



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Promoting Effective Citizenship and Community Empowerment

A guide for local authorities on enhancing capacity
for public participation



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Rhys Andrews, Richard Cowell, James Downe,
Steve Martin

Centre for Local & Regional Government Research
Cardiff University

Dave Turner, School of Environment
University of Gloucestershire

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Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Telephone 020 7944 4400
Web site www.odpm.gov.uk

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Any errors that remain are the responsibility of the authors alone.

Introduction

What's the issue?

Relationships between local government and the public are changing. Effective governance requires an informed, engaged citizenry which votes in elections, participates in decision making and works with service providers in designing, delivering and monitoring services.

To create such an informed, engaged citizenry requires public bodies to go beyond the now routine provision of opportunities for consultation and participation. It means embarking on a process of learning, on the part of the public and on the part of organisations that need their input.

What does this guide do?

This guide provides advice on what local authorities can do to support learning for effective citizenship. By 'effective citizenship', we mean people having the knowledge, skills and sense of empowerment to play a meaningful role in local decision-making. Thus, this guide builds on the work that many local authorities already do to widen participation, but suggests further ways that councils can support people in learning how they can become more involved.

Who is this guide for?

The main audience for this guide is local councils. The advice is aimed at departments, units or individual officers concerned with promoting democratic engagement, and is also highly relevant to elected members.

Because supporting effective citizenship has wide implications for the relationship between government and communities, sections of it will also be relevant to partner bodies in the public, private, and voluntary sectors. In many instances, deepening public involvement in decision-making processes is most effectively achieved through partnership working.

What remit does this guide cover?

Citizenship is a broad field. This guide focuses on *democratic* aspects of local citizenship – involvement in decision-making, service design and partnership working – rather than issues of community cohesion or national citizenship ceremonies. In practice, of course, these agendas are closely linked. For example:

- involvement in community groups and the voluntary sector can be a springboard for engagement in government decision-making
- cohesive communities, which can work together to address issues that affect them, are more likely to feel empowered to work with local democratic institutions
- democratic institutions like local government will themselves be strengthened by a citizenry that possesses the skills, habits and knowledge for effective participation.

Using this guide

The guide is divided into seven chapters, each of which reflects a key challenge in promoting effective citizenship:

- 1. Effective citizenship:** This chapter explains why helping the public to become more effective citizens is a key issue for local authorities, and how it fits with current government policy.
- 2. Learning and citizenship:** This chapter sets out the importance of formal and informal approaches to learning about effective citizenship, and stresses that councils can reinforce people's learning experience by making sure their approach to public participation is meaningful and effective.
- 3. Tailoring initiatives to the target audience:** This chapter introduces ways of developing learning initiatives that reflect the needs of different social groups, with particular reference to young people, marginalised and under-represented sections of society, and 'the silent majority'.
- 4. Changing Council Culture:** This chapter explains how councils might adjust their internal culture, structure and ways of working to foster effective citizenship, including the coordination of public involvement activities, issues of staffing, and the training of officers and elected members.
- 5. Measuring Success:** This chapter considers how to evaluate whether the public has become better informed or empowered as a result of citizenship initiatives, and whether councils are becoming more sensitive to citizen input.
- 6. Sustainability:** This chapter shows how it takes time to build the confidence and capacity needed to enable people to become effective citizens.
- 7. Links and contacts:** This section provides links to key sources where further information on good practice can be found.

The guide can be read as a whole, or readers can turn to sections that are most relevant to their needs and interests. To illustrate the main points, we have provided real-life examples of activities which have successfully enhanced capacities for engagement in local decision-making. We recognise that supporting effective citizenship may have resource implications and, where possible, we have tried to indicate how our examples have been funded.

This guide was commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and has been produced by the Centre for Local and Regional Government Research at Cardiff University. Information was gathered from a range of sources including a survey of all English local authorities and interviews with officers, elected members and other individuals involved in citizenship initiatives. The quotations used to illustrate this guide are from these interviews unless otherwise indicated. Numbered references are located at the end of each chapter and further details of the Research are given in Annex 1.

CHAPTER 1

Effective citizenship

Chapter Summary

- This chapter explains why helping the public to become more effective citizens is a key issue for local government, and how it fits with current government policy.
- It sets out how effective citizenship can be promoted by local government through communication, capacity-building and cultural change.

Citizenship – the wider policy agenda

Effective citizenship means, at its simplest, members of local communities being ready, willing and able to get involved in local issues. This is not simply about people having the opportunity to participate, but also about possessing the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to take part. Local government is well placed to play a key role in promoting effective citizenship because of its closeness to local communities.

There is increasing evidence identifying the benefits of an active and engaged citizenry that gets involved in local decision-making.¹ Harnessing the insights, perspectives and talents of local people can improve services, the quality of democracy, and the legitimacy of council leadership. There can be benefits to participants, too. As well as contributing to improving the quality of life of their community, getting involved in local affairs can provide individuals with opportunities to acquire training, skills, and give them pathways into education and employment.

In recognition of these potential benefits, policy-makers at local and national levels have taken an increasing interest in encouraging people to re-connect with government and participate in local decisions. It is important, therefore, to explain how this guide relates to the range of government initiatives already in place:

- The Department for Education and Skills has issued guidance on the delivery of citizenship education as a statutory part of the school curriculum. However, there is much that local authorities can do outside the classroom, to support school-based learning and extend this to wider social groups and into adult life. This guide focuses on these activities.
- The Home Office has set up a *virtual Active Citizenship Centre*, a network of learning hubs on *Active Learning for Active Citizenship* (primarily for adult learners), and is working with a series of '*Civic Pioneers*' – councils with a commitment to civil renewal. This guide has been informed by emerging good practice from all three initiatives.
- Round six of ODPM's Beacon Council programme invited local authorities to apply for Beacon status for their work in 'getting closer to communities'. The activities of successful applicants have been used to illustrate this guide.

Increased public engagement forms a key part of the Government's vision for local councils. The 1998 Local Government White Paper, *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People*, emphasised the importance of giving local people a 'bigger say and a better deal'.² The 2001 White Paper *Strong Local Leadership* required local authorities to alert 'young people to the working of social and public life... and the means at their disposal for influencing local policies' as part of councils' wider duty to promote 'effective community engagement'.³ This guide seeks to help councils meet these requirements.

This agenda is developing very rapidly, and has been taken forward in a series of government pronouncements:

- The importance of an effective, informed and empowered citizenry was underlined in the Government's Ten Year Vision for Local Government.⁴ This vision encourages local authorities to explore innovative ways for involving more people in local democracy and to build the capacity of neighbourhoods to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- Promoting effective citizenship goes hand in hand with government plans to give people more control over their local communities, as set out in *Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity*⁵ and the supporting publication, *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*.⁶ If councillors are to act as "leading advocates for their communities"⁷, they need to be skilled in stimulating local voices.
- In the widest sense, effective citizenship is integral to the creation of sustainable communities, as places which enjoy 'effective engagement with the community at neighbourhood level, including capacity building to develop the community's skills, knowledge and confidence'⁸
- This agenda is now being pulled together across Government, in the cross-departmental action plan, *Together We Can*.⁹

This good practice guide seeks to support this wider agenda by providing advice on how councils might support effective citizenship in their local area. It highlights a range of educational or promotional activities currently being carried out by or on behalf of councils, to help people learn how to make better use of decision-making processes both for themselves, and for society as a whole.

SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

There are numerous examples of initiatives where collaboration between public bodies and communities to improve the quality of life has been mutually educative, and delivered lasting improvements to a community's capacity for further involvement. One such example comes from **Morice Town, Plymouth**, where a Home Zone project, seeking to regenerate the physical environment and reduce traffic, achieved high levels of community direction. The council had to work hard, and apply a number of strategies to win the public's trust – 'planning for real' and design workshops proved more successful than traditional large meetings. But among the results are new community groups, more community events, greater use of the streets for public gatherings, and the success of the community forum in attracting funding for other projects. For more information, see <http://www.homezonenews.org.uk/schemes/> or <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/>

CASE STUDY: CITIZENSHIP SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

The *'R U Listening'* initiative designed by the **Lincolnshire Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership** seeks to educate young children (under 11s) in active citizenship. Projects start by using a drama group to run a workshop with children for a day, to establish the issues that concern them, and to express them in words, song and movement. The issues that emerged in the initial round, across six primary schools, were litter and personal safety. These expressions of concern were then brought by the children to councillors and professionals to listen to them, discuss the ideas, some of the impediments to rapid change, and what the children could do to pursue their concerns. Projects that have been progressed included 'art bins' designed to appeal to children and encourage them to deposit litter, children carrying out surveys of traffic speeds near schools using radar equipment, and children writing letters to owners of railway property to remove drug litter and improve the area. Through their involvement in the scheme, children begin to learn about decision-making. For more information contact **Chris.Lamberton@lincolnshire.gov.uk**.

How can local authorities help?

In recent years local authorities have made huge strides in engaging with the public. Large numbers have adopted residents and user surveys, citizens panels, citizens juries, focus groups, neighbourhood and area forums and an array of methods for providing information and consultation via the internet.

BASIC INFORMATION?

The internet is a powerful tool for pulling together information about government, including decision-making structures. But surprisingly few councils provide simple diagrams – perhaps an organogram – to help people negotiate the complex structures of local partnership working.

But simply providing opportunities for the public to participate only goes so far. Despite using a growing range of consultation and participation techniques, more than half of residents believe that their local council has not consulted them in the past year.¹⁰ And there is much more that can be done to draw marginalised and vulnerable people into local decision-making. It is therefore important to find new ways of increasing people's capacity or desire to become more involved.

SCIENCE OF CITIZENSHIP

"In making governance work, you have got to get the physics right – the structures – but you've also got to deal with the chemistry, the emotions involved" (Council Officer)

The types of activities that councils can undertake to help people learn about local decision-making can be organised into three broad categories:

- **Effective communication** – giving people the information and knowledge they need to understand local decision-making structures, but also taking steps to simplify the knowledge required, either by bringing together information on opportunities to engage, or by combining opportunities into a single process.

FOREGROUNDING FORWARD PLANS

Although local authorities are required to produce Forward Plans, which set out upcoming decisions, more could be done to communicate them clearly through the internet. **Southampton City** is one of a number of councils that have sought to create more visible, interconnected and user friendly Forward Plans (see <http://www.southampton.gov.uk/council/>).

- **Capacity building** – training and practical support that strengthen the existing skills, knowledge and confidence of individuals, community groups and council personnel to get involved in decision-making and develop solutions.¹¹ This may include skills in communication, diversity issues, conflict resolution or community leadership.
- **Promoting cultural change** – with the public, this means cultivating a belief in the value of collective action to address social problems and improve the quality of life; for councils, it means learning to operate in ways that are responsive to citizen input, and showing participants that their involvement is valued.

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

'One thing I would be looking for in ten years time is that people know where best to place their energies in order for something to happen. Now that might be at a neighbourhood level, at an area level, at strategic level, national, regional and that's whether you're citizens or a worker...there (needs to be) a mechanism for people to feel they can have an impact on the world around them and contribute to it and challenge it sometimes'. (Councillor)

Cutting across these types of activity, there are a number of other principles that will assist the design and delivery of effective learning opportunities.

- **Mainstreaming citizenship learning.** Encouraging effective citizenship need not be a stand alone activity – *quite the opposite*. Promoting effective citizenship can be combined with the good work already underway in public participation. Opportunities for learning about effective citizenship can be incorporated into public participation exercises and partnership work, as well as into initiatives to involve people in the design and delivery of front-line services. The *Beacon Council* programme has delivered good examples of 'whole council' approaches to engaging the public, including the Blyth Council case study given below.
- **Address the wider context.** It is also critical that local authorities pay attention to wider issues which may affect people's propensity to get involved, such as the condition of the voluntary sector and community groups in their area, race relations and the representation of marginalised groups on decision-making forums.
- **Partnership working.** Promoting effective citizenship requires genuine collaboration between councils and a range of other public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations. As part owners of the citizenship agenda, schools, non-governmental organisations and local community groups can all make significant contributions. When all these different organisations work in partnership, there is more scope for improving practice by learning from each other, and to deliver more effective learning opportunities. For councils to fulfil their community leadership role effectively, they should be fully involved in these shared processes of organisational learning.

- **Effective citizenship and active citizenship.** It is important to recognize that for people to be effective citizens they need not always be taking action. Effective citizenship may be reflected in people's increased understanding of local democracy, as well as active participation in decision-making or community groups. This means councils disseminating sufficient knowledge for people to decide for themselves whether it is worth getting involved in local issues and processes.

INDEPENDENT THINKING

"Sometimes encouraging the public to become more politically active can be uncomfortable for local authorities. I do think they need to do it at least in partnership with a body that can be critical of the local authority without being frightened ... otherwise it's going to be very tame stuff that not a lot of people are going to get very excited about" (Voluntary Sector Officer)

- **A bumpier but more exciting ride?** More people, more engaged in local decision-making may well mean more challenges to the agendas of local councils and other public bodies. The trick for local councils is to connect with the energy, ideas and excitement of a more engaged citizenry, and use it to shape decision-making processes and policies in which everyone has confidence.

CASE STUDY: BECOMING A 'COMMUNITY BASED COUNCIL'

Blyth Valley achieved Beacon status in 2005 for its progress in '*getting closer to communities*'. This reflects the cross-authority efforts to become a 'community based council', based on the idea of services being shaped by the needs of local people. The approach was systematic, and clearly driven by strong political and managerial leadership, taking a 'whole system' approach to achieving change within its internal processes and procedures. Not only are corporate and service strategies aligned to community development goals but key staff are trained in the principles of community development. The establishment of the 'Community, Regeneration and Culture Unit' within the council and associated training of personnel has had a positive impact on collaboration amongst the councils units, as well as with the community. Connecting the range of strategic, practical and needs-based actions Blyth Valley has undertaken, is the decision to develop a significant community development staff resources, largely paid for from external sources, and the provision of capital and revenue resources for a 'hub and spoke' network of community centres, one for each ward. This has aided two-way links with the community, and fostered investment in the voluntary and community sector, to increase the capacity of the community to resolve its own problems and draw in extra resources. Key outcomes include a doubling of the number of voluntary and community sector organisations over ten years. For more information see

<http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=1704903> and ODPM (2005) *Review of the Advisory Panel on Beacon Councils*,
<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1161955>

References/further reading

- 1 For recent analyses of the benefits of community engagement see Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2005) *Improving the Delivery of Mainstream Services in Deprived Areas – the Role of Community Involvement*, report for the ODPM in collaboration with the Home Office and the Cabinet Office (<http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1561>); also B Rogers and E Robinson (2003) *The Benefits of Community Engagement*, Home Office and Active Citizenship Centre: <http://communities.homeoffice.gov.uk/civil/reports-publications/publications/publications-civil-renewal/benefits-com-review-of-evidence.?view=Binary>
- 2 DETR (1998) *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People*, (Cm 4014) London, The Stationery Office)
- 3 DTLR (2001) *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services*, London, The Stationery Office (also at [http://www.localgov.gov.uk/images/Strong%20Local%20Leadership%20-%20Quality%20Public%20Services%20\(Dec%2002\)_192.pdf](http://www.localgov.gov.uk/images/Strong%20Local%20Leadership%20-%20Quality%20Public%20Services%20(Dec%2002)_192.pdf)
- 4 Located at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137789>
- 5 HM Government (2005) *Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity. A Five Year Plan from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*, CM 6425, Crown Copyright (see also:- <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1122850>)
- 6 ODPM and the Home Office (2005) *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*, ODPM, London (also available on:- <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137794>)
- 7 As above, page 16.
- 8 HM Government (2005) *Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity. A Five Year Plan from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*, CM 6425, Crown Copyright, p.57 (see also:- <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1122850>)
- 9 Available through the Home Office at <http://www.togetherwecan.info/>
- 10 MORI (2004) *Round 6 Beacon Council Scheme: Baseline Data*, July, ODPM, London (see also:- <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/aio/1704955>)
- 11 See ODPM and the Home Office (2005) *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*, paras 119-127 (also available at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137794>); also Home Office (2004) *Firm Foundations: The Government's Framework for Community Capacity Building*, http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/research_news_details.asp?id=200514102725&cat=9&parentid=2 and *ChangeUp: Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector*, <http://communities.homeoffice.gov.uk/activecomms/sup-vcs/changeup/>

CHAPTER 2

Learning & Citizenship

Chapter Summary

- Promoting effective citizenship requires processes of learning that enable all parties to reflect upon – and learn from – their experiences.
- To reinforce people's willingness to get involved in local decision-making, opportunities for participation must be seen to be meaningful, open to influence, and to value citizen input.
- It is important to make learning opportunities accessible; give careful attention to language; set out clearly what is at stake; build on capacities that are already in place; sustain the dialogue, and give feedback to people when they do participate in decision-making.

Becoming a more effective citizen implies a process of *learning*, through which people and communities acquire the knowledge, skills, and confidence to get involved in local issues. This includes recognising that there are both rights and responsibilities associated with democracy and community life. Local authorities are able to assist and influence this learning process in a variety of ways. Moreover, there are plenty of areas where officers and elected members can learn how to support and encourage local citizenship.

Ways of learning

The concept of learning tends to conjure up images of *formal*, often class-based training with some form of accreditation. Indeed, this is an important component of the citizenship agenda to which we return below. However, in addition to formal learning, there is a great need for *informal* types of learning – sharing lessons that can be learned from practical experiences of getting involved in political issues, local partnerships, or voluntary groups. These forms of *experiential learning* can be harnessed to deepen understanding, and foster the ability to get further involved, as illustrated by the textbox below on the involvement of young people.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

Youth work officers are very careful to ensure that the young people they work with are able to reflect on, and learn from, decision-making activities they have been involved in. A cautionary example comes from a group of young people in a rural area pitching for a couple of hard play areas to meet their needs. Video was used to make their case, but the image used to depict 'the problem', "*one of the guys kicking a football against the doors of the village hall*", left one councillor too angry to see the wider argument. Youth workers were able to address a potentially deflating experience: "*we said, OK, you didn't get what you wanted, but how could you appraise where you're at to take another route?*" These are the citizenship learning outcomes. (Youth worker)

There are a number of crucial steps that can be taken to help people learn from their experiences. One step is to assist people and community groups in *reflecting* critically upon these experiences – what happened, why they think it happened, and what they felt about it.¹

Helping people to reflect on their experiences can be beneficial to their learning in a number of ways:

- Enabling people to develop lessons that can be applied in future.
- Encouraging learners to value their own and each others' experiences.
- Assisting local social groups in making links between their situation, their efforts to influence change, and the wider political context.
- Helping people to acquire the confidence to influence their own lives independently from top-down intervention.
- Negotiating the inevitable tensions of democratic decision making – how to sustain faith in the process when, by its very nature, participants will not always get what they want, as quickly as they want.

Councils can inject further structure and impetus into this experiential learning through forms of mentoring and 'peer learning', assisting people in developing and sharing their political skills. A useful example is provided by *Stockton-on-Tees* council – a Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder council. Not only is over 50% of the pathfinder's board composed of residents, but, each board member has a "buddy", providing a transfer of experience, and allowing twice as many people to be informed of the Pathfinder's activities.²

As well as providing spaces for reflection, councils can also provide individuals and communities with opportunities to *test out* their learning. Opportunities for experiential learning can be mainstreamed within councils' existing structures for consultation, participation and service delivery.

Formal learning & accreditation

As citizens themselves adopt deeper roles in regeneration, local forums, or specific service areas, there may be scope to support them through more formal training. Local authorities and other public bodies could facilitate such training in a whole range of areas, including skills in communication, diversity issues, conflict resolution or community leadership. Developing people's abilities at committee work, advocacy, policy analysis and ICT may also help them to become more influential. To give two examples, Youth Councillors in *Burnley* received training in advocacy skills, while *Ealing Community Network* provides a training programme to all local community groups, including sessions on 'representing your community'.

A range of bodies are able to provide relevant training, including further and higher education institutions, voluntary sector organisations and, increasingly, communities themselves. Local groups with experience in regeneration and public involvement can be encouraged to provide peer support to others. Information on potential providers is pulled together within the *Active Learning for Active Citizenship hubs* (<http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/active.asp?cat=14&parentid=13>), the *National Institute for Adult Continuing Education* (<http://www.niace.org.uk/>), and *CSV Community Partners* (<http://www.csvcommunitypartners.org.uk/resources/links.html>).

EDUCATION PROVIDERS

A number of organisations provide citizenship education – some have been doing so for a long time. For example, the **Workers' Educational Association (WEA)** has been providing citizenship education and activity since the 1920s. Now the largest national voluntary provider of lifelong learning in the UK, the WEA seeks to provide student-led, democratic learning, across all the regions, and currently attracts 30% of its learners from disadvantaged areas. The WEA is interested in development work, small projects and partnership work. See <http://www.wea.org.uk/>

In a whole host of areas, it may be appropriate to validate people's developing citizenship skills. This includes both accrediting what people have learned, as well as offering links to further education in the field of public involvement and a possible route into paid employment. Typical qualifications might be training to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level in Community Development, Community Leadership, Service Assessment or Introduction to Youth Work.

Whilst accreditation can help individuals to sustain and demonstrate their learning, it is important to bear in mind that formal, accredited routes may be inappropriate and insufficiently flexible for some individuals. Community-based, non-accredited learning can create the confidence and potential for local people to move forward together in new and innovative ways.

STUDYING PARTICIPATION

Bradford's International Centre for Participation Studies was set up in 2003 to link democratisation discussions that are taking place out in the wider world to processes going on locally and regionally. The centre is funded by the *Higher Education Innovation Fund*, and runs short courses and workshops with local organisations, including the community and voluntary sector, around participatory methods. They are trying to understand what inhibits participation and what facilitates participation, and are working both with the people who want to push for greater participation and the institutions that want to open up. The centre has set up a Foundation degree in Active Citizenship and Participation. They are working with local employers who are interested in understanding and promoting participatory practice to develop a curriculum. See <http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/icps/>

Getting the basics right

One critical step that local authorities can take to support learning about democracy, and encourage people to engage, is to uphold good practice in the way that they themselves involve the public. This is vital for three main reasons:

- First, mechanisms for public participation are also valuable vehicles for learning about citizenship. Many initiatives, including, “Community Strategies, Sure Start and the New Deal for Communities” can be seen as “nurseries for democracy”.³ Engagement in particular initiatives, or within the community sector, can provide a “ladder of opportunity” as individuals and groups build upon resolving problems in their local area “to engagement in a broader set of issues covering a wider area”.⁴

- Second, with this opportunity comes responsibility. One of the major concerns of providers of citizenship education is that the democratic ideals that people learn in ‘the classroom’, about the importance of fair, inclusive and open discussion, are not always shared by ‘real world’ decision-making processes. Councils as a whole need to act in ways which reinforce the message that getting involved in local decisions is worth it; failure to do so can cause lasting disaffection with the political process.
- Third, many of the key principles for designing effective public participation are equally applicable to the design of learning opportunities for effective citizenship.

For these reasons, it is worth restating some key principles of good practice in involving the public.

The right time and the right place

Give careful attention to times and locations where learning activities or decision-making takes place. Ensure that buildings are accessible and events are held at times that do not exclude those in paid employment, carers or those with childcare responsibilities. Selecting meeting places that are genuinely accessible to target audiences, which symbolise a willingness to travel to meet a social group on their own ‘turf’, really can pay dividends.

REACHING OUT

The police in **Plymouth** provide a dramatic illustration of how timing the delivery of community involvement can greatly increase participation, and foster greater trust in the longer-term. Officers have taken particular steps to engage the Chinese community – a hitherto under-represented group – in crime and community safety issues. The Chief Constable attended a meeting held in a Chinese restaurant at midnight; a typical period of free time for the Chinese community. This helped to generate greater trust, more feedback, and a demonstrable increase in the willingness of the Chinese community to communicate crime concerns to the police.

Councils can assist in providing a space or a base in which groups within local communities can meet and engage with each other, as well as with the local authority, thus strengthening social networks. This could be through innovative management of building assets, providing a virtual space such as an email network or website, or developing text message services. For example, the *Camden Community Buildings Network* brings under-used community buildings (such as tenant association halls) back into use, which in turn facilitates outreach work, including initiatives with a citizenship component. A virtual alternative is given in the textbox below.

VIRTUAL SPACES

The **Practical e-Democracy in London project** has led to the development of a ‘Councillor’s Tool-Kit’ which enables elected members to have their own web presence and interact with users. Community Groups are also provided with a free, fully interactive website to engage with their users and other interested people. See http://www.londonconnects.gov.uk/_db/_downloads/PeDiL_LCedem_conference.ppt and <http://www.e-democracy.gov.uk/default.htm>

Attention to Language

Communicating in plain English and being careful about the choice of words really is important in all spheres of democratic activity. For many people, straightforward language is vital to enable them to understand decision-making processes. Where appropriate, make sure events, activities and initiatives are fully accessible to those whose first language is not English. Making careful use of visual images can help to explain concepts that may be hard to grasp for people with learning difficulties.

JARGON & AGENDAS

“The terminology, the jargon they use makes us feel stupid and ignorant. We feel intimidated”

“We are not sure why they want us there. There is no consistency. Do we really have a say? ... We and our views are not taken seriously”

Source: *Asian Women and Community Engagement*; For more information see **Manchester Women’s Network** at <http://www.wevh.org.uk/>

Clear terms of engagement

Learning for citizenship needs to acknowledge the difficulties that arise in effecting change. Likewise, in their dealings with the public, councils need to be clear from the outset about what might follow from getting involved and expressing a view. This means explaining what is at stake – the intentions behind seeking public involvement, the possible outcomes, and what can and cannot be influenced.

In some circumstances, councils could do more to positively promote the potential impact of involvement, without raising expectations unduly. For example, *Hillingdon Borough Council* plans to begin voting-promotion campaigns 12 months in advance of elections. This includes publicising past election results on people’s poll cards to highlight the difference that one vote can make.

Build on what’s already there

In designing learning opportunities for citizenship, councils can usefully start from where people are at in terms of their life situation, experience, confidence and interest, and allow them to shape their own learning experiences. Finding out how different sectors of the public would like to learn about local democracy is often likely to result in more effective initiatives. This also means recognising where particular communities already have assets and skills and building upon these. Acknowledging the role of community groups as vehicles for extending involvement in local affairs is therefore essential.

In designing citizenship education activities, practitioners should remember that existing networks, umbrella groups and community organisations can provide knowledge and contacts, and may be well placed to deliver information and capacity building to their members. This applies to formal structures through which local authorities are already doing citizenship work – from Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Strategies to parish councils – as well as community and voluntary groups.

ASSESSING CAPACITY

Many councils – perhaps acting in partnership with other bodies – would gain from an overview of the condition of the voluntary and community sector in their area. To give one example, **Lincoln's** Local Strategic Partnership funded Lincoln Community Network to conduct research to update ward profiles, as an input to local neighbourhood renewal plans. The LCN consulted a range of community sector and statutory sector stakeholders in the design of the research and used the resulting information to produce an assessment of the capacity for community action in each ward. (From National Audit Office, *Neighbourhood Renewal: Case Examples in Getting Communities Involved* at http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/03-04/03041070_case_examples.pdf)

Illustrations of a responsive education provider and the value of developing community networks, are given in the two case studies below.

CASE STUDY: RESPONDING TO NEEDS

The **South Yorkshire Active Learning for Active Communities** hub, run by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and Northern College in Sheffield, encourages groups to come to them with topics and issues they would like to address. They then provide customised solutions, including tutors, workshops, visits and discussion groups to suit their aims. Recent examples with an effective citizenship theme include 'Talking Politics', 'Changing ourselves, changing our world', 'Fact and Fiction about Asylum Seekers and Refugees' and 'The USA in the world today'. See <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/active.asp?id=200497111254&cat=14&parentid=13>

CASE STUDY: NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

The **Ealing Community Network** in London used £320,000 from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's community programme to support community network development, and increase the say of voluntary and community groups in local decision making. Funding and support was given to develop existing networks, such as the BME Forum, Refugee Forum and Carers Consortium. Innovative new networks were developed, too, such as the establishment of the *Southall Environmental Alliance* and *East Acton Alliance* of local residents groups to develop e-mail and intranet links as a better way of reporting local service issues such as graffiti and broken street lights to the local authority. In 2004, resources were allocated to develop networks for young people, people with physical disabilities, Somali groups and lesbians and gay men'. See <http://www.ealingnetwork.org.uk/>

Sustaining the dialogue, learning to listen

Building a sustained dialogue with communities is important for reinforcing people's learning experiences, and for democracy as a whole. It takes time to establish people's trust and confidence, so keeping the dialogue going over the long-term is crucial. Curtailing engagement breeds cynicism about local government, damages peoples' confidence and can increase their sense of alienation.

Local authorities need to ensure that people's involvement is acknowledged, to provide feedback on responses they have received and say how participants have influenced action. *All parties need to learn how to listen.* The case study from Ipswich, below, shows how responding to citizens' concerns can sustain and extend their involvement, and deliver positive lessons in local democracy.

CASE STUDY: DEMONSTRATING EFFICACY

Evidence of a virtuous circle can be found in **Ipswich**, where 'people who don't see the council as ever having done anything positive' are gradually believing that by working together, with the council, as citizens, their quality of life is improving. Ipswich's MAD team ('make a difference') went into areas for five weeks to find out what people want.

If the priorities are to address graffiti, dog mess, abandoned vehicles or litter, that is what the team will do. Strong anecdotal information suggests that it is the scope for local people to access resources, and influence how money is spent that is improving confidence in the council, councillors and the police; people saying, 'we've realised we can make a difference'. Physical outputs include better lighting, footways, children's play equipment and additional police presence. For further information, contact jim.manning@ipswich.gov.uk. and see <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=764893>

Every step counts

Almost every point of engagement with local authorities can help to reinforce the message that people's views are valued, and provide further learning opportunities. Confidence can be built by front-line service providers, and by showing that the council listens positively to suggestions. In other instances, spontaneous single-issue protest movements can be harnessed by councils as the basis for more long-lasting engagement.

SEIZE THE MOMENT

"In our authority, one of the council's committees hinted through the press that certain city youth clubs would be closing down. Young people in some of the wards responded to this by demanding a meeting with officers to explain themselves. Now that could have been a brilliant example of young people initiating engagement with the local council but the way that we engaged them seemed almost condescending at times. If you're going to engage with young people then you've got to accept what they say and at least allow it onto the table" (Councillor).

Use every available avenue

While existing networks are valuable for delivering citizenship education, relying on traditional channels will not reach everybody. Using a range of methods that reach into people's every day lives is vital. So too is recognising that no single method of supporting effective citizenship will appeal to everyone. Hence the next chapter turns to the important task of tailoring initiatives to different audiences.

CASE STUDIES: BALANCING POWER

A key issue in various decision making forums, from Local Strategic Partnerships to Area Forums, is that new, community-based participants often lack the support that public sector participants take for granted, and this erodes their ability to exert influence. The National Audit Office report *Neighbourhood Renewal: Case Examples in Getting Communities Involved*

http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/03-04/03041070_case_examples.pdf

provides a number of examples of where, in the context of regeneration, support has been provided for community group participants.

In **Rotherham**, the Community Empowerment Network supported local representatives serving on the Local Strategic Partnership with ICT resources, training and mentoring support, and expenses for attending LSP meetings.

In **Great Yarmouth**, a system of coloured cards were introduced during LSP meetings to help voluntary and community sector representatives indicate when they were unable to follow proceedings, because the speaker was talking too quietly or using jargon.

The LSP for **West Cornwall** has introduced a mentoring programme and handbook to support new members, especially those from the voluntary and community sector, to help explain the LSP and the practicalities of being a member. It also offers briefing and support to members before LSP meetings, organises events where members can develop their knowledge skills and experience, and assists members in carrying out their communication responsibilities.

References/further reading

- 1 For further discussion of learning from experience, see Boud D, Keogh R and Walker R (Eds.) (1985) *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*, Kogan Page, London.
- 2 For more information on Stockton on Tees Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder, see **http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/works_details.asp?id=2004111010382&cat=11&parentid=3**
- 3/4 HM Government (2005) *Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity. A Five Year Plan from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*, CM 6425, Crown Copyright, quotes from pages 7 and 21 respectively (also at: - **<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1122850>**)

CHAPTER 3

Tailoring initiatives to different audiences

Chapter Summary

- Different ways of informing or empowering people work better in different contexts, and for different social groups.
- Involving people in the design of learning activities can make them more effective.
- It is important to pay particular attention to ways of supporting effective citizenship for young people, other marginalised groups, and the ‘silent majority’.

Making general provisions to inform or educate the public about decision-making is unlikely to reach every section of society. To paraphrase a key principle of communications, “there is no such thing as the public – there are a series of interrelated and overlapping publics”.¹ Councils have to understand the interlocking effects of age, gender, ethnicity, income and life experiences on people’s knowledge, capacity and willingness to participate. This is equally true of the voluntary and community sector which, far from being homogenous, embraces groups that vary enormously in income, professionalism, membership and objectives.

Assisting all people in becoming effective citizens requires initiatives that are tailored to the needs and circumstances of different audiences. Although there is no magic formula for reaching diverse groups, there is a growing body of experience and expertise on which councils can draw to develop appropriate learning opportunities.

A PLURAL APPROACH

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council avoided the institutional reflex of having one single forum to represent each sector of society. With the Community Strategy, social cohesion has been mainstreamed by bringing together BME networks, tenants groups and the voluntary sector in single events, rather than engaging them separately. For young people, too, having a plurality of forums and routes to engagement, some of them linked to area committees and some to particular initiatives, are seen as more successful in extending citizenship than a “single, shiny, showpiece youth forum”, not least in making venues more physically accessible. For certain groups, such as Asian young people and Asian women, having very local groups has been vital in extending involvement, not least because diverse Asian groups resist being lumped together into a single forum.

The advice that follows is structured into three broad sections – young people, other marginalised and under-represented groups, and the ‘silent majority’ – but many of the ideas can be adapted to meet the needs of a range of social groups. Beyond this, no guide can claim to deal exhaustively with the permutations of circumstances that communities face – there is no short cut to councils researching carefully their target audiences and listening to their needs. The case study below, on engaging Asian women in Manchester, highlights the nuanced issues involved.

CASE STUDY: ENGAGING ASIAN WOMEN

The research project, *Asian Women and Community Engagement*, highlights the particular difficulties that Asian women may face in getting involved in decision-making. Despite being strongly motivated to participate, Asian women were found to be significantly under-represented in formal community engagement structures in **Manchester**. This reflects a lack of time, knowledge, confidence and trust in the process, coupled with barriers of language and jargon. They can also feel intimidated by male-dominated environments, especially if they are the only Asian women present. Some face particular pressures to stay within the family home. Asian women themselves stressed the need for more women-only workshops, some restricted to Asian women and others involving women from the wider community. They also recognise the value of informal contacts and social events. These help to generate shared identity, and build the confidence to get more involved, acting as training processes to help more Asian women get involved in wider issues. Specific training to address lack of confidence, fear of speaking at public events, and a perception of not having enough knowledge, is also desirable. For more information see **Manchester Women’s Network**, <http://www.wevh.org.uk/>

Young People

Many councils have been working hard to inform, inspire and empower young people to get more involved in decision-making – for good reason. Involving young people is vital for the future health of local democracy, including supplying the next generation of politicians. They are a group keen to become informed and to get more involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

BAD OLD DAYS?

“Young people attending a council meeting where they get a packet of crisps, a can of cola and a friendly smile, is no longer acceptable. That is what happened in the early days – it is patronizing; it was a pat on the head” (Councillor)

Involving young people is no longer an optional extra. The *Hear by Right*² guide to youth inclusion stresses that young people have a right to participate in decisions that affect them, under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CASE STUDY: REALISING RIGHTS

In **Rochdale**, young people and the council operate a ‘28 day accountability clause’. When the MYP (Member of Youth Parliament) or a youth forum has produced a piece of work on an issue – say a consultation response – then the officers or members responsible must respond within 28 days reporting any progress that has been made. This demonstrates a commitment to the right of young people to be involved in decisions that affect them, rather than seeing their involvement as a favour or a chore, and reinforces positive lessons about the value of public involvement. Youth officers feel that this clause is beginning to be more widely honoured, and young people are being taken more seriously across the authority.

There is a range of ways in which councils can help young people to learn about democratic processes:

- *Fostering effective links between youth work, schools, and real decision-making processes.* Citizenship education became a statutory part of the secondary school national curriculum in 2002 in England. The Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health education (PSHE) non-statutory framework was introduced in primary schools in 2000 (See <http://www.nc.uk.net/webdav/servlet/XRM?Page/@id=6016>). While this guide does not duplicate government advice on the teaching of citizenship within schools, there is plenty that councils can do to strengthen links between schools, the local community and wider decision-making processes. This can be of practical benefit to all parties and a valuable context for informal learning. It can develop young citizens' sense of responsibility for real decisions and, by connecting class-based learning to political action, can really enhance political literacy.

Examples of initiatives that facilitate these connections are given in the text box and case study below.

SHARING THE BURDEN

Schools can benefit from assistance with the resource and administrative requirements of teaching citizenship effectively, especially in reaching beyond the classroom to make links to elected youth forums. **Derwentside Council's SPICE initiative** (Special Project for the Implementation of Children's Elections) seeks to address these practical headaches, provide an effective voice for young people and deepen citizenship education. It has achieved a very high school and pupil participation rate in its citizenship activities. See <http://www.spiceproject.org.uk>.

CASE STUDY: LINKING SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

The **London Borough of Barking and Dagenham 'All Change' Project**, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, was a three-year project that began in April 2001. The project saw an innovative voluntary-statutory sector partnership between the national charity CSV (Community Service Volunteers) and Barking and Dagenham Local Education Authority, and signalled a fresh approach to community development and volunteering among young people. By being based in the Inspection and Advisory Service of the LEA, the Project Officer was perfectly poised to link up schools and pupils with community organisations and local authority departments to create opportunities for active citizenship within the local community. This was also carried out in support of the statutory requirement for schools to deliver citizenship education. Outcomes of the project included mapping of local partnerships, termly newsletters informing schools of opportunities for active citizenship, linking particular school needs with appropriate community partners for school citizenship events, and the training of community partners and council officers in citizenship education and how to work effectively with schools. For further information on this continued work in Barking and Dagenham, contact erik.stein@lbbd.gov.uk; for more information on school-community links, including good practice guidance, see the CSV's '*Community Partners*' website, <http://www.communitypartners.org.uk>.

Getting the best out of these connections may also require giving educators, employers and decision-makers appropriate education. Indeed, teaching pupils citizenship in schools may have more impact if those values are embedded in a wider community. Interim evaluations of the *Post-16 Citizenship Development Pilot Programme* – focusing on further education and the workplace – stress that initiatives worked better where young people had control of their learning activities, and where senior management in public organisations championed citizenship.³

- *Making effective, mutually educative links between elected members and young people.* Many local councillors already visit schools and youth groups to engage young people in local politics and many young people make the return journey into councils to learn more about decision-making. Much of this takes place under the auspices of the annual Local Democracy Week.

Evidence shows that these links are well received by young people. However, badly executed councillor visits can have adverse impacts. Care is required to ensure that visits take place at times other than during election campaigns, and that they offer genuine dialogue with young people – an occasion to see their concerns acted on – rather than just a media opportunity.

Clearly, the need for prior information and the development of relevant skills applies to schools as well as councillors. Advice packs are now available for helping schools and elected representatives to make the most of such visits.⁴

- *Representation of young people within formal decision-making structures.* The most obvious vehicle for helping a section of young people to boost their understanding of democratic processes is provided by youth cabinets, youth mayors, youth partnerships and the myriad other representative structures that councils have introduced. A key step is moving beyond symbolic representation, to ensure young people are taken seriously in the decision-making process, and have the skills to take up this more significant role.

CAPACITY TO CHOOSE:

“Some people see the youth cabinet as a ready-made youth involvement group that can be hoicked along to attend every event. It’s just about ‘let’s get the boxes ticked’. Part of our job is to enable young people to be confident enough to say no sometimes when they don’t feel that their presence is an equal one ...” (Youth Worker).

THE RIGHT STUFF

“I had a telephone call from a school saying that they didn’t think one of the young people that had been elected to the youth cabinet was the right sort of person. Previously, representatives had been head boy, head girl and this young person was definitely not that kind of material. We had to address the school’s preconceptions about what these young people are really for, and why they are there”. (Youth Worker)

By working with the *UK Youth Parliament* (UKYP)⁵ and supporting local Members of the Youth Parliament (MYPs) local authorities can ensure that representative groups such as youth councils and forums have a voice at Central Government level. MYPs meet Whitehall departments to progress issues raised by MYPs at their Annual Sitting.

Well-supported structures below national level are required to get the most out of the UKYP. This is the case in the south-west region of England (textbox below), which has also sought ways of ensuring that knowledge gained by one cohort of youth representatives is passed on to successors.

REGIONAL SUPPORT

The **South-West** region has a fully funded Regional Youth Democracy Worker in place that works with LEAs to assist them in holding elections for the UKYP. Best practice within the region is shared through a *Participation Workers Network*, supported by the Government Office, and outgoing MYPs are invited to the regional UKYP meetings to share their experiences. For more information, contact www.learning-southwest.org.uk/Youthwork.html

At local level, it is important to design structures that are right for the circumstances. In *Stoke City*, for example, a Young People's Local Strategic Partnership was set up as a more inclusive approach than working only with schools, allowing better links to the renewal and cohesion agendas, and to members of the Local Strategic Partnership. Other councils have made close links between Youth Councils and cabinet structures, and sought to deliver effective training to young people and relevant officers.

CASE STUDY: MAKING FRIENDS & INFLUENCING PEOPLE

West Sussex Council has achieved increasing success with their Youth Council since it was set up in 2001. Efforts have been made to embed it into the Council's formal decision-making structures, by basing it in the chief executive's office and giving it more status. Youth Cabinet members hold the same portfolios as the adult cabinet members, and joint focus groups between them have proved mutually educative. Over time, the young people have become better at setting their own agenda and priorities – adults are invited to put in bids for young people's involvement. Supportive training is provided to youth cabinet members, in the form of a residential training weekend, though peer education is also important. The youth cabinet is also involved in training adults in how to listen to and act upon young people's ideas. There are varying degrees of participation – reflecting the different levels of drive of the young people involved – but West Sussex have developed a structure which accommodates different levels of commitment without stigma. Cabinet members themselves, along with the West Sussex Youth Parliament, have also taken responsibility for consulting young people: working with young 'travellers'; meeting groups of asylum seekers; organising events bringing together young parents; and promoting the interests of young carers. Participants have effected change in spheres including bus fares, consumers' rights, bullying, policing and sexual health needs, childhood obesity, and school council development. **For more information contact Pandora Ellis at youth.cabinet@westsussex.gov.uk.**

- *Best practice youth work*, with its traditional concern for empowering young people, is a critical delivery agent for informal citizenship education that councils can cultivate. In some areas, the *Connexions* service has been a useful vehicle for bringing young people at risk of exclusion into local democratic processes and debates.
- *Building in responsiveness to new demands*. Wherever possible, councils need to ensure that young people have the opportunity and are encouraged to propose and develop new activities themselves. Citizenship work should generate and celebrate this responsiveness, an illustration of which from Gravesham, is given in the textbox below.

RESPONSIVE INITIATIVES

A young people's club, 'Kids dot go', was created by a residents' association in **Gravesham** to encourage young people to get involved in community projects. Young people earn points for taking part in local events that they can then use to go on trips. The young people decide how they are going to earn their points, what trips they are going to spend them on and whether sanctions should be applied to those who break the rules. For more information, contact **Glyn.Thomas@gravesham.gov.uk**

- *Exploring diverse means of delivering learning.* Arts projects can be effective means for reaching the very young (as illustrated by the 'RU Listening' initiative in Chapter 1). The arts are also valuable tools for re-engaging disaffected young people with their local communities and each other. Indeed, art-based involvement can be useful in reaching wider audiences *per se*, overcoming traditional barriers to involvement, and developing people's skills as citizens. Literacy and confidence in speaking in public are not pre-requisite for these types of activity.

CASE STUDY: ARTS-BASED ENGAGEMENT

The website from **Local Democracy Week** <http://www.localdemocracyweek.info> provides guidelines on planning creative, art-based consultation events. Key lessons (taken from the London Borough of Redbridge's experience) are:

- make contact with key organisations early on (in this case, citizenship teachers in schools, youth workers, the voluntary sector), to help them feel part of it;
- involve young people in deciding how the promotional material will look, to help meet the target audience;
- connect the activity to the schools citizenship education agenda;
- invite prize winners to events hosted by the Mayor and councillors, presenting prizes at the beginning of a meeting of the full council.

See also National Youth Association publication, *Art Unlimited*, at <http://www.nya.org.uk/>

Young people will also deepen their learning experience if they are involved in the follow-up and review of initiatives. Encouraging young people to carry out surveys and research can help to stimulate their awareness of citizenship issues. Again, this is equally true of the community as a whole, and is discussed in Chapter Five under 'Participatory Evaluation'.

FUN, FUN, FUN?

An element of fun is always helpful for engaging young people, although, "*if they feel that there has been genuine space for them and their ideas and issues, that keeps them engaged far more than any reward process*" (Youth Worker).

- *Interactive technologies.* Councils can now avail themselves of a range of tools that seek to enhance the knowledge, learning and engagement of young people through ICT. A well-known ICT tool is the reality TV-inspired interactive game *I'm A Councillor Get Me Out of Here*, run each year under Local Democracy Week. Available for schools, but

connected to national parliament, is *HeadsUp*, a political literacy resource including on-line Forums, which may also offer something to young people outwith the school context <http://www.headsup.org.uk/content/>. And ODPM has produced *Demgames*, a computer-based resource designed to teach citizenship skills to young people, which can be downloaded from <http://www.demgames.org/>. Some councils are experimenting with text messaging, which is useful in reaching young people in rural areas, and has the advantage of eliciting a response, in contrast to one-way means of communication.

A key issue for all 'technologies' of participation is that they are not a substitute for face-to-face dialogue. Deriving effective learning outcomes means using these tools within a supportive, educational structure.

SIM-COUNCIL, SIM-CITIZEN

North Lincolnshire Council worked in partnership with a private company, Delib, to produce three games for young people which put them in the shoes of a councillor: '*Captain Campaign*' (about winning support); '*Councillor Quest II*' (making decisions for a local village); and '*Money Manager*', about allocating budgets. This way of demystifying council decision-making emerged as a Local e-Democracy National Pilot Project; games to be available through <http://www.demgames.org/>. More information via <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk>.

DEliberative Meeting Of CitizenS

DEMOCS is partly a card game, partly a policy-making tool to enable small groups of people to engage with complex issues. It helps them to find out about a topic, express their views, seek common ground with other participants and identify a preferred position. Evaluation of DEMOCS suggests that people learn not just from the information on the cards but from other participants. Some feel sufficiently empowered to begin to consider and question received expert opinion. For more information see <http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/democs.aspx>

Marginalised and under-represented groups

As well as targeting young people, many councils have been providing information and capacity-building to other marginalised and under-represented groups. Such actions are increasingly driven by legislation and government policy. For example, enabling people with disabilities to get more involved in decision-making has become even more important following the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment). And many councils participated in the '*Better Government for Older People*' initiative which piloted a range of ways of engaging with older people. See <http://www.bgop.org.uk/home.aspx> .

Progress has been patchy, however, and the continuing under-representation of various groups within decision-making processes – from women to black and minority ethnic (BME) groups⁶ to people with disabilities – shows the need for sustained effort.

In this section, we suggest broad approaches to providing learning opportunities and capacity-building to minority and under-represented groups. Each piece of advice may be applicable to a range of different groups – it is for councils and the groups they serve to think clearly about which approaches fit best.

TAILORED KNOWLEDGE WORKS

Inspire Black Country, in conjunction with **Sheffield Hallam University**, has delivered workshops focusing specifically on the skills and knowledge women require to engage effectively in regeneration. Participants reported increased level of confidence in challenging dominant viewpoints, collecting and understanding statistical information, and in their own communication skills, which led some women to begin actively participating in decision-making bodies. For more information, see <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/>

- *Developing the confidence for collective action.* Councils need to consider how learning initiatives can develop the confidence and self-esteem of the people involved, and provide an element of networking so that group members can come together, collectively, to learn about the scope for creating change. This ethos of creating a safe, supportive learning environment is relevant to young people, and has also been applied successfully to gender-based citizenship activities as shown in the case study below.

CASE STUDY: SUPPORTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Through the *IMPACT!* initiative of the **West Midlands Active Learning for Active Citizenship** group, women have been able to reflect on how, why and where they can make a difference, to share experiences of engaging with decision-makers and to receive support from other group members. Creating space for reflection is considered a vital ingredient because for people to gain the capacity and confidence to act as citizens they need to feel safe to ask questions and make mistakes, but also have their views challenged in a non-threatening way. Careful facilitation is crucial. *IMPACT!* has addressed issues around gender and difference in a sensitive manner, with participants able to go at their own pace, and so feel included in shaping the direction of their learning. *IMPACT!* has also facilitated sessions on presentation skills, and links with MPs and MEPs. For more information, see <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk>, or contact Working for Change on jillbed@lineone.net or wawdg@tiscali.co.uk.

'It's not always what you say, it's who says it and how', is a common theme in work on encouraging older people to become involved in decision making, especially as they are often less confident about communicating with local service providers. For example, some authorities have noted the unwillingness of many older people to complain about council services because they are fearful of 'losing what they have got'.

WHERE TRUST IS ABSENT

"Regeneration officers working with communities were united in wanting the council badge removed, as they felt it was vital to be seen as separate from the local authority. However, this makes it hard for officers to promote the good work that they are doing in the community to build capacity, and also makes it difficult to use the regeneration work to engage and educate the citizenry about what the council is doing" (Council Officer).

- *Connecting effective citizenship, social inclusion and community cohesion.* Involving diverse groups in decision-making places great onus on councils to ensure that barriers to understanding between groups – and between those groups and decision-making bodies – are broken down. In some instances, "groups within neighbourhoods may define themselves in ways that are divisive",⁷ while some sections of society suffer from discrimination at the hands of others. Both problems are impediments to the cultivation of effective citizenship. Councils will need to connect the task of promoting information and

learning about citizenship with wider agendas of social inclusion, race equality and community cohesion.

There is already extensive guidance available on these subjects.⁸ A key government programme – *Community Cohesion Pathfinders* – has been exploring best practice in this area, and the Home Office has been working with a growing network of *Civic Pioneers* – councils that have signed up to share their practical experiences in promoting civil renewal and involving the public.

Encouraging different faith communities to participate in citizenship learning activities can help in generating shared agendas for local areas which cuts across geographical, ethnic and class boundaries.⁹ The development of inclusive, plural forums on specific issues may assist, as the text boxes below illustrate.

FAITH AND LEADERSHIP

Bradford's Intercultural Leadership school is run through the Active Faith Community and is looking to develop the leaders of the future. It is a residential course that looks at cultural issues, the heritage of the district and educates people into civic life. The Local Strategic Partnership supports this school with funding.

ENCOURAGING COLLABORATION

Multi-faith events in **Camden** have widened participation in shared social issues across the borough. Seating arrangements for Faith Communities meetings are structured by ward area rather than by faith group to ensure that they are inclusive and focused on local issues rather than religious differences. For more information, **contact Debbie.Chan@camden.gov.uk**

Evidence suggests that opportunities for sharing feelings about local concerns help to develop closer links across different communities, as well as exposing myths and confronting racism. Diversity events can prove an effective way of highlighting that difference is something to be celebrated rather than viewed as a social problem. They are also a practical and productive opportunity for councils to engage with people in an informal situation, to deepen people's skills in collaboration, and to help potential community leaders learn and develop. Three case studies below illustrate current practice.

CASE STUDIES: CELEBRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

A 'Big Day Out' event was coordinated by the **Gravesham** Community Cohesion Group comprising a variety of music and entertainment acts and food stalls, representative of local ethnic diversity. At the heart of the event site, the council set up a stall with a customer contact centre and the opportunity for registration with the 'People Bank' consultation forum. **Rochdale** held their 'Who Put the T(ea) in Britain' event (inviting people for a cup of Fair Trade tea), which was intended to encourage people to talk to each other, in schools and community centres. Rochdale's first Asian mayor being in place encouraged broad-based participation. This event has at least encouraged people to find out more about the lives of Rochdale's diverse social groups and look beyond extremist propaganda. The Sanity Fair project in **Stoke** has helped people use festivals to promote cooperation between religious and ethnic communities which, in the best cases, have helped to create a local sense of unity, local empowerment and connection with the City Council, as well as bringing forward new community leaders.

There are other ways that councils might make innovative use of the political knowledge already held within the local population, in ways that foster community cohesion as well as citizenship. For example, the Better Government for Older People programme used senior citizens to talk to young people about the importance of voting. Older people can have valuable knowledge and life experiences to contribute to learning about citizenship.

- *Reaching the right people in the right way.* Working in partnership with established community and voluntary organisations can often help councils reach marginalised and under-represented groups. But these social groups are rarely homogenous, and so it may be necessary to adopt different methods to encourage the voices of groups that are less frequently heard. The textbox below highlights different approaches to seeking engagement, while the case study from Bolton illustrates how outreach can be delivered by members of the target communities.

MULTI-TRACK CONTACT

MORI recruited members for **Camden Talks**, a citizens' panel, from specific target groups, such as the BME community, disabled people and young people, by using a twin-track approach. Postal targeting in geographical areas was used in conjunction with voluntary sector consultation. **Camden Central Partnership** has backed projects (such as the *Addressing Health Needs* initiative) which use peer-group methods to engage with and inform hard to reach groups such as Muslim women and older Irish people. For more information, contact **Debbie.Chan@camden.gov.uk** A community safety project in **Bradford**, talked to established residents and tenants groups, but also knocked on doors, used surveys, brought focus groups together and held workshops. This helped to include many people who had never taken part in such activities before.

CASE STUDY: REACHING OUT

Bolton has recruited eight *Community Network Ambassadors* – local people from ethnic minority backgrounds and other minority groups, employed part-time to identify the needs and priorities of their communities. They have attended a training course at Bolton Community College on Participation and Involvement which covered the benefits of participation, local authority forums and barriers to participation. The Ambassadors consulted 68 small and marginalised groups about how Bolton Community Network could help them, and devised their own innovative and accessible means of communication, using a visual tool called the 'fruit tree'. The consultation focused on the kind of support that groups need to develop their capacity to participate effectively in local regeneration, and the ambassadors are helping to set up a training programme in response to the expressed needs of Bolton's ethnic minority communities. See National Audit Office, *Neighbourhood Renewal: Case Examples in Getting Communities Involved*, at http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/03-04/03041070_case_examples.pdf. For more information, contact <http://www.boltoncvs.org.uk/>

Novel strategies can be especially important where social groups are spatially dispersed, or lack social networks. This is often the case with black and minority ethnic people living in rural areas. In this context, outreach to where people live can be critical, especially through the use of bi-lingual community workers, but also by establishing opportunities for people to meet and form social networks.¹⁰

Councils can find it especially difficult engaging with asylum seekers and refugees, either because of language barriers or the practical difficulties of reaching into the places where they live and work. A number of organisations are now helping immigrants and refugees to become more effective citizens. One example is the *Migrant Workers Centre in Boston*,

Lincolnshire, which is working to provide agricultural labourers with a safe environment for receiving objective advice on issues that affect their lives.

Case studies (below) from Exeter CVS's Lilac project and the London Borough of Haringey also illustrate the work going on to engage with highly mobile populations. A major task in addressing citizenship issues with this vulnerable sector of society is to provide learning opportunities which also foster cohesion, integration and understanding in the wider community.

CASE STUDIES: ASSISTING INTEGRATION

Exeter CVS is running the LILAC project (Learning for Integration, Learning for Active Citizenship – <http://www.exetercvs.org.uk/Projects/LILAC.htm>, a cross-European scheme to empower people from other countries to become active citizens. Among the project's activities are:

- the identification of information and support needs in the area of citizenship and integration;
- developing a multi-media toolkit to promote citizenship in settings such as language classes, and
- preparing a 'Good Practice in Citizenship Teaching' training pack and course for adult educators across Europe.

North Dorset District Council has been supporting isolated asylum seekers through the various community partnerships, which have "taken such individuals under their wing and protected them". They have also provided English lessons to help these people integrate more successfully.

CASE STUDY: TRANSIENT LOCAL CITIZENS

London Borough of Haringey achieved Beacon status in 2005 for its progress in 'getting closer to communities', and is remarkable for its efforts to embrace its highly transitory population (50% a year changing address over large parts of its area). Neighbourhood Management, alongside the continual development of a diverse and active voluntary and community sector, have been major driving forces in the borough. Initiatives directed specifically to the transitory population include a forum for people in temporary accommodation, a landlord forum, and greater cooperation between council departments. The council can also draw on a pool of 100 language interpreters. For more information contact <http://www.idea.gov.uk> and see ODPM (2005) *Report of the Advisory Panel on Beacon Councils*, <http://www.odpm.gov.uk>.

For older people, many of whom face difficulties in travelling to events, the use of ICT – suitably supported – can help both in learning about decision-making, and in utilising that knowledge. For example, Hillingdon Borough Council has used interactive e-voting to make decisions about the timing of adult education courses and the age-structure of social housing.

- *Responding to demands and understanding needs.* Responding to what people say they need in terms of citizenship education can make any initiative more effective, whether that is the demands of black and minority ethnic communities, or understanding the diverse needs of people with disabilities. And facilitating these needs and encouraging people to be more confident in making demands is important in itself, especially for groups which traditionally have seen lower levels of political engagement. To give just one example, the *Workers' Education Association* (WEA) in Sheffield has been working with the African Women's Group at the Subud Centre, where members requested to learn about how to vote, their town hall and how to become involved in school life.

- *Advocacy courses* – helping people learn how to speak for themselves and on behalf of others – can assist people from a range of excluded groups to take an active role in decision-making and the delivery of services. Key design features of the ‘Speaking Up’ course run by *Exeter CVS*¹¹, designed for people with disabilities, include offering participants opportunities to practise their skills (in speaking at meetings or giving a talk), and making the course lively and dynamic. Participants report gaining the confidence to speak up in situations they previously would have found daunting, notably in discussions with service providers, and speaking in committees and forums.

SUITABLE LANGUAGE

“In designing an initiative to give a voice for people with learning difficulties, we had to take into account that some people cannot easily say ‘advocacy’” (CVS Officer)

The silent majority

Most councils are aware that their consultation and participation strategies do not touch the majority of their constituents. The question is whether people lack the relevant knowledge, feel disempowered, or are simply disconnected from local democracy. After all, few people are actually untouched by council services, even if they are disengaged with council politics. Silence may also be a product of increasingly busy working lives, leaving little time for the responsibilities of being a good citizen.

A number of strategies might be adopted to connect this ‘silent majority’ with the council and, once connected, to deepen their learning and draw them into more meaningful engagement.

- *Information on citizenship and the council.* Councils should ensure that those members of the public who do not actively seek involvement are nevertheless informed of opportunities for participation, made aware of the impact which they can have, and encouraged to take part if they wish.
- *From consultation to connection.* One of the criticisms made of the increasing use of citizens panels as a means of consultation, is that it treats people as mere consumers of services. A number of local authorities have been connecting citizens’ panellists to wider learning opportunities and fostering deeper connections with democracy, as illustrated in the textbox below.

PANEL POWER

Each year, **Worcestershire County Council** invite a sample of 60 panellists to a festive event, at which they can meet councillors and officers face-to-face, and take part in further e-voting and focus group debates. Feedback surveys of participants reveal *“the vast majority said that their view of the council had improved because of these events”* (Council Officer). In **Rochdale Borough Council**, panellists have been able to select topics that they would like to discuss, and the accompanying citizens’ panel newsletter provides wider information on how to access decision-making processes and pursue particular issues.

- *Seize moments of opportunity.* Councils might consider taking the message about public involvement to spaces and places that people use in their everyday lives, whether this is via posters, road shows, articles in local newsletters, use of speciality food shops, the local media or in conjunction with service delivery. A range of services – including the Youth Service, Sure Start, Primary Care Trusts, libraries and schools – provide points of connection between the public, council services and, potentially, local democracy, as do the community and voluntary sector.

The key is sensitively and persuasively to make use of the opportunities that life throws up. A good example comes from the South Yorkshire Active Learning for Active Communities hub which has been running a course, ‘Understanding Your School’, and has exploited it to extend the involvement of parents in school management issues. When people’s children are about to go to school, their interest in education is at its highest, making this a timely opportunity. They have also embedded elements of citizenship into IT courses for local people. Reaching young people through pub culture has been exploited in a number of areas, as the case study below illustrates.

CASE STUDIES: ENGAGING 18-35s

A novel programme in **Heywood**, Lancashire, made use of beer mats and artists to get local people involved in the *New Deal for Communities* programme, and especially to reach parts of the populace that had not previously been engaged (18-35 year old males). The process involved employing locally known artists to make drawings of residents and interview them about their aspirations for the NDC programme; the resulting portraits and comments made by residents were transferred onto 5400 beer mats and displayed in local pubs. NDC workers then used the beer mats as a tool to help encourage other local people to get involved. 650 people got involved overall. (See also *Firm Foundations*, Home Office 2004). http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/research_news_details.asp?id=200514102725&cat=9&parentid=2

In **Cardiff**, campaigns on voter registration have targeted students and young people through beer mats, mousemats, mobile phone holders, student newspapers and university enrolment materials.

- *Peer learning, outreach and support* can be powerful tools for encouraging people to learn about local decision-making, because “it’s the existing learners who are the most effective ambassadors”.¹² In *Stoke City*, for example, peer support was used to get 18-25 year olds involved. Twelve young people were recruited from Stoke’s diverse communities, receiving proper financial support and training.
- *Harnessing new technologies.* Many local authorities are using speedier, ‘byte-sized’ and electronic communication mechanisms, but these are relatively untapped resources for citizenship education. ICT can help to connect the busier citizen with local democracy, especially those with childcare responsibilities, as well as wired-up but otherwise hard to reach groups. Examples include using websites, emails, text messaging, video and blogging.¹³

A number of local authorities are now providing live webcasting from the council chamber, including Lancashire County Council (see case study below).

CASE STUDY: WEB-CASTING COUNCIL MEETINGS

Lancashire County Council have used virtual mechanisms for bringing the council and its decision making processes closer to the public, to inform them, to reach groups with poor mobility, and thus to widen their audience. Under the auspices of an LGA project, '*Designs on Democracy*', Lancashire has run Web casts of council meetings, as well as youth council meetings and one-off debates. Officers feel that they are achieving a positive response. Average viewing figures are 300 a month sometimes, rising to 1,000, but this belies a suspicion that the media constitutes an important part of the audience – which then communicates events more widely. Web-casting may also be having unexpected benefits for transparency. Most people (80%) watch the archived rather than the live material, which allows them to refute or verify for themselves stories run in the local media. (For further information on Lancashire, contact Andy Wilkinson, 01772 533378). For more information on webcasting council meetings more generally, see www.public-i.info/clients.php

Technologies can be useful for giving experience of decision-making processes to individuals who might otherwise be reluctant to put themselves forward. Electronic keypad voting technology helps those uncomfortable with registering views in a group setting and can prevent more assertive participants from dominating debate. In Stoke-on-Trent, the 'Speak Out' initiative used video recordings to enable 60 homeless people to articulate their needs to the council. In Gateshead, the Visually Impaired User Forum produced a short film, 'Pathway Hazards', using a grant and training from the Community Empowerment Network, to communicate their concerns to service providers and other groups.

References/further reading

- 1 From the document, *Media and PR Toolkit: How to Create Effective, Engaging Communications* (page 6), produced by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, ODPM.
- 2 See Harry Wade and Bill Badham *Hear By Right. Standards for the Active Involvement of Children and Young People*, Local Government Association and the National Youth Agency, and the follow up skills workbook, *Act By Right: Skills for the Active Involvement of Children and Young People in Making Change Happen*. See <http://www.nya.org.uk>.
- 3 For more information on the Post-16 Citizenship Development Pilot programme see <http://www.citizenshippost-16.lsda.org.uk>.
- 4 Advice packs on MP's, MSP's and MEP's are available through the Hansard Society, at <http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/>. These packs provide information and resources to teachers, pupils and elected representatives on how to get the most out of their visit to a school, and meet key aspects of citizenship in the National Curriculum. Further information is also available through the Youth Voting Network of the Electoral Commission <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>
- 5 For more information on the UK Youth Parliament see <http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk>.
- 6 The work of Operation Black Vote has made an impact on these issues throughout Europe. See <http://www.obv.org.uk>
- 7/8 For information on community cohesion see *Community Cohesion – An Action Guide* (Local Government Association, <http://www.lga.gov.uk/>), *The Journey to Race Equality: Delivering Improved Services to Local Communities* (Audit Commission, <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/>), or the IDeA's guidance on *Promoting Racial Equality*, which provides lessons from Beacon Councils at <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=1>
- 9 For more information on engaging with faith communities, see Local Government Association (2002) *Faith and Community: A Good Practice Guide for Local Authorities*, London, LGA, and the Interfaith website, at <http://www.interfaith.org.uk>.
- 10 For more information on engaging BME communities in rural areas, see the conference report, *Connecting Black Minority Ethnic People in Rural Areas – are we doing enough?* Further information through the Community Development Exchange, <http://www.cdx.org.uk>.
- 11 For more information on Exeter CVS's advocacy courses for people with disabilities, see <http://www.exetercvs.org.uk/Projects/Advocacy.htm>
- 12 Taken from DfES (2003) *Neighbourhood Learning Centres, Guide for Practitioners*, p.19. See <http://www.skills.org.uk/guide.htm>
- 13 Or, to give the full name, 'weblogging' – the production of an on-line diary. For more information see Hansard Society (2004) *Political Blogs – Craze or Convention?* <http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk>.

CHAPTER 4

Changing council culture

Chapter Summary

- Initiatives to support effective citizenship are likely to be more effective if the council's whole culture and organisation demonstrably values and encourages citizen input.
- This chapter suggests actions that may help, including coordinating participation initiatives within councils (and between partners), having the right staff with the right remit, promoting learning within organisations, developing the roles of elected members, decentralised structures, education for local governance and building the capacity of social networks.

Developing effective citizenship is not just something councils do to the public – it requires that decision-making bodies themselves operate in ways which value the input of citizens and foster mutual learning. This can require cultural change. It can also require organisational structures which support the public in learning about local democracy, and which make decision-making processes easier to understand and access.

There is a whole host of ways in which a council can orient itself to fostering effective citizenship, and reinforce people's learning about democracy and decision-making. No single solution will be appropriate in every context, as the textbox below illustrates. Some ideas have been touched upon already in this guide: for example, processes of service design can provide positive learning opportunities for democratic involvement. This chapter suggests further actions that may assist, including the coordination of participation initiatives within councils (and between partners), having the right staff with the right remit, promoting learning within organisations, the important role of elected members, neighbourhood working and decentralised structures, education for local governance and building the capacity of social networks.

ORGANISATIONAL SOLUTIONS?

Lewisham created a Central Policy and Partnership Unit that organises citizenship initiatives on behalf of the corporate body. **Lambeth**, too, has a central body that 'brokers' citizenship roles across the authority to ensure all departments 'play the game'. **Blackburn with Darwen's** Citizenship Award Group (an offshoot of the LSP) supports citizenship internally and rewards groups for successful initiatives.

Other councils see risks in these approaches which need to be considered: "*The worst thing that could happen would be to have a separate unit for citizenship. It would marginalise citizenship – it would allow everyone to say, 'it's not our job now, we have a specific unit to do citizenship'. Yet we all work with citizens of the borough – it's our day job*" (Council Officer).

Co-ordinating participation

Encouraging effective citizenship is everybody's business, so there is a need to ensure joined-up working across government. Poorly coordinated programmes risk wasting resources and creating confusion, both within the public sector and among target audiences.

One relatively straightforward step that councils can take is to ensure that the consultation and participation activities of different departments are coordinated more effectively. This cuts down on duplication and wasted effort, and helps to guard against ‘consultation fatigue’ on the part of the public. Some recent Government policies have played an important role in encouraging authorities to develop more joined up working, as the textbox below illustrates.

FRUITS OF MODERNISATION

Wiltshire County Council's youth democracy and participation work has benefited from the Local Public Service Agreement on increasing voter participation. This ensured that the council “provided funding to push things along’ and that there was ‘the political will behind this work” (Council officer). The PSA also set clear measurable targets for the work. Likewise, **Durham** County Council has found CPA to be a powerful driver of change for improving engagement. And raising public engagement can also assist with decentralisation: in **Tewkesbury**, getting local area representatives on the Local Strategic Partnership has sustained the impetus given to locality forums across the borough.

To increase coordination, many councils are now producing complete, web-based itineraries of participation events, for internal and external use. The best are also starting to link up with other public sector bodies – a critical step in places that are governed by a complex network of partnerships. These initiatives also help departments and partners to share best practice, and to get evidence-based feedback on what worked where and why. The case studies below typify current good practice.

CASE STUDIES: CONSULTATION AND LEARNING

In **Rochdale**, concern about the impact, quality, proliferation and duplication of consultation activities drove the council to start producing Corporate Consultation Action Plans. Within this, a key development is the ‘Consultation Forum’, a web-based comprehensive listing and database of forthcoming consultations, the methods involved, and contact details for how to get involved. The aim is to embrace ‘involvement exercises’ in the widest sense, not just consultation, and to make this a partnership activity, extending the scope for public information, coordination and organisational learning beyond the council. A further component of the Action Plan is a Consultation Guide and Toolkit/Consultation Pack to advise internal audiences on good consultation practice. Advice is available on the council’s webpages, and is also built into staff and member induction. Rochdale has also developed a self-assessment checklist and consultation resource point to help pool available expertise in consultation, and to integrate the evaluation of experiences into everyday work. For more information, go to <http://www.rochdale.gov.uk> and follow the link to ‘Consultation’.

CamdenTalks seeks to enhance the internal capacity of the council and its departments by organising its strategic and service-specific consultations into one overarching engagement framework. There are also briefings, seminars and workshops to facilitate internal training about consultation more generally. At the same time, CamdenTalks offers its citizen panel members the opportunity to get involved through a choice of questionnaires, telephone or internet surveys, focus groups, in-depth workshops and online discussions. See <http://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/council-and-democracy/having-your-say/>

The right staff with the right remit

The experience of a number of local authorities demonstrates that you need people as well as processes to support citizenship. For all the glib talk of ‘mainstreaming’ participation, it often takes skilled people with the right job remit to connect people, communities and decision-makers in ways that are mutually educative. This can mean staff with the scope to start from the needs of the target audience, and with the skills to reconcile the expectations of communities and the capacity of service deliverers.

MAINSTREAMING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Blackpool's Community Development Unit was set up with RDF and NRF funding to develop the community sector in the town. Now located in the Chief executive's Unit, the CDU has worked on producing a compact to guide the relationship between voluntary and community groups and statutory organisations. Moreover, a key task of the CDU has been to work closely with different departments in the council, to explain the compact, and ensure that community development issues are brought into all areas of the Council. For more information contact <http://www.blackpool.gov.uk/faqs/showlevel3.aspx?level2id=78>

Councils may find it useful to develop staff with the responsibility for fostering links between elected members and the wider public, to facilitate the learning of both parties. One case study is the Worcestershire Area Democracy Team, below.

CASE STUDY: SUPPORTING REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

A key feature of **Worcestershire County Council's** approach to connecting people with their council is a three-person ‘Area Democracy Team’, linked to the central administrative and political functions of the council. These officers work to support elected representatives in communicating their role to the public, raising their profile, by providing stands, information materials and leaflets, for example ‘Do you know your councillor?’; ‘People Like me Helping People Like You’. They also help support numerous area-based forums and surgeries in which the public can meet representatives from the council and other public agencies. Officers felt that the greater flexibility they enjoyed in their remit, compared to officers in similar posts in other local authorities, made them more effective in carrying out this role. For more information, contact Jmurray@worcestershire.gov.uk.

Careful attention needs to be given to how community works are deployed. A lack of skilled community workers, deployment of community workers in unduly limited roles, and a lack of integration between community workers employed by different agencies can hamper efforts to engage the public.¹ The introduction of ‘Community Organisers’ in Salford is an example of an initiative that seeks to get around these problems (see textbox below).

COMMUNITY ORGANISERS

In Salford, nine residents have been recruited as Community Organisers by the **Salford Community Empowerment Network** and deployed to assist with communication and outreach work across the city. Their job is to engage with local communities and link them to participation structures and neighbourhood renewal. Each Organiser works 12 hours each week and they have no office – only a mobile phone and a waterproof coat. The Organisers themselves have learned about community development and participation. For further information see <http://www.communitypride.org.uk>.

In some cases, it is beneficial to employ and empower staff to work across different governmental tiers and a range of public bodies. For example, the community development team managed by *Dorset Community Action* is funded by all three tiers of local government, but recognised as independent. The team help community groups feed into parish plans, market town action plans, community planning and consultations with statutory agencies. Over time, the team has found that the individuals involved are becoming more motivated to engage with local strategic forums.²

In smaller councils, there may be scope for networking resources. For example, ‘Getting closer to communities’ Beacon, *South Somerset District Council* established a small community development staff, that in turn maintain a network which draws in other front-line staff from across the District, and from other districts in the county. A number of staff in other disciplines have also been trained as ‘Interact facilitators’, to facilitate participative community meetings. (For more information contact <http://www.idea.gov.uk>.)

Learning *within* organisations

Learning *within* local authorities and partner agencies is essential. As the Home Office put it, this means “expanding learning and development within public services, so that professionals, practitioners and policy-makers are better equipped to engage with citizens and communities”.² This applies to frontline staff – community workers and others – that work directly with a range of social groups, but also to officers in other departments as well as councillors, the community and voluntary sector and businesses.

OFFICER ATTITUDES

“You need cultural change and capacity building among officers to persuade them that there’s value in participation, to build the capacity of officers to go out there and meet the community face to face. This may mean subtle shifts in attitude, like being receptive and open-minded enough to think, well, perhaps we’re not delivering the best of services” (Council Mayor).

Councils may be able to learn from the training already underway in other authorities. In *Gravesham*, “tenant participation ensures tenants have a say in what training is needed by staff” (Council Officer). In *Burnley*, staff receive ongoing training in consultation, communication and race and diversity training, in partnership with the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and 20 Housing. And at the national level, the Home Office has developed training modules for civil servants in supporting community engagement, which have been rolled out by central government in 2005. (For more information contact charles.woodd@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk).

Elected members

The Government is keen “to maximise the potential of locally elected representatives to act in a leadership role as advocates and champions of local communities”,³ but the activities of councillors can also do much to reinforce effective citizenship among the population as a whole. Councillors can represent individuals and groups in ways that help to inform and empower them, facilitating community involvement. At the same time, elected members may find that wider democratic engagement supports their community leadership role.

The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) publication, *A Councillor’s Guide*,⁴ gives a number of ways in which councillors can provide informal learning opportunities:

- supporting their constituents by providing information on relevant contacts in local government or other services, so that people can take the next steps themselves;
- helping to facilitate meetings, petitions and surveys and so on;
- encouraging negotiation between different groups.

REACHING THE AUDIENCE

Councillors have reached out to citizens by setting up booths in supermarkets (**Worcestershire**), using Mobile Units which take councillors out to communities (**Lancashire**), and highlighting the challenges of democracy through fly-on-the-wall TV documentaries (**Blackburn with Darwen**).

Representative democracy itself can be conducted in ways which reaches a wider range of audiences: the textbox below from Birmingham's Community Empowerment Network suggests one method by which this can be done; the case study of Lancashire's Cabinet in the Community initiative suggests another.

CONNECTING CIVIL SOCIETY TO REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

B:cen, **Birmingham's Community Empowerment Network** offered £250 to community groups to hold hustings events in the run up to the June 2004 local authority elections, and nine groups took up the offer, ranging from existing neighbourhood forums to women's groups. B:cen also provided support and training, including a workshop with these groups. Between 30 and 200 people attended each event, which heightened interest in local elections. For information, contact info@bcen.net, and see <http://www.bcen.net/>

CASE STUDY: CABINET IN THE COMMUNITY

To open themselves up to wider dialogue, and break down perceived detachment from the general public, **Lancashire County Council** have used local radio media personalities to host a television-style 'Question Time' session with the leader and four councillors. This is regarded as using "a format that is something the public are familiar with in their everyday lives, from what they watch on television", whereas "a committee meeting, to most normal citizens, is a fairly artificial way of doing things" (Councillor). This is held locally, around the county, and presented to an invited audience of citizens who have expressed a willingness to be involved – by completing an invitation form in the Vision newspaper or via the Citizens Panel – but who may nonetheless be sceptics. The Leader and member will take virtually any question from the floor, demonstrating that the council is committed to meaningful scrutiny. Food and refreshments are provided afterwards and usually about 50 people attend. (For further information, contact Andy Wilkinson, 01772 533378)

Attention to the style of local party politics is an important way of influencing the public's willingness to engage. The IDeA⁴ suggests that under-promising and over-delivering is more likely to leave people with a positive impression of local democracy. Holding all-party surgeries, or even partnership-based forums, makes it easier for constituents to find the appropriate body to address their concern, but also demonstrates cooperation. Political groups, too, need to give careful consideration to what is legitimate to attack and what is needlessly undermining local democracy and discouraging voter turn-out.

In considering the actions above, it is important to assess how far elected members are able to absorb the community advocate role now promoted by government policy, and think carefully about how this can be developed in ways which also empower excluded groups to access representative democracy. The IDeA, with its *Modern Members* programme, and others are able to advise on appropriate member development programmes.⁵

Neighbourhood working and decentralised structures

The Government's 10 Year Vision for local government, sees devolving the delivery of services to neighbourhood level as an important way of securing sustainable improvements in public services and re-engaging citizens with government. Learning about effective citizenship is integral to this process. Neighbourhood level governance needs informed, skilled and confident communities in order to be effective; at the same time, these local structures provide invaluable "nurseries for democratic participation".⁶

There is a whole number of ways in which more localised forms of governance – whether that is neighbourhood management of services, area committees of local councils, or parish councils – can help to foster effective citizenship. They can make local democracy more physically accessible, less daunting, and more tangible. Potentially, they allow a wider range of people and groups to gain experience of decision-making processes.

NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTIVITIES

The ODPM and Home Office paper, *Why Neighbourhoods Matter*, gives a range of examples of neighbourhood-level governance, driven by parish councils, service providers and local activists. To give one example, **Thurrock Council** developed its approach to neighbourhood engagement to take advantage of the Thames Gateway proposals and to improve the ability and opportunity for communities to influence local services. Through its area committee structure, area forums have been set up and programme of community training have sought to improve people's capacity to be involved. One result is that local democracy has been made more relevant to residents, with a 10% increase in turn out at local elections, and 8 new councillors emerging from the forums (see *Why Neighbourhoods Matter*, Appendix B, page 33).

For local-level institutions of any form to deliver on this potential, they need to be welcoming and inclusive. Many useful lessons can be taken from councils that already operate some form of area structure, although it is always advisable to take into account an area's social and political history, as well as its present circumstances. Some councils, such as *Rochdale*, have a rich history of decentralised government to draw upon (see case study below). In *Stoke City Council*, ten Community Forums were created, to promote more citizen-focused services but also to develop a wider set of community leaders with their roots in local needs.

In some instances, education about citizenship values and capacity building may be necessary to support communities in getting more involved in decision-making and service provision at neighbourhood level. This may be true where councils are concerned that local groups may favour racist, divisive or exclusionary policies, or where local communities lack the ability to use new, local decision-making structures to best effect.

CASE STUDY: DECENTRALISATION AND COHESION

Rochdale experimented with radical decentralisation of local government in the 1980s, and this experience fed into the creation of four Township Committees in 1992. These committees are Rochdale itself (c96,000 people), Middleton (c45,000), Pennines (c32,000) and Heywood (c30,000) – each reflecting distinct geographical communities within the borough. Townships are full Standing Committees of the Council with extensive delegated, regulatory and financial powers. This structure allows a significant degree of political pluralism, and creates an array of opportunities for the public to raise concerns and participate “on their own territory”. Outwith Rochdale itself, township committees also meet in a range of venues within their area. The township structure has cross-party support and, coupled with a radical political tradition going back to the co-operative movement, is deemed to underpin Rochdale’s current strong performance in contemporary citizenship agendas. The openness of its agenda-setting process is one factor explaining why Rochdale did not suffer the rioting or support for extremist parties encountered in neighbouring towns. The internal operations of the township committees are important here. To take Heywood Township Committee as an example, instead of meetings being dominated by councillors with an agreed agenda, they are led by an Open Forum – a process where anybody can speak without asking for prior permission – and people can also have questions asked on their behalf. Demonstrating the efficacy of involvement is critical, hence senior service officers and, increasingly, representatives from the police and partner bodies attend township meetings, to provide prompt responses to the public.

A key challenge in developing ways of decentralising or devolving decision-making is to find a framework which can embrace a diversity of circumstances, but which is not held back by the variable preferences of different areas and different tiers of government. The case study of Wiltshire (below), suggests a way forward.

CASE STUDY: PROGRESS DESPITE COMPLEXITY

A key component of **Wiltshire County Council's** community strategy is a determination to establish closer relationships with local communities and play a more dynamic role in their development. One particular challenge has been driving progress in the face of variable interest between districts, parishes and communities across a diverse geographical area. One mechanism that the County has used to spread the ethos of community involvement is its own employees – such as teachers, lifelong learning and community librarians. Another mechanism has been to instigate a community strategy for each of 20 identified ‘community areas’, provide each one with a community involvement support officer, and bring together all tiers of local government with the county’s services. By 2005, half of the areas were yielding an array of local involvement activities, with signs of improvement in the remaining areas. The County also makes good use of technology to give communities more voice by offering all community groups their own website linked to the authority’s site, and by using video to encourage citizens to record their own vox pops. To spread progress, examples from the more advanced areas are being disseminated to others, and networking between the community support officers, librarians and frontline staff from other authorities have been used to increase involvement around the county. Customer satisfaction with the county council as a whole has risen, against the national trend. For more information contact <http://www.idea.gov.uk> and see ODPM (2005) *Report of the Advisory Panel on Beacon Councils. Recommendations to Ministers on Beacon Authorities for Round 6*, ODPM, Crown Copyright, pp.74-5 (also at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1135620>)

Education for local *governance*

While partnership working has multiplied the opportunities for different social groups to be represented in decision-making processes, it has also made governing structures more complex for people to understand. It also raises questions about the skills and structures required, to ensure that the involvement of community representatives in partnership forums is meaningful.

With an estimated 5,500 different local partnerships across Britain, involving around 75,000 people as board members,⁷ there is considerable scope for coordinating the recruitment, training and support of these local stakeholders. Partnership working can provide a solution. Local Strategic Partnerships are well-placed to tackle such cross-cutting issues and bring different delivery agents together.⁸ This opportunity has been seized in Bradford, as demonstrated in the case study below.

CASE STUDY: PARTNERSHIP SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIP

There are approximately 3,500 citizens' governance roles within the city of **Bradford**, including everything from school governors and magistrates to members of health boards and regeneration partnerships. Yet despite the large number of courses and opportunities for people who are on a 'learning path' to study diversity or citizenship, there was little to bring 'Mr and Mrs Bradford' onto such pathways. To address this, an Active Citizenship Framework was set up. The City Council is working with Bradford Vision (the LSP), health bodies, the University and other agencies, to explore ways of better co-ordinating and improving the recruitment, training, support and retention of the city's active citizens. They are developing a common approach to training and recruitment, auditing current practice to share what works best, and beginning to consider how to re-engage people with representative democracy. For more information, contact <http://www.bradfordvision.net>

There are other ways in which councils can help people negotiate the complexity of local governance arrangements. A growing proportion of local authorities have introduced 'one stop shops' for concerns, queries and complaints. In some cases, these focus on service delivery – allowing a single point of contact for routine queries – but in others, the emphasis is on simplifying political decision-making structures. For example, in *Worcestershire*, joint councillor surgeries bring together county, district and parish councillors, enabling members of the public to have their questions addressed by the most appropriate person. Responsibility for securing a suitable response can be taken up by the council – or whichever public body is most appropriate – rather than requiring the public to understand the intricacies of local government structures.

Tackling citizenship internally as well as externally

Councils could do more to encourage their own staff to get involved in decision-making, both within the authority and in their wider lives. Staff in one focus group conducted for this guide felt that while their council was getting better in giving feedback to the public about consultation events and the outcomes, they were not so good in providing feedback to their own staff when they had made an input to decision making. This is a missed opportunity, given evidence that public servants are more likely to be active members of their local community.⁹

There is a range of approaches that can help officers and members to learn more about the scope for encouraging effective citizenship in the work that they do.

- *Learning from practice and from active citizens.* In *Ipswich Borough Council*, efforts are made to get staff from different departments and different levels in the organisation to chair area forum meetings, and to develop their citizenship-related skills. In *Lambeth*, the Democratic Services department is providing ten modular training programmes for staff which involve community activists in the delivery.
- *Networking cultural change.* Bringing together public sector partners with community and voluntary sector representatives within community strategies or local strategic partnerships provides a basis for cross-organisational learning about participation, the cultural changes required, and scope for sharing good practice.
- *Joining up with diversity.* Having representatives from different sectors of society in prominent decision-making positions can encourage people from those sectors to get more involved in decision-making, and make councils look more credible when they deliver citizenship initiatives. This is true of women voters, but is also true of black and minority ethnic groups. For example, *Rochdale's* first Asian mayor was considered by officers to be a critical factor in bringing Asian communities into closer contact with the council. Ensuring that council staff and elected members are sufficiently aware of issues around equality and difference is also helpful.

MANAGEMENT MATTERS

“What’s important is managers and members are willing for us to be innovative in promoting citizenship – when there is that kind of atmosphere then you can really try”. (Youth Empowerment Officer)

Coordinating capacity building

The Government recognises that promoting citizenship, community involvement and capacity building needs much greater collaboration and coordination at national and regional as well as local level. To assist, Chapter 7 of this guide provides links to key networks and information sources.

There are ways in which local government can help in creating a more coherent programme of capacity building for citizenship. This may have particular benefits for the community and voluntary sector, where greater cohesion in the provision of support infrastructure, community workers, sustainable funding streams, networks, ICT, learning opportunities and information may better meet the needs of frontline organisations.

The points below set out the main principles of the Home Office’s report, *Firm Foundations: The Government’s Framework for Community Capacity Building*,¹⁰ and suggests ways in which local authorities may be able to play a role.

- *Providing a menu of appropriate and accessible learning opportunities* – pulling together the range of learning opportunities for citizenship activities; identifying neighbourhoods where capacity is clearly developing, and where learning visits for others can be arranged; devising strategies for mentoring and more formal training opportunities; providing one-off advice to tackle particular issues.

- *Setting up community anchor organisations* – These are strong, sustainable community-based organisations that can provide a crucial focus for community development across an area. Such organisations are locally controlled, address the needs of areas in a multi-purpose way, and are committed to inclusiveness. Fostering and sustaining these groups provides a vehicle for devolving local government to neighbourhoods and improving local input to decision-making. They can also provide mentoring for other communities in citizenship issues.
- *Local action-planning* – any process whereby the members of a community work together to produce a plan, especially in setting priorities for Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks. Such activities offer a focused setting for the development of skills, confidence and experience in decision-making processes at local level, building the capacity for neighbourhood governance. See the Bradford case study, below.
- *Providing stronger, more effective collaboration* – at local level, this can entail following the recommendations of *ChangeUp*, the Government's Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework,¹¹ to develop Infrastructure Development Plans for support for the community and voluntary sector. Such a plan should relate clearly to the Community Strategy, and be capable of influencing the investment priorities of the Local Strategic Partnership. The piloting of Local Area Agreements (in 2005/6) may also help to drive a more coordinated, coherent approach.

CASE STUDY: NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION PLANNING

Bradford's concept of Neighbourhood Action Planning emerged from a recognition that the poorest communities were disconnected from official processes of engagement, and often needed to find a voice for themselves. At the same time, strategic decision makers needed to listen to people's knowledge and experience of poverty. Neighbourhood Renewal Funding enabled the Local Strategic Partnership to offer neighbourhoods, communities and front-line workers small amounts of money to address their priorities for their area, and tackle it in a way that fitted with them. Each community can receive up to £25,000: £5,000 to help devise their plan and a further £20,000 to begin to put it into action. They can use their funding to buy expertise from public service staff who help to draw up or implement their plan. By January 2005, there were 66 action plans in operation across Bradford. The key is flexibility, to respond to the diversity of community situations, and the ways in which strategic bodies can assist. The support team has worked hard to create a support structure to help these groups to work effectively. They held a series of action learning events at which groups learned how to produce their action plans. Eight experienced community development workers were contracted and a further ten have been trained from disadvantaged areas. The latest phase seeks to extend the neighbourhood renewal process to areas beyond those eligible for NRF resources. A discussion paper on local action planning is available on <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/>

References/further reading

- 1 See Glen A et al (2004) *Survey of Community Development Workers in the UK*, London, CDF and Sheffield, CDX.
- 2 See Home Office (2004) *Firm Foundations: The Government's Framework for Community Capacity Building*: http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/research_news_details.asp?id=200514102725&cat=9&parentid=2
- 3 From ODPM (2005) *Vibrant Local Leadership*, ODPM, London, para 36; see also ODPM and the Home Office (2005) *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*, ODPM, London, page 16. Both documents are at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137794>
- 4 IDeA. *A Councillor's Guide for 2005/6*, available through <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk>; see also the work of the Local Government Leadership Centre.
- 5 See <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=1589608>
- 6 ODPM (2005) *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*, ODPM, London; quote from the Forward. See <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137794>
- 7 See Helen Sullivan and Chris Skelcher (2002) *Working Across Boundaries: Partnerships in the Public Sector*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, pp.24-7
- 8 From ODPM (2005) *Vibrant Local Leadership*, ODPM, London, paras 21-22 (see under [3] above)
- 9 See Brewer, G. (2003) 'Building Social Capital: Civic Attitudes and Behaviour of Public Servants', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, vol 13, no 1, 5-26.
- 10 Home Office, *Firm Foundations: The Government's Framework for Community Capacity Building*. For the full document, with additional links to supporting materials, see under [2] above.
- 11 See Home Office (2004) *ChangeUp: Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector*, <http://communities.homeoffice.gov.uk/activecomms/sup-vcs/changeup/>

CHAPTER 5

Measuring success

Chapter Summary

- To learn whether an initiative has helped people to get more involved in decision-making it is important to evaluate what has been done, and what the outcomes have been (for the council and for citizens).
- Success can be evaluated through 'hard', quantifiable indicators of cohesion, inclusion and influence on decisions; 'soft', qualitative measures of personal learning and development; and by citizens themselves through participatory evaluation.

A key link in the virtuous circle of promoting effective citizenship is to learn what worked well, where and why, and to tell other people about it. Evidence of effectiveness can influence funding bodies and thus help to sustain citizenship programmes, as well as helping practitioners to learn about the most appropriate approaches.

But evaluation is no easy task. In the past, evidence from citizenship-related initiatives was anecdotal and thin on the ground. Most councils continue to rely on a small range of pragmatic measures to understand whether their community engagement activities are effective – typically electoral turnout, numbers attending participation events, and simple feedback forms. Nevertheless, the importance attached to effective citizenship has prompted many organisations to start thinking more widely about evaluation, and there is a growing network of advice from which councils can draw.

Councils have much to gain from extending simple, 'head counting' measures of effectiveness to assess whether public involvement is becoming more inclusive, or whether certain social groups are facing particular barriers to becoming effective citizens.¹ More needs to be known about the *quality* of public involvement, what people are learning, and how that affects them and their community.

ART OF THE POSSIBLE

A growing array of citizenship-related initiatives have been subject to evaluation. Examples include **Wigan** Council's evaluation of its Township and Community Programme; **Oxfordshire's** School's Council initiative evaluation, conducted by Save the Children, and **Hambleton's** evaluation of its revamped polling station initiative.

In this section we suggest approaches to measuring success. In some areas this may imply collecting new data, but in others it is simply a matter of pulling together information that is locked within individual departments, or undertaking existing data collection exercises in different ways.

Building on existing indicators

Councils do not need to reinvent the wheel. There are several dimensions of effective citizenship where indicators have already been developed. Utilising existing indicators can help councils benchmark their own performance with other organisations, devise a sensible

baseline, and thus understand the scope for improvement. Data could be collected by piggy-backing relevant questions to existing feedback and consultation devices, such as citizens' panels, service-based customer feedback, or internet feedback.

- *Feeling involved and influencing decisions.* Indicators of community involvement feature in the Audit Commission's Quality of Life Indicators, and are already being used by some organisations for assessing progress on citizenship. To give some examples, the Egan Review of skills for sustainable communities measured a sense of community through the question: 'to what extent do you feel involved in your local community?' The Home Office's Citizenship Survey asks people a range of questions about their sense of empowerment, including the extent to which they felt able to influence decisions affecting their local area. The Home Office has also issued a booklet, *Building a Picture of Community Cohesion*.² Councils will probably need to use a basket of indicators to begin to understand the picture.
- *Impacts of involvement.* The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit has published a toolkit of indicators for measuring the effects of community involvement in renewal. The menu of 60 indicators may be suitable for Local Strategic Partnerships, Local Area Agreements and Area Forums. They cover impacts on governance, social capital, service delivery, inclusion, learning and capacity-building.³
- *Understanding capacity and community.* Councils may be interested in measuring the extent to which communities are flourishing.⁴ This should include assessing the health of the voluntary and community sector in the local area – which provides one of the more robust and sustained expressions of people's propensity to participate. One might measure the number of groups, the formation of new community networks and voices, levels of membership, or particular skills – such as grant applications made.

These indicators may become increasingly important as the Comprehensive Performance Assessment corporate assessment begins to evaluate how successfully councils are leading and influencing local communities, local partnerships and other agencies.⁵

Qualitative change

"It's a political thing – understanding my place in society, connecting to others, and understanding power, how to change things" (Young Person's Representative).

In the end, effective citizenship is about better democratic outcomes, whether that is achieving social change, challenging inequalities or promoting sustainable communities. Measuring whether people feel more empowered can require qualitative information, including careful assessment of people's *individual* development, as well as tracking participants to assess how far they and the groups they represent are accessing power structures. The following sources of information might be valuable.

- *Accessing decision-makers.* Councillors' casework files can yield insights about the inclusiveness of political structures. Cases could be counted and broken down by age, ethnicity, location and employment status, and the means by which people made contact.
- *Valuing 'soft' outcomes.* Effective citizenship is as much about people's confidence as about having the skills to get involved in local decisions. Evidence of the impacts on confidence and self-esteem can come from teachers or other individuals familiar with

participants' attitudes and behaviour. The textbox from Tewkesbury, below, provides a brief illustration.

ATTITUDE SHIFT

Teachers in a school in the **Tewkesbury** area have commented how pupils involved in Youth Action have become more engaged: *"You can see a difference in the attitudes of the kids. They are more confident and have more self-esteem – they seemed to walk differently"* (Youth Worker). Young people involved in this scheme also fill in 'behaviour questionnaires' on completion of their involvement.

- *Tracking personal development.* Staff working closely with sections of the public may be able to identify signs of personal learning, as individuals progress from simply participating in initiatives, to facilitating events and workshops, to becoming Peer Educators or deepening their involvement in civic life in other ways. Staff involved in user forums may be able to report on the quantity, social complexion and quality of public involvement in their service.

Participatory evaluation

A key message of this guidance is that effective citizenship can be mainstreamed in a range of council practices, widening the scope for learning, and reinforcing its effect. This is equally true of evaluation, where many organisations are now involving the public directly in evaluations, not just as survey respondents, but in carrying out research themselves in local communities.

REFLECTIVE EVIDENCE

Learning and assessment can be combined where the beneficiaries of citizenship initiatives reflect on what worked, and why.

This is the case with **Bradford's** Neighbourhood Action Plans, where participating groups fill in a book which records what has happened and how has it happened, furnishing everyone involved with an array of evidence for future learning. For more information, contact

<http://www.bradfordvision.net/index.php>

Undertaking 'participatory evaluation', or 'community auditing' may help councils and other bodies to solicit opinions not typically heard and deliver more reliable evidence. It can also build the capacity of communities, by providing members with new citizenship skills and research abilities, giving them insights into their own community, getting communities networking, and deepening ownership of outcomes. More information is provided in the textbox from Worcestershire and the case study examples below.

YOUNG CITIZENS AUDIT

Worcestershire County Council made an effort to *"work with a group of young people to enable them to become assessors of youth work for us and with us. Young people have actually developed their own tools for the observation of youth work; they go out and visit youth centres; and their feedback actually contributed to the OFSTED inspection. And they're now launching a rolling programme of quality assurance visits to youth centres. That's involved equipping them with skills and the knowledge – the essential training"* (Youth Worker). For more information, contact **Jmurray@worcestershire.gov.uk**.

CASE STUDY: PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

The Community Audit and Evaluation Centre of **Manchester Metropolitan University** has provided facilitation and training for participatory research in a range of policy areas, including effective volunteering, social services, Health Action Zones, drugs services, the pensions decisions of ethnic minorities, and audits of youth work, as well as delivering sessions on cross-cutting issues like gender awareness, representation and conflict resolution (contact <http://www.did.stu.mmu.ac.uk/caec>).

Further examples are given in the National Audit Office's report *Neighbourhood Renewal: Case Examples in Getting Communities Involved*

http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/03-04/03041070_case_examples.pdf, including:

- using a Community Empowerment Network to map the distribution of renewal grants against deprivation levels (Rotherham);
- a workshop-based event with young people (Wandsworth); and
- the use of a Community Network to analyse the capacity for community action in each ward (Lincoln).

See also the National Youth Association publication, *Young People as Researchers: Possibilities, Problems and Politics* (through <http://www.nya.org.uk/>)

Cultural change in local authorities

If people are to become more effective citizens, then there needs to be a change not just in their own behaviour, but also in the culture of decision-making bodies, including local councils. Attitudes towards public participation may need to become more accommodating. Progress with cultural change may be assessed through a number of mechanisms.

- *Sharing evidence and good practice.* Sharing evidence throughout the local government community, between councils, community groups and a whole range of other relevant agencies can broaden perspectives on what works in what circumstances. It can also help build capacity for citizenship work, by generating networks of support for activities and training programmes. Round 6 of the Government's Beacon Council initiative included the theme 'Getting Closer to Communities', which required applicants to provide evidence of visible outcomes in this sphere.⁶
- *Benchmarks and checklists.* Again, work is already underway in devising systems for health-checking the wider citizenship work of councils. The Audit Commission publication *Listen Up!* includes a checklist of key questions local authorities should ask when engaged in consultation work. *Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Partners Forum* has developed a benchmarking toolkit 'Working Together in Practice' to support the work of Learning and Skills Council staff involved in citizenship activities.⁷
- Given the potential for ambiguity in any measure of effective citizenship, councils could usefully undertake strategic discussions – involving relevant departments and other partner bodies – to interpret what the data they are collecting is telling them. Monitoring the delivery and quality of public participation could be a task for Scrutiny committees. This may help to embed organisational learning.

References/further reading

- 1 A useful starting point for assessing the inclusiveness of decision-making institutions is the Government's guidance note from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (2004) *Ethnicity Monitoring: Involvement. Guidance for Partnerships on Monitoring Involvement*, ODPM, London. (see also: <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=771>). Many of the principles also apply to other diversity themes.
- 2 For candidate indicators on participation, inclusion and social cohesion, see <http://www.local-pi-library.gov.uk>; Munton T and Zuruwan A (2004) *Active Communities: Headline Findings from the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey*, Home Office, London, and *Building a Picture of Community Cohesion* (Home Office, 2003) at <http://www.monitoring-group.co.uk/News%20and%20Campaigns/research%20material/community%20cohesion/buildpicturecomcohesion.pdf> The Government's strategy for community empowerment, *Together We Can*, pulls together a range of measures being used by the Home Office to evaluate its civil renewal initiatives. See p.29, in <http://www.togetherwecan.info/togetherwecan.html>
- 3 See <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=905>.
- 4 To understand the extent to which communities are flourishing, see for example, Gabriel Chanan, (2004) *Measures of Community*, London, Community Development Foundation, and the Audit Commission, *Area Profiles Report*, London. <http://www.areaprofiles.audit-commission.gov.uk>
- 5 Audit Commission (2005) *Proposals for Comprehensive Performance Assessment from 2005 – Consultation Document*, London, p.6.
- 6 For more information see <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=1704911>.
- 7 See Audit Commission (1999) *Listen Up!*, London, Audit Commission, and http://www.yhregforum.org.uk/publications_resources/news/105.pdf

CHAPTER 6

Sustainability

Chapter Summary

- Building the necessary trust and capacity for people to become effective citizens is a time-consuming process, and it is important to maintain the momentum once it has been developed.

Too often in the past, a dialogue between councils and the public has been initiated only to prove difficult to sustain. Local government is littered with relatively short-lived initiatives that ran for a while and then closed down as funding streams dried up, key officers moved on or participants simply lost interest. Unfortunately, such breakdowns can have a lasting impact, in the erosion of trust and confidence that dissuades people who feel let down from getting involved again in the future.

Certainly, it is important for councils to deliver ‘quick wins’ from their engagement with communities, because people can quickly become disaffected with processes that do not appear to be making any real difference to their lives. But it is equally important to try to build up capacity over the longer term – re-energising local democracy is a long-term investment in the future of local communities.

In designing initiatives, attention must be given to their future development and ownership. How might others be supported to maintain the momentum? Is there a strategy for refreshing the membership of community networks or local community development works? If it is a one off event, then there needs to be a clear, achievable legacy. Long-term sustainability is also important because the public can take time to get used to new opportunities for influencing decision-making, or to feel confident in acting on the information and skills that they acquire.

SKILLS & SUSTAINABILITY

“We have a big emphasis on transferable skills that could apply to a range of jobs. So we are looking at people not just having NVQ level Community Work but also the opportunities of work in the future, because there’s no point training people then to lose them ...” (Council Officer).

Real progress takes time

Helping people learn how to become more effective citizens can be painstaking, requiring great reserves of patience, especially when many factors beyond local authority control can set things into reverse. Indeed, given the inevitable tensions in engaging with the public, smooth harmonious situations are not necessarily indicators of success. Acknowledging difficulties and addressing them constructively and openly is essential to creating a sense of progress for all participants.

Many local authorities are beginning to adopt a more long-term approach – *Lambeth*, for example, has developed a three year strategy emphasising their commitment to the citizenship agenda. The practical challenges can be further illustrated through a number of examples.

CASE STUDY: BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN SMALL STEPS

A former social worker hired as manager of the *Wands Sure Start Centre, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire*, charts the effort required to get local parents to be more confident in acting as citizens. The young parents that she worked with had many reasons to lack confidence in their capacity to change the conditions of their lives, but by applying her skills of 25 years in social work assessment, the manager was able to animate a sense of self-belief. Although this meant not going in “*too fast, too deep*” because confidence takes time to develop among those that feel they have been let down many times before, it also involved challenging the client group in a sensitive way. Wheeling in government initiatives and statutory agencies can alienate the local community, adding to a sense of negativity. What this example shows is that genuine efforts to lift the capacity of the most marginalised have no quick fix and take a lot of hard work. It took months to get parents to a situation where they were sufficiently confident to organise a Christmas Fair, but taking issues one at the time is more effective than seeking to resolve a whole series of problems in one go. From steps such as these, some parents are now getting more involved in working with local schools, sitting as representatives on boards otherwise dominated by professionals, and a few have considered becoming local councillors.

CASE STUDY: BUILDING CAPACITY

South-East Ipswich suffered a range of social and economic problems, including failing schools, crime and anti-social behaviour, and inequalities in health and job opportunities. The process of generating capacity and confidence to tackle these issues began with Ipswich Borough Council putting in a community development worker for six months, first to get together people prepared to form action groups for their street, and then linking them into an embryonic group which could meet with the statutory agencies. They also needed to negotiate the intense territoriality of South-East Ipswich, which meant initially holding the same meeting more than once in different parts of the area, to allow a wider cross-section of social groups to attend. “*We have a Sports Hall with great meeting facilities – it seemed the obvious place, but we were only getting people from a third of the area*” (Officer). Both Sure Start and the development worker have directed people to relevant training courses in civic education (how to chair meetings, take minutes, and be part of a committee) provided by the local Learning and Skills Council. As well as steadily increasing the capacity of the community to work together, these activities have also helped a few people from marginalised groups gain access to paid work. For further information, contact jim.manning@ipswich.gov.uk.

CHAPTER 7

Links and contacts

Central government and a host of other organisations have developed initiatives that support citizenship, many of which provide networks of advice and experience. The section below provides links to key sources, where further information on particular aspects of good practice can be found.

Key organisations

- The **Active Citizenship Centre** was set up by the Home Office in 2003, and provides a forum for research and information about citizenship, public involvement in decision-making and civil renewal. The Centre is drawing together a database of good practice and research from a range of government departments, local authorities and initiatives, which can be accessed at <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk>.
- The **Active Learning for Active Citizenship learning hubs** are a 'bottom up' action-learning network, seeking to exchange and improve best practice in the delivery of citizenship education for adults. They receive funding from the Home Office and bring together a range of practitioners from the community and voluntary sectors, government and academia. There is a geographical spread of hubs across the English regions, each with a distinctive focus. For more information, contact the Active Citizenship Centre, as above, or the individual regional hubs:
 - **South Yorkshire**, organised through the Workers Educational Association (contact thartley@wea.org.uk)
 - **Greater Manchester**, organised through Manchester Metropolitan University (contact carol_packham@uk2.net)
 - **Lincoln**, organised through the Community Operation Research Unit, University of Lincoln (contact zbendek@lincoln.ac.uk)
 - **Black Country**, organised through IMPACT! Women Active in Community and Public Life (contact smcclure@wolverhamptonvsc.org.uk)
 - **London**, organised through the London Civic Forum (contact <http://www.londoncivicforum.org.uk>)
 - **South West**, organised through Exeter CVS (contact Karen.kendall@exetercvcs.org.uk)
 - **Tees Valley**, organised through SkillShare (contact k.milburn@bellevuecentre.org.uk)
 - **Accreditation Bodies**. Ideas for accrediting people's learning in the broad field of citizenship, community engagement or capacity building can be explored through the Open College Network or the homepages of National Vocational Qualifications. See <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/nvq/>

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) within ODPM delivers programmes to support community involvement in regenerating England's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Key

objectives include supporting community self-help activity, drawing community groups into wider decision-making about local public services, and maintaining Community Empowerment Networks to bring a community and voluntary sector perspective to Local Strategic Partnerships. The NRU also runs a Community Facilitation Programme and is recruiting Neighbourhood Renewal Advisors: people with experience advising communities on 'what works'. For more information see <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk> or <http://www.renewal.net>, and the good practice guidance produced by the National Audit Office, Neighbourhood Renewal: Case Examples in Getting Communities Involved at http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/03-04/03041070_case_examples.pdf

Key programmes

- **Civic Pioneers** are a network of local authorities that have committed themselves to working together in sharing their practical experiences of engaging local communities. Their activities include developing the skills to engage in or facilitate participation among its councillors, staff, community groups and individual citizens, so that they can take a constructive role in shaping policies. The concept was developed by the Home Office in conjunction with the Local Government Association and the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives. Designated pioneers include *Birmingham, Rochdale, Sheffield, Ipswich, Plymouth* and *Portsmouth*, each seeking to demonstrate how citizenship can be promoted without additional assistance from central government. You can share their experiences through the Active Citizenship Centre website, at <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk>.
- The **Beacon Councils** scheme seeks to identify the best performing councils who can act as centres of excellence from which others can learn. Round 6 of the Beacon initiative included the theme Getting Closer to Communities. Successful Beacon Councils were required to demonstrate progress in enabling communities both to do more amongst themselves and to help shape public services. The winners were announced in March 2005, and their activities include the provision of support and capacity building to develop the skills of local people; council structures that are open and responsive to input and feedback; inclusive consultation procedures; a shared commitment to participation amongst all partners; and joint ownership of outcomes. For more information see <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=1704903>
- **Local Democracy Week** brings together events, information and ideas specifically targeted at helping young people up to the age of 26 get more involved in local decision-making. The website provides a range of ideas, including 'shadow a councillor for a day' initiatives, how to give young people direct experience of council work, and a host of case study-based advice on creative consultation events. See <http://www.localdemocracyweek.info>.
- The **Post-16 Citizenship Development Programme** is funded by the DfES and managed by the Learning and Skills Development Agency, with the aim of developing and sharing good practice to support the possible implementation of an entitlement to citizenship education for all 16-19 year olds. In 114 pilot projects across the country, support has been given to innovative ways of promoting citizenship, mostly with sixth forms and FE colleges, but also with employers, community groups and training organisations. The emphasis for this age group has been on active participation in their own communities, but projects also gave opportunities to practice democratic decision-making in their host institutions. Further information about the project can be found at <http://www.citizenshippost-16.lsd.a.org.uk>.

- **Neighbourhood Learning Centres** have been promoted by the DfES through Learning and Skills Councils to meet the learning needs of local communities. They provide a *vehicle* for delivering citizenship education to communities, by locating in accessible premises, using outreach, and adopting flexible teaching. They also provide a *context* for learning about effective citizenship: local people must play a key role, as learners, volunteers and staff, and actively participate in shaping the courses available. The experience of Neighbourhood Learning Centres also offers lessons on delivering learning to a wide range of social groups. For more information see <http://www.skills.org.uk>.
- **Community Cohesion Pathfinders** came to an end in November 2004. Fourteen pathfinder partnerships were jointly funded by the Home Office and Neighbourhood Renewal Unit to deliver a range of projects designed to promote community cohesion. As well as work within communities themselves, and the community and voluntary sector, initiatives sought also to promote community cohesion within local authority service planning and delivery. Best practice from the Pathfinder areas is being disseminated to all local authorities. For further information see <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/activecommunities73.htm>

Key documents

- *Together We Can* <http://www.togetherwecan.info/> is a cross-government action plan, led by the Home Office, which sets out the Government's commitment to empower citizens to work with public bodies to improve their quality of life. It aims to pull together relevant initiatives from across Government, to help support active citizenship, stronger communities, and more effective partnerships between public bodies and local people.
- *Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity* <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1122850> sets out a five year plan from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, including key policy proposals on the connections between effective citizenship and sustainable communities, enhancing local leadership, and moves to encourage neighbourhood-level governance. More detailed proposals are set out in the daughter documents *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter* and *Vibrant Local Leadership* <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137794>. These reports, along with the supporting evidence base in *New Localism: Citizen Engagement, Neighbourhoods and Public Services* <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137166> can be found through <http://www.odpm.gov.uk>.
- *Hear by Right* offers tried and tested standards for organisations across the public and voluntary sectors to assess and improve their approach to the active involvement of children and young people. It builds on *Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which states that it is children and young people's right to be involved in decisions that affect them. It gives advice to adults responsible for setting standards, measuring progress and drawing up action plans, and links to further information on involving young people. See <http://www.nya.org.uk> for further details.
- *Firm Foundations*, published in December 2004, is the Government's framework for community capacity building, and sets out proposals for how community groups and capacity building can be better supported at neighbourhood level, and across all tiers of government. For more information, contact the Home Office's Active Citizen at http://www.active-citizen.org.uk/research_news_details.asp?id=200514102725&cat=9&parentid=2

ANNEX 1

About the research

This guide to good practice was commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and has been produced by the Centre for Local and Regional Government Research at Cardiff University.

It draws upon a range of data about local authorities' own experiences of promoting effective citizenship including:

- analysis of previous research
- detailed examination of a sample of English local authority websites
- a short postal survey to all local authorities in England
- telephone interviews with local authority officers
- seminars with local authorities and representatives of other organisations with expertise in citizenship issues
- nine case studies incorporating a series of face-to-face interviews with local authority officers, elected members, individuals from other organisations that have been actively engaged in promoting citizenship, and focus groups with front-line staff and interested citizens.

The data was collected between January 2004 and February 2005. The main results are written up in a research report, *Promoting Effective Citizenship and Community Empowerment: A Research Report*. The research team also produced an initial literature review on local citizenship, *Civic Education and Local Government: A Literature Review*, with accompanying summary. These documents can be obtained at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1137166>

The research team comprised:

Rhys Andrews, a Research Associate at the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research, Cardiff University;

Richard Cowell, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of City & Regional Planning and Deputy Director of the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research, Cardiff University;

James Downe, a Senior Research Associate at the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research, Cardiff University;

Steve Martin, the Director of the Centre for Local and Regional Government Research, Cardiff University, and

Dave Turner, a Senior Lecturer in Local Policy and Community Development in the School of Environment, University of Gloucestershire.