all seem likely to score well on the social, political and economic rationales but not so well on the civic rationale, since they do not necessarily change the incentives or put in place the locally appropriate structures and processes to encourage citizens to engage more actively in community issues – these are things which are more appropriately decided at neighbourhood level, not in the national policy arena.

Finally, the option of an imposed national system seems likely to score less well than the 'new national central-local compact' or the 'new national framework', since imposed systems tend to be strongly resisted by local government institutions. The one exception is in relation to the economic rationale, where an imposed system might be able to offer greater efficiency in service provision at community governance level, e.g. through larger community councils or compulsory arrangements for shared services etc. This of course, would only be relevant if service provision (rather than simply service commissioning) were to be at significant levels in the new system.

#### *Assessment based on community governance principles*

A second way of assessing the options is to consider how well they are likely to embed key principles of community governance. Here we draw upon and extend the set of governance principles developed from the literature by Bovaird and Loeffler (2003):

- *subsidiarity* (van Kersbergen and Verbeek, 2004) - devolution of decision-making to the lowest practical level;
- *citizen engagement*, allowing a proper level of dialogue between communities and the governmental system;
- *transparency*, ensuring that decisions and behaviours in the public realm are visible to citizens and their organisations (while ensuring privacy and freedom from intrusion for decisions and behaviours not in the public realm);

- *accountability*, ensuring that decisions and behaviours in the public realm can be questioned and if appropriate, challenged by citizens and their organisations;
- *the equalities agenda and social inclusion* (relating to gender, ethnicity, age, religion, etc.) – so that decision-making reflects the diversity of the communities involved;
- *ethical and honest behaviour*, so that the representatives of community governance institutions can be trusted to carry out their tasks;
- *equity* (fair procedures and due process), *respect for the rule of law* and *freedom from harassment or coercion*, so that the formal rules and regulations of community governance institutions can be trusted by citizens;
- *ability to compete* in their environment, so that the institutions and organisations of community governance are efficient, based on appropriate scale, scope and funding;
- *ability to work effectively in partnership* across public, private and third sectors to mutual advantage within supportive networks; and
- *sustainability*, so that the community governance system is long-lived (justifying the original costs involved in setting it up) and changes only slowly, so that citizens do not have significant transaction costs in adapting to its changes.

No community governance option is likely to be dominant, in the sense that it scores better or just as well as all other options in terms of every one of the evaluation criteria. In any case, although all of these governance principles are likely to be strongly upheld by at least some stakeholders, it is highly unlikely that they can all be achieved at once - this is the Governance Impossibility Theorem (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2009: 11). Consequently, they may have to be prioritised and the weights attached to these principles will be important in determining which option appears most attractive.

In practice, these governance principles operate mainly at a relatively micro-level – the actual levels of citizen engagement, transparency and accountability will depend on the finer details of the community governance system adopted, rather than simply on whether the approach is based on constitutional independence, local devolution or a new form of national system. The only governance principle which distinguishes clearly between the options is subsidiarity, which is the defining principle behind the constitutional independence option, although the local devolution option and the three national system options could also embody subsidiarity, if designed to do so.

The other governance principle which is particularly likely to be important in choosing between the options is *equity* (fair procedures and due process). Given that each of the options involves a different relationship between citizens, their community and the higher levels of government – and that under many of the options, this relationship will differ across the country - it is important to ask to what extent citizens can be said to have ‘equality of community governance opportunities’ under each of the options? A different interpretation of this ‘offer’ applies under the various options:

- *Constitutional independence and local devolution*, where local authorities have freedom in the community governance arrangements which they choose - every citizen would simply have the right to choose, with other principal authority voters, which, if any, community governance system to have in their authority.
- *Do nothing and covert tinkering*, where the current approach to community governance is maintained or only modified ‘under the counter’ - citizens would have no explicit rights in terms of the community governance system which they would experience;
- *New national central-local compact or framework*, where a new national system is agreed – citizens would have the right to live within a community governance system which meets certain guidelines and a right to vote in their principal authority on how this approach is actually designed and implemented;
- *New imposed national system*, where structures and political and management processes of community governance are centrally prescribed – here, citizens would have the right to the same form of community governance, wherever they lived.

## 6 Potential areas for further research

At various stages of this Briefing Note we have highlighted gaps, ambiguities or conflicts in the literature on community governance. This suggests the need for further research. At the very least, it will be important for policymakers to become more aware of what can be learned from experience with community governance systems elsewhere in the UK and internationally.

The first challenge is to find whether there might be mechanisms and a language which might make citizens more aware of the role of and the value provided by, the community governance arrangements in their area. Most research in this area has concentrated simply on how aware citizens are of town and parish councils, neighbourhood forums, residents associations etc. and how much they participate in such arrangements. It would be valuable to extend this research to explore what changes to community governance systems might be associated with greater understanding and participation by citizens.

Perhaps even more revealing would be to take this line of research further to explore how important citizens consider such mechanisms of community governance to be. Since citizens are unlikely to be able to respond meaningfully to generic questions about community governance or even about specific institutions such as community councils, it may be necessary to explore how important citizens believe particular benefits and outcomes of community governance to be, e.g. having a way of representing local people's views in local council or NHS decisions, along the lines set out in the previous section. Again, how much do citizens value the principles embodied in community governance, as set out in the previous section (e.g. how important is it that there is transparency of how council decisions will impact upon different neighbourhoods).

Moreover, there is a close relationship between key elements of community governance and co-production, particularly community co-production (see INLOGOV, 2014), so that a complementary research agenda would be valuable on:

- How do different forms of community governance build trust and solidarity through developing the relationships between citizens, and between citizens and government?
- How can different community governance approaches and the involvement of active citizens, challenge anti-social norms and boost community outcomes?

- What are the institutional barriers to rolling out more radical practices within community governance such as participative budgeting? How can resistance within traditional community government structures be overcome?
- How can greater involvement in community governance be encouraged through digital means, including social media?
- Does positive experience by communities in community governance lead to greater civic participation more generally, e.g. through involvement with principal authorities or in national policy issues?

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## 8 Resources

### Community Governance Toolkits

The [Parish Council Toolkit - National Association of Local Councils](#)

Governance health check for third sector organisations – WCVA

[http://www.wcva.org.uk/media/258953/governance\\_health\\_check.pdf](http://www.wcva.org.uk/media/258953/governance_health_check.pdf)

Effective Community Governance: An Overview – Results That Matter team

[http://www.rtmteam.net/page.php?pageID=25&section=overview\\_of\\_ecg](http://www.rtmteam.net/page.php?pageID=25&section=overview_of_ecg)

Good Governance: A Code for the Voluntary and Community Sector

<http://www.governancecode.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Code-of-Governance-Full1.pdf>

Public Engagement Toolkit – National Assembly for Wales

[http://www.assemblywales.org/NAfW%20Documents/public\\_engagement\\_toolkit\\_2014.pdf%20-%2007052014/public\\_engagement\\_toolkit\\_2014-English.pdf](http://www.assemblywales.org/NAfW%20Documents/public_engagement_toolkit_2014.pdf%20-%2007052014/public_engagement_toolkit_2014-English.pdf)

Practitioners' Manual for Public Engagement – Participation

[Cymruwww.participationcymru.org.uk/media/.../principles\\_draft\\_report.doc](http://www.participationcymru.org.uk/media/.../principles_draft_report.doc)

### General websites on community governance

Community governance reviews: guidance – DCLG

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-governance-reviews-guidance>

What do we mean by governance, engagement and accountability?

<http://www.futurecommunities.net/ingredient/53/what-do-we-mean-governance-engagement-and-accountability>

### Organisations specialising in community governance

National Association of Local Councils (NALC): [www.nalc.gov.uk](http://www.nalc.gov.uk).

Association of Larger Local Councils (ALLC): [www.allc.gov.uk](http://www.allc.gov.uk).

Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC): [www.slcc.co.uk](http://www.slcc.co.uk).

Commission for Rural Communities: [www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk). (Look out for the Rural Proofing Toolkit)

Governance International [www.govint.org](http://www.govint.org)

new economics foundation (nef) - [www.neweconomics.org/](http://www.neweconomics.org/)

Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) – [www.scdc.org.uk/](http://www.scdc.org.uk/)

Scottish Joint Improvement Team (JIT) – [www.jitscotland.org.uk/](http://www.jitscotland.org.uk/)

Think Local Act Personal (TLAP) – [www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/](http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/)

### **Hyperlocal websites**

Hyperlocal websites - [http://openlylocal.com/hyperlocal\\_sites](http://openlylocal.com/hyperlocal_sites)

Network neighbourhoods – [http://networkedneighbourhoods.com/?page\\_id=13](http://networkedneighbourhoods.com/?page_id=13)



## Appendix A:

Key for Figure 1: The proportion of variance in quality of life indicators attributable to Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs), Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and small areas (intra-class correlation coefficients) (Source: Jacobs et al., 2009: 15).

Code	Definition
turnout	Election turnout: ward
imd_score_crime	Index of Multiple Deprivation score on crime
imd_score_kids	Children Index of Multiple Deprivation score
imd_score_elderly	Older people Index of Multiple Deprivation score
wa_tot_ben	All people of working age claiming a key benefit: percentage
wa_jsa	All people of working age claiming job seekers allowance: percentage
sec_school_absence	Secondary school absence indicator: rate
ks4_mean_points_score	National curriculum assessments: average points score Key Stage 4 indicator
combi_air_qual_ind	Combined air quality indicator: 26/10/2007
area_green	Area of green space per head: thousands of metres squared
le_all	Life expectancy at birth (years): all people ward
concept_teen	Conceptions teenagers: 2002 and 2004 figures combined ward
smr_lsoa_01	Standardised mortality ratio at LSOA level: 2001
pphlds_limlong_ill	Percentage of households with 1 or more limiting longstanding illnesses

perc_rough	Percentage of people living rough
phhlds_noheating	Percentage of all occupied households without central heating
perc_commute_wrk	Percentage of population travelling over 20km to work
perc_privtrans_wrk	Percentage of population travelling to work by private vehicle
perc_pubtrans_wrk	Percentage of population travelling to work by public transport
perc_footbike_wrk	Percentage of population travelling to work by bike or on foot