

# votes and voices:

the complementary nature of representative and participative democracy

Collated by Sally Cooke and Dhara Vyas



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This series of essays has been collated by Sally Cooke and Dhara Vyas on behalf of LGA and NCVO respectively. The opinions expressed here are those of the respective authors.

## Foreword

*Votes and Voices: The complementary nature of representative and participative democracy* brings together a wide range of views from across local government, the voluntary sector and academia. This publication gives us a flavour of the plethora of thoughts, views, opinions and differing perspectives that there are on this subject.

We would like to thank all of our authors for taking the time to write their contributions for us. Whilst there are diverging views amongst these essays, there are also many synergies: one key factor that all our contributors agree on is that, however challenging, representative and participative processes are both key components of a healthy local democracy. They also agree, to a greater or lesser extent, that now is the time to harness the momentum of recent years if we are to truly strengthen and consolidate the relationship between local government and the voluntary and community sector. As one contributor puts it:

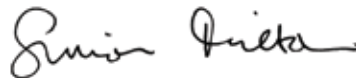
*'The importance of creating a compelling narrative linking representative and participative activity, and its ability to galvanise partners, should not be underestimated'*  
(David Jenkins, CEO, Dorset County Council)

It is in search of this narrative that we have asked this diverse group of people to contribute their thoughts to this publication. It is through this exchange of views and the dialogue that follows that we can truly begin to understand the many ways in which communities and groups in society organise themselves to come together, to represent, and to give voice to their views and concerns, through both civil and civic means.

Together, these essays present opportunities that are both practical and challenging. They also begin to give us some new ideas and ways forward for the future of the local relationship. We believe it is right to work together on this agenda, to grasp the opportunities and to tackle the challenges in order to achieve our shared ambitions.



Sir Graham Melmoth  
Chair, NCVO



Sir Simon Milton  
Chair, LGA



## Liz Richardson - senior researcher Institute for Political and Economic Governance (IPEG) University of Manchester

### Neighbourhoods as a key site for interaction

Interactions between the voluntary and community sectors and local government can and are taking place at all levels including strategic work in localities, sub-regions and regions. Neighbourhoods at the sub-local level are often the sites where the things that matter to people's lives are in sharpest relief, where interactions take place, battles are fought and positive working relationships between the sectors are forged.

In many neighbourhoods there is currently a debate taking place about neighbourhood governance – what are the rationales, structures, processes, and memberships. Or in more prosaic terms - who gets a say over what, who is in charge or gets final say-so, how people get a say and how decisions are made, and what changes as a result.

### Who are the representatives?

What underlies much of the debate on neighbourhood governance are fundamental issues about what legitimacy and accountability different groups of stakeholders have to make and influence local decisions. There are (at least) six identifiable sets of stakeholders in neighbourhoods: local residents who are not active or members of groups; the community sector made up of smaller self-managed groups; the voluntary and third sectors made up of larger organisations; local elected members; council officers who are ultimately accountable to local politicians; and other paid workers and professionals working for public sector bodies or other agencies. In addition, central government is an ever-present but virtual stakeholder, exercising its interests indirectly through softer measures like policy context setting, and in more hard hitting ways through targets and financial settlements.

The lines are often blurry, for example how to differentiate between and within the community, voluntary and third sectors. The line between local councillors and the community and voluntary sectors is complicated by the fact that many local councillors are also residents of the neighbourhoods they represent, and that many local councillors are also volunteers, for example in 2004, 48 per cent of councillors were school governors, 30 per cent were involved with other public bodies, and 50 per cent were doing voluntary work<sup>1</sup>. Many local councillors in the UK started out as tenants' representatives<sup>2</sup>.

1. IDeA and Employers Organisation (2005) *National census of local authority councillors in England 2004*, London: Employers Organisation

2. Beckford, J., Dougal, A., Millward, E. and Reid, B. (2003) *Encouraging participation: a toolkit for tenants and social landlords*, Coventry/York: Chartered Institute of Housing in association with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Despite these overlaps, each of these interest groups typically has its own understanding of their right to be part of what goes on, but more importantly its own criticisms and suspicions of the others. A common theme is that each suspects the others of being sectional and acting in their own interests. And none of the groups of stakeholders trusts the others with decisions about resources.

For example, community groups argue that their views are based on direct first hand experience, as well as their status as service users and council tax payers. But other stakeholders accuse community 'representatives' of not being representative, of being captured by sectional interests, and say that the base for community groups' accountability is too narrow.

In the case of local elected members, their accountability comes from their ward-level democratic mandate through local elections, their local knowledge and links upwards to wider local government structures. In the UK we also have a tradition of using political parties as ways of organising local politics, which some feel adds to accountability – as we can easily find out what policies politicians stand for. However, others criticise local politicians for being party political, and use low electoral turnout figures to say that councillors do not have a broad enough base. Some jibes focus on perceptions of pork barrel politics.

Local government officers are ultimately accountable to their elected members. However, in reality they play a role in decision making, for example offering guidance on options. This role is sometimes explicit and recognised, and sometimes not. Paid workers generally (arguably) also have their own form of legitimacy as professionals eg through membership of professional associations. The basis of legitimacy of officers and professionals is through the 'evidence base' and objectivity that they offer based on knowledge as well as their value base – the public service ethos. But other stakeholders often criticise officers and professionals for their lack of local knowledge and direct experience, and their 'producer mentality' that means that they act in their own interests.

## Not working together

When different groups' mandates are not respected, they tend to feel disempowered and frustrated, and do not play an effective role. Worse, in the recent past, there have been damaging tensions, and occasionally severe local antagonisms<sup>3</sup>. This hampers the ability in local areas to tackle common problems and make things happen.

As decision-making structures in local government have changed some councillors have felt pushed out<sup>4</sup>. Concerned and defensive councillors have been described as "wounded lions" whose "powers might be draining away but it [isn't] advisable to try and take them on."<sup>5</sup>

3. White, G. et al (2006) *Exemplars of neighbourhood governance*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

4. Gains, F. (2006) *New council constitutions: a summary of the ELG research findings*, Norwich: The Stationery Office.

5. Taylor, M. (2005) *Councillors and community advocates (notes and presentation)* Policy and expert workshop on citizen participation and neighbourhoods at ODPM 23rd May 2005.

Community groups have expressed concern over the remoteness of local elected members and the failure of local elections to provide an adequate mechanism for local accountability in practice<sup>6</sup>. Many of the community groups I talked to in the 1990s saw local members as unrepresentative and occasionally patronising. They identified conflicts of interest between local councillors and community groups. One community volunteer in Wales said, "You see [local elected members] at strategy meetings but that's the last you see of them. They don't get involved at the grass roots. They've been voted in unopposed". They're "unapproachable". The chair of the residents' association was very supportive of local elected members; her brother and her uncle were local councillors. But she said: "When they're presented with a strategy, half the councillors say 'what more do these tenants want?!'" Members "don't know what happens on the ground". Councillors see a conflict of interest between themselves and residents' associations: "We do the same job as them, we tread on their toes, now we've got access to council officers we don't use [councillors] really". In the Midlands, despite major moves forward with the tenants' federation and council working closely together, not all the tenants' and residents' associations or the local councillors were equally as supportive of these new co-operative relationships: "There are varying degrees of support. Some [residents' groups] have the same old attitude, like 'the only good councillor is a dead one'".<sup>7</sup>

## Working together

If the stakeholders' different forms of accountability and legitimacy are respected, then all groups can be empowered to contribute positively. Seeing all forms of representation as working together means that each group can hold the others in check, self-interest can be balanced out, competing claims can be examined fairly and everyone will be empowered to contribute. This must be done in a genuine way:

*"The danger of this is that those who try belatedly to reinvent themselves as community champions try to lead from the front, imposing themselves on existing arrangements rather than understanding them and tapping into them".<sup>8</sup>*

Nationally there is already some evidence that non-executive councillors are enjoying their enhanced community leadership role<sup>9</sup>, including working more closely with the community and voluntary sectors. Changes in local government structures through the 2000 Local Government Act have had the desired effect of freeing up non-executive members to spend more time on external activities out in their constituencies, meeting stakeholders and attending area committees<sup>10</sup>; there have been positive outcomes for neighbourhoods, service delivery, and citizen engagement/local democracy.

And there are good examples from local areas of local elected members and community groups working together alongside agencies and authorities. Below are just three from the north-west.

6. Richardson, L. (2008) *DIY community action: neighbourhood problems and community self-help*, Bristol: Policy Press

7. Richardson, 2008 op cit

8. Taylor, M. 2005 op cit

9. Rao, N. (2005) *Councillors and the new council constitutions*, London: ODPM

10. Rao, 2005 op cit.

In one authority in Cheshire, a hard-won understanding of the respective contributions of different stakeholders is starting to create possibilities for the succession of neighbourhood management arrangements. A social landlord is offering its asset base, the local community development trust could provide social enterprise opportunities, a community forum offers a way for councillors, community reps and agencies to talk together.

In one Merseyside authority, local elected members have had the willingness and openness to see the benefits of new ways of working more closely with local community groups. Member services section used to get complaints from local community groups that members were not supporting them. They don't get complaints any more. For example two of the local community organisations said that their local member was now: "always very involved"; "more inclined to do things"; "more active, want to participate and help the group achieve things". The community organisations felt that they received member support whenever they asked for it, and sometimes before.

Officers from the council have supported these changes through their member development process – learning, training, and sharing events for elected members. Their member development work is accredited through the North West Employers' Organisation Member Development Charter to Level 2. The Charter at Level 2 offers a stretching framework. It asks local government to demonstrate what impacts elected members' work is having on real outcomes in the community. For example, emotional intelligence training enabled one member to read better the emotions of members of the community they were dealing with. Members underwent financial training, which then allowed them to spot overpayments, resulting in a cash saving for a community group they were working with.

In Greater Manchester, re-structuring of neighbourhood governance structures into community councils is seeing results in one authority. New community members are being attracted into the groups. Councillors and community groups share leadership; elected members are not allowed to chair and do not have decision-making powers, instead they act in their 'champion' role. Feedback from officers and community members is that community councils offered a chance to start with a 'blank sheet' in the way that neighbourhood governance operated. The idea is to avoid 'top table' style meetings; informality is the key. Other hands-on innovations include neighbourhood walkabouts to pin-point and resolve local issues and raise visibility. Walkabouts involve councillors, community council board members, the police and other agencies. I watched as residents were drawn out of their homes onto the street by the presence of a crowd including uniformed officers. Residents responded positively to the 'council' coming to them. People then had the chance to show the walkabout team physically where problems happened and chat informally about what the issues were. Some issues were resolved on the spot with an agreement to fix fencing. Neighbourhood governance processes and structures are facilitated by a team of area co-ordinators. The authority has recognised the training and development needs these new arrangements have

created, eg a long lead-in time to community councils, with a shadow board created before they were launched helped people prepare for their new roles.

## Conclusions

There is still a way to go to get things right. For example, in a national survey in 2005, 12 per cent of councillors felt arrangements for area working in their authority were ineffective, 16 per cent felt the arrangements were effective, and 35 per cent felt they were partially effective, an increase from 2003, but still not an overwhelming success as yet<sup>11</sup>.

A fundamental factor in creating change in neighbourhoods is being able to use what everyone has to offer to the full. This requires a mind-set change to recognise the basis of legitimacy and potential contribution of others sets of stakeholders. Positive attitudes underlie peoples' ability to work well together; what also helps are structures that offer frameworks that reinforce this recognition; learning and development; facilitation by local government of processes.

Representative and participatory democracy contributes to tackling the challenges that communities face best when:

- the councillors and other stakeholders are not too wedded to the previous 'way of doing things';
- partners from all sectors, officers and councillors are clear about councillors' role in the neighbourhood, and councillors are willing to take a backseat if necessary;
- the legitimacy and potential contribution of other stakeholders is recognised and welcomed;
- the council has an overall approach to area-based working, which may include an asymmetric approach to neighbourhood arrangements;
- there are no local rivalries about which institutions represent the neighbourhood;
- councillors and partnerships have officer support to improve services at the neighbourhood level;
- there is a clear delivery mechanism for delivering action plans;
- there is proactive, widespread and creative community engagement; and
- councillors have been supported by learning and development programmes.

There are many different policy options, each with risks attached, but there is a clear case for more 'polycentric' models of neighbourhood governance, allowing for different bodies in the lead, based on a range of forms of accountability against clear criteria. A healthy plurality of arrangements, tailored to neighbourhood strengths and assets, offers much potential for improving quality of life for residents.

11. Stoker, G., Gains, F., Greasley, S., John P. and Rao, N. (2006) *Councillors, officers and stakeholders in the new council constitutions: findings of the 2005 ELG sample survey*, University of Manchester: Manchester



## Rob Whiteman chief executive London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

In Barking and Dagenham we face particular challenges in tackling the issues that matter most to our residents – and in building strong communities. In 1991, only 6.8 per cent of the borough's population was non-white: this had risen to nearly 15 per cent by 2001, and is now, it is estimated, approximately 25 per cent. This change is not represented in just a few BME groups, but across a wide range of migrant communities (and people moving to the area to find relatively cheaper housing by London standards).

In a borough where many residents took satisfaction from the extent to which it had not changed in contrast to the rest of London, these changes have come as a shock – communities are mourning the past, and fearful of the new. Residents look back to a time when, they perceive, communities were highly cohesive, and they see those connections dissolving.

Significant plans for regeneration as part of the Thames Gateway will bring major benefits to the established population – but can equally be seen as bringing further change and pressure on resources.

Such fears, irrespective of reality, have the potential to become a source of tension, and to be exploited by extremists.

Our challenges therefore include:

- to support local people through a period of significant change;
- for new arrivals in the borough to be safe and supported to play a full and active part in their new communities; and
- to ensure that regeneration schemes deliver real benefits to established communities.

We know that there is significant cynicism, even disaffection in the established, local community. In 2006, 63 per cent of residents surveyed said they didn't feel they could influence local decision-making. 32 per cent said they would like to be more involved in decision-making with a further 52 per cent saying it would depend on the issue.

It seems reasonable to connect this perceived lack of ability to affect local decisions with a feeling of frustration with and fear of changes in the area.

In 2006, we conducted a major piece of engagement with the local community, to inform our updated community cohesion strategy. The engagement work employed a number of innovative techniques such as 'graffiti walls' and 'videoques'. The researchers went out to local people where they were - social clubs, the local football club, shopping centres, and door-knocking. While we took care to reach those groups often known as 'hard to reach' (women, people with disabilities, BME communities), here we also worked hard to reach the established communities who, we sensed, were not being heard. When we reached them, time and again, they told us that no-one ever came and asked them what they thought, but they liked the fact that we were doing so now.

In many ways, the council's relationship with its community and partners has changed. Post Right-to-Buy, a smaller proportion of the local population has the council as a landlord. Similarly, the council used to hand out, in its role as local benefactor, grants to local community groups – now it commissions voluntary organisations to deliver local services to help meet its objectives. Through our strong Local Strategic Partnership, we recognise that we don't have all the answers, but by working together with our partners, voluntary and statutory, we will make a difference together.

We have recognised this changing dynamic in the establishment of our borough-wide Neighbourhood Management service. Neighbourhood Management recognises that local people:

- are best-placed to identify the things that matter most to them in their communities;
- can be supported to agree a set of local priorities for action; and
- will be motivated to come together, both to hold local services to account to deliver those priorities, but also to be part of the process of finding solutions to local problems and to making change happen.

We are working together with local people and our partners, to develop local Neighbourhood Partnerships to facilitate this – a model which enables people to get involved to the extent that they feel most comfortable with:

- becoming members of the partnership overseeing delivery of neighbourhood action plans across a range of services;
- joining sub-groups looking at specific issues such as activities for young people or anti-social behaviour;
- taking part in activities to directly make a difference, such as community clear-up days; and
- giving their opinion on local issues at fun events which bring the community together.

A vibrant voluntary and community sector is essential to build strong communities. Neighbourhood Management can help statutory services to target their resources where they will make the most difference. Voluntary and community organisations can provide

the 'extra' that makes the difference over and above what the statutes can deliver – including developing social capital to increase local capacity, and bringing people from different backgrounds together.

Our Neighbourhood Management service is less than a year old, but already we can see the difference that can be made. For example:

- co-ordinating community clear-up events; cleaning up estates, shop parades and open spaces with local people. Following these events many have said that they want to play their part by monitoring and reporting the cleanliness thereafter and/or by joining their local Neighbourhood Partnership;
- Gascoigne Neighbourhood Management team hosted an inter-generational project – an IT programme for the over 50s taught by local teenagers;
- our Well London project is helping to develop local health services with residents, work overseen by the Neighbourhood Partnership; and
- Neighbourhood Management is increasing the number of people who are actively involved in our partnership work to improve local services by encouraging them to join Safer Neighbourhood ward panels and Neighbourhood Partnerships

Our consultation work with the local community has shown us that local people do want to come together and get to know each other – but they don't know how. The council can do a limited amount to support this, through events such as our Town Show and the Molten arts festival, but we can achieve much more by supporting the voluntary sector to help us. Our tenants and residents associations have a great track record in reaching local people, and have delivered some highly successful events designed to increase community cohesion. Our 'new arrivals' project will work with local community groups to make contacts with people newly arrived in the area and help them to get involved.

As vital as the participatory opportunities described above are, this does not mean a lessening of the importance of representative democracy. Indeed, in this context, councillors' role as community leaders is more vital than ever. Their visibility as representatives of their local communities, their knowledge of local needs to inform policy, their scrutiny of local service delivery on behalf of their constituents - these are all vital not only to delivering high-quality services, but also to convincing local people of the value of representative democracy.

Crucially, the successful 21st century councillor is first and foremost an advocate of the people that they serve, striving to understand and promote community needs in council and partnership forums. To effectively exercise their representative role, they need to be confident in a participatory environment.

Councillors have a crucial role in making difficult decisions, allocating scarce resources and articulating challenging messages. This is based on the long-held understanding

that decisions have to be made for the public good, which will inevitably lead to winners and losers in the community, and which is why we elect politicians. The closer the links between representative and participative models of democracy, the better the quality of decisions and the more likely the community to understand (if not welcome) the basis for those decisions.

In Barking and Dagenham we have embarked upon a programme to support councillors in their community leadership role. This involves a series of neighbourhood walks, listening events and question times designed to enhance councillors' visibility in their local areas, develop an ongoing dialogue about the things that matter most to local people and inform our priorities, policies and service planning. By using a mix of traditional and innovative engagement approaches, our councillors are strengthening their representative role through participatory means.

In the future, we believe that, as the personalisation agenda develops, the same principles will apply to community participation, and the extent to which people will spend their spare time for the benefit of their community. We believe that our model of Neighbourhood Management, which supports local people to give as much or as little of their time as they are able to, and which enables them to get involved in what most interests them, demonstrates that this is possible.

In order to make this a reality, we will continue to develop our skills as enablers and facilitators, supporting and commissioning our voluntary sector partners to work with us in developing this social capital.

By developing strong, active communities, where local people can see that the things which matter most to them are being addressed, they can influence decisions and come together with their neighbours to make the difference, we believe that we will address the challenges that face us today in Barking and Dagenham.



**Julia Unwin CBE**  
**director**  
**Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

Voluntary and community organisations have been central to making places that people want to live in for as long as anyone can remember. Playgroups and allotment societies, arts venues and environmental campaigns, residents groups, heritage centres and lunch clubs – these are part of community life in every part of the country and always have been. They are the way people express affiliation with their neighbours, the way in which they pursue shared interests, and frequently the way that they come together to express their dissatisfaction or propose change and sometimes declaim their sheer fury at what has been done to them. Places change and develop because of the people in them and because of the ways they organise themselves. Place shaping relies on voluntary and community organisations – and broader civil society.

None of the changes we have witnessed in the ways in which neighbourhoods and places operate would have happened without the active engagement of people who live in those communities – as activists, as entrepreneurs, as creative players, as members of local groups. Over many decades they have agitated, advocated, argued and acted – developing services to meet their own needs, demanding more from the institutions that exist to serve them, and highlighting the inequality in some areas, the desperate grinding poverty in others. From villages to market towns, from outer estates to neighbourhoods in the heart of big cities - communities have organised to drive change.

What these community and voluntary organisations have done (and continue to do) is build strong bonds. They enable the identities to flourish; they strengthen the sense of affiliation, of belonging. And in some cases they bridge too. They make connections between issues and concerns, between competing priorities and between neighbourhoods. They do all this; what they don't do is represent. This is the role of the tiers of representative democracy in which people, very often coming from these community and voluntary organisations, face the electorate on a manifesto and then take a seat in their parish, district, city or county council, served by officers whose task it is to support the wishes of the majority party. Operating within a vital framework of democratic accountability, representative democracy is by definition trading off priorities, judging between competing demands, and allocating scarce resources. Participative democracy is messier, more partisan, and often noisier. It can contain opposing viewpoints, challenge prior assumptions, argue passionately for change – but it cannot be subject to the same tests or the same expectations as representative democracy.

This sort of engagement is not the same as being representative. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation study on active governance reported that there seems to be a 'Catch 22' situation where participants are either dismissed as unrepresentative or as the 'usual suspects'.<sup>12</sup>

The diverse voices which make up a rich and vibrant civil society cannot be marshalled for the convenience of local or central government. Utilitarian funding models have in the past allowed voluntary and community organisations to flourish only when their objectives and purposes could be aligned with those of the democratically elected body. They could then be categorised as either service providers or representatives, and be challenged and held to account in these roles. This model created a set of relationships in which civil society was seen as either the agent of the local authority, or existing solely in order to serve it.

This model is increasingly redundant and outdated.

Place making provides a framework in which it is not just possible, but also necessary, to see civil society as valuably contributing to the development of places, whatever the relationship with the strategic body that is the local authority. If local authorities are serious about their role as place shapers, they need to work closely with groups who often have a long and abiding concern for place, but whose voices may be challenging or difficult. This understanding of participative organisations as neither an adjunct to local authorities, nor a route into them, but as simply valuable in their own right is essential for place shaping, but it will not be easy. Competing voices with no simple message are hard to hear, and responding can be uncomfortable. But this is the reality of diverse community life.

The new approach needs to be located in the changing nature of places. The diversity of modern Britain means that the places in which both local authorities and voluntary organisations are working are very different. Communities are infinitely less homogenous than they may once have been. Demographic change, through immigration, migration, and the changing age profile all change communities. So too do developments in the nature of social care, and the presence within communities of many people who were previously hidden. Changing work patterns and aspirations have influenced the shape of communities, just as much as different patterns of family formation. And over and above all of this, these diverse communities need a resilience and a capacity to respond to outside challenges – whether pandemic flu or climate change – that will test their strength and their abilities in ways that have not been seen for some time. Little wonder then that increasingly local authorities struggle to manage these challenges alone. What is needed is nothing less than a new settlement between local authorities and the diverse, overlapping and complex organisations that together help to shape a place.

This new settlement challenges both local authorities and the voluntary and community

12. Maguire, K. and Truscott, F. (2006) *The value added by community involvement in governance*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

sector to behave differently, to frame their value differently and to describe their purpose in new and varied ways. Unless this challenge is grasped, there are real limits to the way in which places can be shaped, can develop and can be created.

For the voluntary and community sector this approach first demands a new confidence and a new way of describing value. These organisations need to consciously reject the call to be representative – or worse, the challenge that they are not sufficiently representative. The language of bonds and bridges, so helpfully developed by the Development Trust Association provides a powerful way of describing the value brought without recourse to unhelpful notions of representation. The power of affiliation which allows bonds to be developed within communities of interest, of ethnicity, of age or of disability has a value in articulating need, as well as making a contribution to building resilience within communities. So too does the affiliation in neighbourhood organisations, whatever their focus. The power of affiliation provides the glue that helps diverse communities operate.

Secondly, this developed confidence needs to be linked with a certainty about independence. Voluntary and community organisations have their own mission, and too often in the past this has been seen as subservient to the agenda of representative democracy. A new settlement which sees these organisations as integral to place will need to affirm their independence of purpose, and recognise the importance of that purpose being locally owned, managed and understood. The temptation to squeeze mission to meet funding availability is a well documented phenomenon. It assumes that value is only ascribed to organisations that can be aligned, but in a more plural, more complex, and more relevant approach to place shaping, voluntary and community organisations will need certainty about their ability to shape and manage mission.

Finally, voluntary and community organisations, as full participants in the shaping of places, need sources of funding that are independent and that therefore require no alignment. The creation of national pots of funding disassociated from the decisions and priorities of local authorities should never be seen as undermining those local authorities and their democratic mandate. Rather it is a way in which the diversity of civil society can be fuelled to provide just the engine of change that place shaping needs. The efforts of local and national voluntary organisations to secure funding that is not part of the strategic direction of local authorities and their partners has, in this context, a real value in self determination, and is a very visible and clear signifier of independence .

But this new settlement also demands a new approach from local authorities. The development of thinking which genuinely values difference, dissent and diversity requires a different approach to the independence, value and power of civil society. The framework of place shaping, with the much clearer focus on obligations to localities, and to all those within them, will help to shape this. But so too will much greater engagement with voluntary and community sector organisations, and a much greater tolerance for their different priorities.

Local authorities, and the whole architecture of local area agreements and strategic partnerships, will need to act less as gatekeepers and more as gateways, focused on hearing the voices of independent organisations, valuing them for the differences they bring, and identifying the benefit in the bonds and the bridges that successful, independent voluntary organisations can offer.

The prize for both local authorities and voluntary and community organisations will be the development of places which can genuinely engage all those who live in them, can respond to different and varied need, but most importantly can be resilient and able to face the challenges that lie ahead.



## Stephen Thake reader in urban policy London Metropolitan University

The Local Authority Act 2007<sup>13</sup> creates the framework for new form of municipalism. It is a municipalism that builds on a collaborative partnership between local authorities and the Third Sector to mobilise community action to strengthen social cohesion, tackle poverty and address climate change.

Over the last 150 years local authorities have been at the forefront of two huge revolutions. In the first, they built the physical infrastructure of our towns and cities including the provision of gas, electricity and, in the case of Hull, a telephone exchange. In the second, they established universal services – housing, education, health and care for the elderly – necessary for a fair society and a thriving economy.

So why do we need another?

If the UK is to be economically, socially and environmentally resilient in the challenging times of the early 21st century, it needs to be a three cornered stool with the market represented by the private sector, the state represented by the public sector and a diverse and thriving civil society represented by the Third Sector.

From the 1980s onward, the policies of central government represent a dramatic attempt to reengineer the UK economy. Without them the UK would not have been able to respond to the global shifts of capital and production that have taken place. But it was difficult and divisive. It changed the contract between the employer and the employed and neglected public services.

The decade of the New Labour governments can be seen as a heroic attempt to invest and modernise public services to meet the needs of a service-based economy and rising expectations. But it too has come at a cost. Public service providers have, in their search for greater efficiency, distanced themselves from the people they serve. Local authorities have become corporate entities managed by performance-related staff with local councillors filling the role of non-executive directors.

Huge though these transformations have been, economic and technological change has not abated. We now live in a precarious world dominated by forces beyond the ability of national governments to control. At a local level a new landscape has opened up where the situation on the ground can deteriorate rapidly and unexpectedly.

<sup>13</sup> The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to give it its full title.

There are limits to what the state at local level can do. It takes time to adjust existing priorities to respond to emerging needs. Local authority interventions focus on service delivery when other solutions may be more appropriate. As a consequence, intervention takes place when situations become acute and often there is a mismatch between what is offered and what is needed.

There is a need for fast, specific, preventive and sometimes protective responses. This is the traditional role of civil not civic society – the community and voluntary organisations.

Yet we have taken civil society for granted. At a time when the need for a vibrant and resilient civil society is of increasing importance we find that it has taken a battering. That does not mean that the contribution of traditional drivers of community action - the work place, families and faith groups - should not be supported but on their own they will not be sufficient. There needs to be an investment in the Third Sector similar to that which we have seen in the public-financed services over the last 10 years and in the private sector over the last 30 years.

So what might this new civil society landscape look like?

First, no single community organisation can meet all the needs and aspirations of everyone. There needs to be a healthy ecology of civil society organisations – community centres, single purpose organisations, community groups, churches and other faith-based organisations - in any locality. They provide the warp and weft of society that create the social glue that holds things together and brings about change at local levels.

In aggregate the activities that these organisations undertake are legion. Traditionally they have covered community, health, cultural development and climate change. More recently they have widened to include a wealth-creating agenda that fosters social enterprise both large and small, as one-off initiatives or in clusters.

These activities create the space where mutuality holds sway and co-operation is more important than competition. They establish a measure of community well-being and self-management. In this space, differences are celebrated and conflicts expressed. Here trust can be built and innovations take place: innovations that can tackle emerging problems before they become acute, as well as deep seated problems that appear to be intractable.

Second, larger community-based organisations - some single purpose, some multi-purpose, some new and others older - are taking a responsibility to support the development of community organisations and groups within their locality. They provide an important part of the local community infrastructure, fulfilling an anchor role similar to that of department stores in successful high streets and shopping centres.

If that is the vision, then how can it be created? In some areas, particularly in rural communities, which have experienced the long-term withdrawal of public and private

services, civil engagement and community action already fill the gap. But this needs to become a generic response.

The leadership function of the local authorities is to create the environment in which civil society can thrive. The well-being powers introduced in the Local Government Act 2000, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Local Authority Act 2007 represent a profound change in approach.

The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) of a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) establishes the desired environmental, economic and social well-being outcomes necessary to create a thriving civil society. The local authority's Core Strategy unifies those outcomes as the driver of both public service and spatial planning.

For these partnerships and strategies to have legitimacy, they need to be co-produced by public, private and Third Sector agencies working together as equals. No one should shy away from the shift in culture and perceptions that this entails.

But investment costs money. How can it be paid for?

First, community activities undertaken by Third Sector organisations need to be seen as core to their identity. However, within the Third Sector, the proportion of income derived from donations has fallen. This has militated against smaller, predominantly local organisations. As a consequence, most are endemically fragile – financially and organisationally - and any deterioration in their situation can tip them over the edge.

Government has recognised the seriousness of the situation by introducing its small grants programme but more needs to be done and it cannot be achieved by extending the commissioner/client relationship.

We accept that there is a local precept levied on every household to pay for the police. If we are willing to do this for security then we should also do it for community benefit in the form of a two per cent precept on the council tax which could provide a realistic budget to support community-based activity. There will be a debate in deciding on the best way to distribute such resources but it would be a debate through which the local Third Sector would grow in legitimacy and change in outlook.

Second, in the UK, we have conflated the financing with the delivery of public services. There needs to be a pluralist approach. It is now understood that there are limits to what the marketisation of service delivery can achieve. However, we have yet to understand the benefits of local production or explore the proper balance between delivery by state and Third sector agencies.

There is scope for the growth of new forms of delivery agencies embedded in the traditions of mutuality, co-operative ownership, co-production and self-help. It should

be a market in its own right where social enterprises can thrive either on their own or as part of hybrid organisations that provide both public-funded services and self-funded community activities.

Third, the ability of community-based organisations to raise their own finance needs to be enhanced. In this context, community foundations, community share and community bond schemes need to be developed further.

Fourth, the physical assets held in land and buildings by public bodies need to be seen as being held by them in trust on behalf of civil society. As part of the LSP's well-being agenda, a proportion of these should be reallocated to the Third Sector to provide a secure base for their operations. The Local Development Framework (LDF) can indicate where the well-being outcomes, if they have a particular spatial relevance, need to be achieved.

Local authorities have within their property portfolios land and buildings transferred or covenanted to them by individuals, charities and even government departments for the common good. These should be separated out from the local authorities own portfolio and, wherever practicable, passed to Third Sector agencies to own and manage either directly or through a community land trust. Existing community purpose buildings should be similarly transferred at their social use value. Empty and redundant buildings should be offered to Third Sector organisations for 'meanwhile' usage and, where a viable long-term use can be established, the freehold should be transferred too.

But the ownership and management of buildings also brings longer term responsibilities and liabilities. The transfer of assets that have limited income earning capacity, such as community centres, should be accompanied by assets that do, such as local shops and workspaces.

However, funding a thriving civil society should not be seen as the reallocation of the assets and service delivery functions held by local authorities to the Third Sector. There have to be major advantages for local authorities too.

The demands on local authorities are growing as a consequence of an ageing population and rising expectations but their income whether locally generated or from central government is subject to constraints. In this more difficult environment, local authorities need to be honest about what they can do. They need to work with other agencies to share the strain. For its part, the Third Sector needs to step up to the plate to deliver the well-being agenda.

A strong and vibrant Third Sector will enable local authorities to focus more on their overarching role of bringing together and integrating the activities of market, state and civil society agencies to develop and implement the local strategies that create a thriving economy and deliver efficient services.

Central government also needs to be an active partner.

It is unacceptable that funds like the Big Lottery should be used to make good funding deficits on the Olympic Games. It needs to be set free from central government control in the same way that the Bank of England. It should establish its own priorities and distribute the funds raised without governmental interference.

In addition, central government, executive agencies and non-governmental bodies should be required to adopt a well-being duty similar to that given to local authorities, the police and the fire services. At present, they do not have to consider the Third Sector when disposing of assets or commissioning services. Yet the Departments of Health and Work and Pensions, the Ministry of Defence as well as the Highways Agency and universities can be significant players within local areas. They also need to become part of the mix.

Finally, the Third Sector needs to be able to look beyond government. The private sector has to be part of the solution also.

The idea that all new residential developments should include an element of affordable housing is now well understood and accepted. This concept should be extended to commercial and retail development whereby a proportion – 15 per cent say - is earmarked for community benefit.

Similarly, it is accepted that the funds held in dormant accounts by the banks and building societies do not belong to them. However, it should not be appropriated by government to pay for programmes areas, such as youth services, from which public service providers have conspicuously withdrawn over the last 15 years. The funds that are to be raised should be transferred to an independent social investment bank that channels investment funds to local communities through a series of specialist Third Sector intermediary bodies.

The concept of dormant accounts should also be extended to the public sector. The government holds huge sums of uncollected national savings and premium bonds. They should be put into the pot at well.

If we are to build a successful economy, a cohesive society and shift behaviour on climate change we all have a part to play. A partnership between a new form of radical municipalism and a vibrant Third Sector can release the energies of both. Together they will be better placed to hold central government and the private sector to account at local levels. The time has come to seize the day.



## David Jenkins chief executive Dorset County Council

Since the Local Government Act 2000 established Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) as forums through which local authorities consult local communities on their community strategies, participatory activity has become increasingly important in the day-to-day work of planning and providing local public services.

Participation has become central to the work of local authorities, not only to identify community needs, but also as a means of addressing them. Arguably, local policy-making has never looked more vibrant as a result. Thanks largely to LSPs and to more local community partnerships, many local authorities have achieved a more diverse range of stakeholders, engaged in new decision-making forums, helping to deliver better outcomes for local people.

However, the question of how government initiatives promoting active and empowered communities through partnership working relate to the traditional and embedded local representative structures has not yet been fully resolved. This is particularly the case in multi-tier areas where, despite the numerous overlapping pieces of legislation and guidance, making this work across the structures of elected county, district, town and parish councils can sometimes appear as an afterthought, in national thinking.

Balancing representative structures with participative models of involvement has become one of the main practical challenges facing local government.

There is limited research to draw on but commonly held concerns appear to include a fear that parish planning and local community partnerships are, at best, duplicating the work of local elected representatives and, at worst, 'usurping' their role. Conversely, it is sometimes suggested that elected representation is an infrequent and remote form of engagement which has little to offer 'hard to reach' communities; in short, that there is a democratic deficit inherent in the representative approach. For local people, who are likely to be more interested in the quality of the service they receive than the process that produced it, it can all seem unnecessarily complicated.

In Dorset, as in other areas, we are working to strengthen both representative and participative activity. The well-established Dorset Strategic Partnership is supported by district level community partnerships, and, in many cases town and parish partnerships. Elected members of local authorities of all tiers are encouraged and supported to play

leading roles at each level, and most find the partnership structures useful in engaging more closely with elected members of other tiers, and with other local players. They come together in our Dorset Strategic Partnership Board, its various theme groups, and the Local Area Agreement (LAA).

Like most counties, Dorset has both urban and rural parts. Rural sparsity makes accessibility challenging. Providing a diverse range of access points to enable participation is therefore vital.

Rural areas don't lend themselves to a linear or 'top down' approach to policy making. Perhaps partly as a result, Dorset has developed a strong tradition of local action and participation, with approximately 5,000 Third Sector organisations and as many as 75 per cent of local people getting involved in informal types of volunteering like keeping an eye on a neighbour (MORI 2005).

Although informal volunteering and third sector activity may not be seen in themselves as participatory democracy, they often facilitate participatory processes. Volunteering and voluntary activity are often a catalyst for other sorts of engagement. We have been supporting community engagement locally through an LAA target to increase formal volunteering and, like many areas, Dorset's new LAA will include national indicator 7 relating to the 'environment for a thriving Third Sector'.

Approximately 90 per cent of the geographical area of England is covered by parishes, mostly in rural or semi-rural areas. Community planning, particularly the more established parish planning, plays an important role in providing cohesion and participation across rural areas. Parish plans can be an important tool in encouraging participation and in bringing together elected representatives and their local communities. It is important that town and parish councils are centrally involved.

Dorset now has well-developed community planning processes, and helps fund support for local actions through a Community Action Fund. Our experience is that parish planning can provide an opportunity for local people to reflect on the needs of their communities and, in partnership with the statutory sector, to make improvements happen. The number of parishes that have completed parish plans rises steadily year-on-year.

Within the children and young people's agenda, partnership structures are bringing together participative and representative democracy to deliver better, more joined-up services for children and young people. Amongst other things, work with children and young people and the children and young people's partnership board has resulted in the inclusion of preventing bullying and harassment as a local priority.

Like most authorities, we are developing new models of commissioning and jointly-commissioning services so that local people and organisations have a greater say in

service planning and delivery. The issues which affect local quality of life clearly cross organisational and administrative boundaries and, like parish planning, commissioning offers an important opportunity to help shape ambitions and priorities and engage local elected representatives with local community groups.

The growing emphasis on partnership working as a means to plan and deliver local policy involves new roles for elected members and often new skills. As research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found, elected members often need support in asserting their democratic authority in the new climate.

Dorset County Council is supporting and developing the role of our elected members through a Member Development Strategy.

Enhancing both representation and participation in their own right is important. But tensions can arise at the interface between community activity and elected representation.

There are a number of ways of managing these tensions, including appointing independent chairs of local and county-wide LSPs and ensuring active and authoritative Third Sector involvement in LSP structures. In Dorset we have recently restructured the Strategic Partnership so that the leader of each district council, as well as the leader of the county council and the chair of the Association of Parish and Town Councils sit on the board, along with, amongst others, representatives of the business sector, Third Sector, and community groups. Following a joint scrutiny of the LSP earlier this year, partners are also about to step up communication with all their elected members about the achievements from partnership working. To quote from the final scrutiny report:

*'It was the [scrutiny] group's experience that increased knowledge of the way the DSP worked and its achievements resulted in a more positive attitude towards it'.*

It is important to identify when participation and representation work together to deliver better outcomes for local people. In Dorset there have been a number of examples, including the development of Community Land Trusts, where local concerns about the lack of affordable housing have led to positive local action at village level. There are also a growing number of examples where a commitment to and from local communities has led to the transfer of assets and services from local authorities to local community groups.

The importance of creating a compelling narrative linking representative and participative activity, and its ability to galvanise partners, should not be underestimated. The joint scrutiny of our LSP confirmed what we suspected about the need for better communication. It also highlighted that while the call-in and scrutiny functions available to local authorities can have an ominous ring to them, in reality they should be a spur to a wider involvement of elected members in partnership processes, and to improved local outcomes.

There are interesting parallels between developments in commissioning/delivery of services and policy-making. In a relatively short space of time, county councils have moved from being the sole providers of certain services, to commissioning many of them, and, with the growth of individualised budgets in adult social care, to now brokering those services.

In much the same way, the role of local authorities as policy makers is evolving from forming and delivering policy to enabling and facilitating the setting of local priorities and local policy-making, across the tiers, through convening and facilitating partnership forums.

It would be disingenuous to suggest that we strike the right balance all the time and the paucity of guidance or research to date means that we are very much feeling our way in aspects of the new arrangements. But there is a growing consensus that our strategic and community partnerships have the potential to harness both the representative and participative functions, to bring them together at both the very local and the strategic level, and to articulate and realise the benefits of both.



## Colette McKeaveney chief executive Age Concern Luton

One of the greatest challenges for all of us working at a local level is translating policy into something workable and beneficial for the communities we serve. All too often a much-heralded and wonderful new idea or a fresh strategy changes little or nothing on the ground. A duty to involve sounds novel but is it really likely to be very different in practice?

I am always interested in the different language of the voluntary sector and local government. For example, our contracts with our local authority use the term “service user” which conjures up the image of a customer. “Member” normally means elected member to the council, but to us it is someone who is part of our organisation, whether as a staff member or a “service user”. This very basic difference illustrates the different natures of our sectors where being required to separate out “helpers” at a lunch club from “service users” misses the point of participating at a level which is right for that individual. The level of involvement we encourage for our members is that they are both providers and recipients of services; this interdependence means that people really shape and deliver services they value and like. In contrast, the common ground is clearer; we are all committed to making a positive impact in the communities we work with.

Our organisation, a local Age Concern, is part of a national federation and has opportunities for dialogue with policy makers at Age Concern England in addition to the peer discussion that takes place between members at regional level. Locally there are many new consultative and decision-making bodies we need to engage with. The representative role is important and I feel a great responsibility in getting it right, in accurately expressing the views and concerns of those people Age Concern claims as constituents and in raising the level of debate over and above a simple single choice.

Intellectually I know it is important for older people in Luton that we participate in all these structures but find a mirror image of the reasons why service users and the public at large probably do not engage well with a variety of consultation structures. Simply finding the time to participate is difficult for us; whilst we know there may be long-term benefits it is often necessary to deal with the immediate and everyday compliances and pressures we face. Therein lies a dilemma – we want service users and the public at large to engage with us and our democratic processes, to participate actively in public debate, giving generously of their time and experience but we can’t always find the time to do it ourselves.

So if I acknowledge a failing in representing the views of older people in these structures how then do we ensure that their voices are heard? Our board, staff and volunteers are well informed on policy and have a good understanding of the issues facing all older people in our area; this is backed up by practitioner research, analysis and evidence collected through our provision of services. Therefore, because we are actually presenting a range of views we can claim to be legitimately representing the people we seek to serve. It is the experience and ability to have an overview of needs and wishes of a variety of service-users which sets the voluntary sector apart from individual representations by community members.

I have often heard the criticism that the “usual suspects” who turn up at consultations have an opinion on everything and that it is hard to get to the “real” people. Time and again the vocal minority shape services for the passive majority and the experience of groups working with larger numbers of people hold no more weight than individual expressions and subjective opinion. The argument goes that, if people were bothered they could have taken part in the various surveys and meetings and they too could have been heard. This is often frustrating for groups like us who spend a lot of time trying to establish “givens” in the way we deliver our services or influence others to shape theirs, only to find that a vocal individual or special interest group has managed to hijack the agenda. Most people do not want to be consulted or involved in every detail and few people want to control every aspect of service or policy development. Existing structures often favour those that do. Over-consultation implies a lack of learning from previous consultation and the analogy of an over anxious cook endlessly checking the pot comes to mind. If we want active participation we have to stop asking people to reinvent the wheel every time we want to develop something new and learn to be more strategic in goal setting.

Council officers and members concerned with really involving citizens and service users acknowledge the disappointment of people still being unhappy after their best efforts to listen and involve. I think this is partly because of the focus on active engagement rather than an acknowledgement that passive engagement is also possible. Not asking someone to do something is also participation; I believe the key is ensuring that citizens and service users are able to express themselves, whether favourably or negatively. A service user recently told me “Don’t keep asking me if the services are okay, if they are not I will tell you”.

When it comes to democratic representation, the roles of the voluntary and community sector and those of local government are complimentary but often blurred. Voluntary sector leaders and workers are often involved in local politics and local councillors are often present as council representatives on the board of local organisations. This affords a great opportunity for the sector to actively shape our local and national government policy but it also means that active councillors can create hierarchies of need and that the sector can be manipulated for political gain.

Age Concern Luton is part of the framework of a town often described as vibrant, multicultural and diverse. Our 350 staff and volunteers provide services for 1000 people each week. Within our community, levels of deprivation are high and expectations are low; it can be a challenge to engage our service users who are often very frail, perhaps suffering long-term physical or mental illness or simply worried about making a fuss in case they lose access to the services they get. It is this group and others who are hard to reach who particularly need the support of representatives, whether elected members or voluntary organisations.

As leaders in voluntary organisations we are challenged to ensure that we engage with and listen to our service users, staff and volunteers and that we accurately and appropriately express those views within the structures of our society. To be democratic and sensitive to the needs of service users, particularly those least able to represent themselves is a great challenge for everyone. Personal representation is necessary for society to function but it can not be simply reduced to voting or passing an opinion when invited. True democratic participation means ongoing dialogue which is meaningful. People see through the 'leading argument' and quickly become cynical about the motives for and outcomes of these consultations.

Local authorities can build trust with communities and sector representatives by promoting transparent debate, by avoiding leading arguments and by ensuring that participatory structures are not onerous. It would be beneficial if local authorities could recognise that representation is an important function, and make provision for this within service level agreements. Recent focus on service delivery and tendering make the representative role harder to finance and some local authorities even consider that there is a conflict where service delivery charities seek to represent their members.

Voluntary organisations can build trust by not trying to replace the individual experience but by drawing on their wider experience and ensuring that they engage at a meaningful level with the democratic processes.



## **Cllr Sue Anderson** **cabinet third sector champion** **Birmingham City Council**

### **A common-sense partnership: but why and how, exactly?**

When the LGA and NCVO asked for my thoughts on representative and participatory democracy and why each needs the other, I first had to ponder why the question was being asked. Over almost 30 years in local politics, it's been a matter of everyday experience for me that both forms of democracy are essential for strong and cohesive communities. Community empowerment is what enables me to be an effective local councillor speaking up for the people I represent.

Writing this piece has allowed me to examine my own assumptions and reflect on how representative and participatory democracy work together. I've thought about the ways in which a strong culture of participation has led to positive changes in the community I represent and helped me to be more effective in my strategic roles as cabinet member and Third Sector champion.

I hope my contribution will help both fellow elected members and colleagues from the Third Sector make the most of opportunities offered by the new local government legislation and the forthcoming empowerment white paper.

### **Participation as a route into a representative role**

The foundations of Birmingham's civic democracy were laid by active citizens who wanted to shape the future of our city. The contributions of the Chamberlain and Cadbury families to Birmingham's civic governance, and to better living conditions for working people, are well known. Throughout the city's history, though, engaged citizens, such as the philanthropic women of Edgbaston, Harborne and Handsworth who founded the Birmingham Settlement, have striven to make life better for our citizens.

My own journey into local politics illustrates how active citizenship can be a route into a representative role. In the late 1960s, I came to Birmingham as a maths teacher at Aston Manor Park Girls Secondary School. Many girls were growing up in extreme poverty in cramped back-to-back housing. The options at school were limited. Most pupils took courses exclusively in typing and other vocational skills, not academic subjects. I persuaded the head teacher to introduce City & Guilds maths qualifications, and am proud of having encouraged girls to achieve their potential.

Experiences in my teaching career made me understand that if you speak out, you can have a positive impact for people with whom you live and work. I got involved in local projects and decided that I wanted to take part in formal decision-making by standing for the council.

Colleagues from all parties in Birmingham City Council, and councillors from elsewhere who've visited us during our year as Beacon council for Third Sector service delivery, tell similar stories about their journeys from community engagement into elected local politics. The challenge for us as councillors is to listen and respond to many voices, and let them help us make what can be difficult decisions.

My experiences before I was elected were formative, making me value highly the contribution of residents and tenants, school governing bodies and community associations. I've always worked in partnership with communities to find shared priorities for well-being and quality of life, creating an agenda which everyone can identify with and feel they own. Local relationships grounded in respect for the distinct but complementary roles of representative and participatory democracy will withstand conflicts – as long as all involved see progress towards common goals.

### **Working with participatory structures: opportunities and challenges**

Birmingham, the UK's largest local authority, is a pioneer council in devolving local decision-making. More than seventy neighbourhood forums across the city help to ensure that councillors' local decisions are informed by community views and needs. Forums are important members of our ten constituency strategic partnerships.

From the mid-1990s, the council's initiative, Local Involvement – Local Action (LILA), offered each ward £50,000 which councillors could allocate to local projects in consultation with neighbourhood forums and other local stakeholders. LILA paved the way for devolution of a significant proportion of council decisions and services to constituency committees and strategic partnerships, as well as for localised delivery of neighbourhood renewal.

As a councillor for Sheldon, I've worked extensively with neighbourhood forums, and have become a better representative as a result. I've fostered trust among residents who had often suspected that councillors wanted to dominate, not work in partnership. In one area of my ward, residents decided they wanted no councillors involved in the forum. I made it clear I respected residents' determination to be independent. By listening and responding, I built a positive relationship with the forum. I took on a role as honest broker between it and the developers seeking planning permission for an extension to the local estate. Residents from the forum are now consulted by the developers at every stage of the design of new properties, and know their views are taken seriously.

## **Participation and delivery**

Because of what we've already achieved in Birmingham, we can respond positively to the new national agenda for empowerment. Delivering neighbourhood renewal initiatives at ward and constituency level presented many challenges. Central government – rightly – scrutinised the impact of neighbourhood renewal investment in the city. A partnership approach to outcomes-focused planning now ensures that community empowerment and participation shape service delivery. Neighbourhood forums are vital to strong constituency strategic partnerships. These partnerships, working with Be Birmingham, our citywide LSP, are shaping from the bottom up the vision for Birmingham's future.

Be Birmingham's planning focuses on delivery of five key strategic outcomes. I see this as closing the loop. As I've said, my experience in my own ward is that partnerships between the council, other agencies and community groups succeed only if there is prior agreement about what local people really want and need.

## **Participation leads to better executive decision-making**

Like many councillors, I wear more than one hat: as local member for Sheldon, cabinet member for adults and communities, council champion for the third sector, and Birmingham resident and service user. We're currently transforming services for older people, and I'm proud that older people themselves are shaping our future strategy. For me, as champion for change, it's really important to have these multiple perspectives, as well as the common sense input of my constituents day-to-day.

Our transformation of older people's services started in 2004/5 with a major consultation involving older people, their families, carers and other key stakeholders including health partners, independent providers and the Third Sector. This enabled us to gain cross-party support for a new approach which promotes well-being through community services (with the Third Sector playing a key role) and specialist care for the most vulnerable, especially those with dementia, in innovative care centres.

To be an effective advocate for change, I have relied on constant dialogue with and challenge from the city's older residents. Crucial to this have been our Older People's Reference Groups (one city-wide, four geographically-based) and the Birmingham Advisory Council of Older People, which advises cabinet and corporate management team. Citizens tell us what they need and expect us to deliver.

My commitment to improving services in partnership with older people themselves has been strengthened as I've witnessed the success of pilot projects in four Birmingham constituencies, including Yardley (my own). These well-being initiatives, including good neighbour, gardening and handyperson schemes, and 'silver surfer' internet training, are delivered by local partnerships of older people, council and PCT staff, and Third Sector

organisations including Age Concern, Birmingham Asian Resource Centre and Anchor Trust. Third Sector partners play a key role in tailoring the services to older people's needs.

This demonstrates the dual role of the sector as advocate for service users and as provider of innovative services which meet needs previously unrecognised. Birmingham's Third Sector Assembly has had a direct influence on the council's transformation plans through a major consultation on day services for older people. As a result, our new care centres will provide a base for services from the Alzheimer's Society and other partners.

## **Bright futures**

I hope I've shown how participation and empowerment is changing Birmingham for the better, and helping elected members to meet people's needs and aspirations. I started with the reflection that the positive interaction of representative and participatory democracy is an everyday experience for most councillors. Barriers to involvement and constructive engagement can be overcome if, as elected members, we show through our behaviour how much we value participation.

We need to listen and respond positively to feedback. We need to inform our constituents about the policies – often determined by central government – which limit what we can do locally. We need to show how their input has made a difference to our decisions. In turn, we ask stakeholders in our communities to respect our role as elected decision-makers accountable at the ballot box. Active citizens help us make better decisions for all. As councillors, we make the most of our power by sharing it with our fellow citizens.



## Tony Hawkhead CBE chief executive Groundwork

Following the many changes to control at May's local authority elections, there are likely to be further local authorities changing political complexion between now and the next general election. This will mean yet more new blood in councils across the country, new councillors full of enthusiasm and the zeal of a hard-fought victory.

One of the ironies of this situation is that a pivotal role for these new recruits will be to find effective mechanisms to pass on their power to local communities. Fresh from election success, their first task will be to try to give away what they strived so hard to win.

If Hazel Blears has her way then the first item on the 'to do' list of anyone entering the town hall is to figure out how to empower all those who put them in power. We're riding a tidal wave of localism in policy-making. We've had calls to consult communities for many years. This has recently given way to more meaningful 'engagement' and now we're urged to take the final step towards empowerment. We've gone from asking people what they think should be done with the money by people in power, to giving people the power and the money to do it for themselves. And that shift has resonance right across the political spectrum.

The theory is great. The reality is more complex. Can power really be given away? Do the people being given it actually want it and know what to do with it? And what then happens to those we elect to represent us?

Giving people the tools to get practically involved in making decisions about where they live has long been a stated policy objective of this government, but it's widely agreed that up until now, attempts to make it happen have been inconsistent and unsystematic, and largely an add-on to other outcomes.

One of the main challenges is that it's easily said but not easily done. It takes skill and experience. It's a truism that poorly executed participation techniques are likely to put off many more people than will be engaged by more positive approaches. It's also true that too often in the past those who have been elected have been able to use their democratic mandate as a reason to sideline legitimate but unco-ordinated voices among the communities they serve.

One of the arguments sometimes put forward by those reluctant to devolve power to communities is that it often ends up in the hands of those who shout loudest or, if not, those least able to exercise it with confidence and responsibility.

We need to get past all this.

The good news is that the time is right for us to move on and make progress. Local Area Agreements and other new mechanisms designed to increase co-ordination represent a real opportunity to focus on a vision for a locality that is shared by service providers and service users alike. Local authorities have new flexibility and powers and can choose to focus on embedding meaningful empowerment into their systems and procedures.

Having a thriving intermediary sector has to be part of the plan. To transfer power effectively and responsibly, there must be sufficient support and safety nets to help those who are not used to it, get used to it; and grow in confidence so that they can take full advantage.

If this is to happen then we also need a recognition that this intermediary role, played by many organisations in the voluntary and community sector, must be done well and does not come for free.

At Groundwork we use concern for and interest in the environment as a way of getting people talking and acting together in their communities. It works because everyone, from an older resident to a bored teenager, have an opinion on the places in which they live, work and play and generally know better than anyone how they can be improved. Whilst working on this kind of practical community project they can get to know their neighbours, make friends with people from different cultures or backgrounds and discover new abilities.

Yet despite the premium placed on engaging residents, funding for this type of community development work is not seen as a high priority and, like many other charities now delivering public service contracts, we generally have to fight for the funding or flexibility to apply these approaches to service delivery. Despite all that's said about intelligent commissioning it's still too often the case that high-quality community development processes are generally seen as being outside the scope of the contract and instead as the 'added value' bought to delivery by the Third Sector.

This terminology is damaging. Added-value implies that it comes for free – an extra or even worse, a 'sweetener'. It doesn't. It is certainly distinctive value but it still costs and that needs to be understood by those providing it and by those procuring it. They also need to understand that this is the only route to sustainable community empowerment.

Maintaining the focus on outcomes – measuring what's changed as opposed to the effort put into delivering it – is going to be helpful. Groundwork delivers lots of outputs

- play areas, parks, community gardens, training courses, business support packages etc
- but it's the process through which that is done that matters most.

One of the central tenets of that approach is that those who live or work in an area must be central to the design, implementation and long-term management of a project. When looking in from the outside it's easy to consider this an efficiency gain – after all we're dealing with voluntary labour with low overheads. What this fails to take into account is the considerable community development work required to get people to this stage.

Another key principle behind the approach is that it is action-oriented. It demands that things happen, some quickly. Although often absurdly dismissed as cosmetic, no-one should underestimate the importance of small changes to the physical fabric of neighbourhoods, especially in areas subject to much larger-scale regeneration.

Making 'quick wins' happen - sometimes as simple as installing a bench in a park or litter bins by a playground – can help to restore people's belief in democracy. Previous experiences to get action may have resulted in frustration and, subsequently, apathy. Greasing the wheels of participatory democracy in this way can help capture and keep people's attention and renew their interest in how decisions get made and how services are delivered.

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) produced a report into active citizenship<sup>14</sup> and concluded that public space was uniquely positioned to facilitate greater participation. Benefits included an increased understanding of planning, funding sources and politics as well as greater partnership working and interaction with others.

The report also indicated that people often went on to what it termed 'higher forms of active citizenship', including formal volunteering, devolved decision-making and representing the local community. Involving communities in addressing immediate environmental concerns – neglected and derelict land, the poor quality of parks and play areas, the lack of facilities for young people – was seen to help create a transition from participatory to representative democracy.

Of course, empowering local communities in this way is not without challenges. One particular case study written up by CLES caused an interesting dilemma for those at Groundwork receiving the report. In this example the individual concerned ended up very critical of the way in which Groundwork had gone about the process – and was very vocal with his criticism. This can't be sidestepped. If someone has now seen enough to spot other people's flaws, that can only be seen as a good outcome. And if we can learn and improve from what they have to say, then so much the better.

This is a potentially fearsome prospect for many local authorities; a confident, knowledgeable group of residents who work closely together will be far more

14. From *Community garden to Westminster* – CLES/Groundwork 2005

demanding and not likely to be fobbed off with excuses.

It may leave plenty of people nervous but this scenario would be a big jump forward. You'll certainly know that you have successfully empowered someone when you realise you can't control them any more!



## **Darra Singh OBE** **former chair of the Commission on** **Integration and Cohesion** **chief executive, Ealing Council**

I recall all too well turning up for my first day as a volunteer at a charitable housing advice agency in the north-east. It was the early eighties and the six months I spent acting as an advocate for the homeless and badly housed, challenging local authorities to do the right thing, taught me a number of lessons that still hold true today. A lack of engagement between the two sectors weakens the effectiveness of all agencies and a failure to develop trust and mutual respect across sectors results in poorer outcomes for local people; top-flight voluntary organisations can and do improve local services through advocacy, capacity building and improving accessibility and reach of public services.

Thankfully the situation has improved and there is greater recognition now of the fact that neither sector can operate effectively without the other. Public service organisations by their very nature find it difficult to be as adaptive as the best in the voluntary and community sector. The ability of community groups to connect with those whose voices are seldom heard and bring together people across “boundaries”, however defined, is a vital resource to all of us in local government. The ability of the best in the voluntary and community sector to alert those in statutory services to emerging needs and challenges should be harnessed to improve how we design and deliver in localities.

It is vital that local government is accountable to residents, and that communities are meaningfully engaged in service delivery. With the right level of support, the voluntary and community sector can play a key role in facilitating this engagement.

In order to tackle complex social issues, reduce inequalities and promote strong, integrated and cohesive communities, all service providers must share a common vision and objectives. In Ealing this is defined by our local strategic partnerships (LSP), and we have worked hard to ensure that voluntary and community groups are supported to play an active role in our partnership arrangements. As part of the compact between the LSP and voluntary and community sector, Third Sector organisations are represented at all levels of council business, and all levels of strategic partnership working. In Ealing, a forum working directly to the LSP examines how best to improve effectiveness and efficiency of voluntary sector commissioning. The local authority and third sector networks work together to ensure that voluntary and community sector representatives on all strategic partnerships are elected and not selected by their peers, and properly supported to make meaningful contributions to strategic discussions and debates.

The voluntary and community sector has a unique perspective on the local area. Third Sector organisations play a key role in promoting good relationships between people and creating a shared sense of belonging to a place. The degree of social capital available is a resource that all public services should recognise as being invaluable and in some localities clearly as yet untapped. They also sometimes play the dual role of service provider and community advocate, and area-based networks of organisations can play a crucial role in representing the views of a wide range of smaller organisations in discussions about how best to provide efficient services that communities really need. The Southall Community Alliance, for example, has been supported and nurtured by the LSP over several years to now play a key role in delivering its integration and community cohesion strategy. Furthermore, Ealing's success as one of the 'Digital Challenge' finalists was due in part to innovative proposals for joint working with voluntary and community sector networks. The programme of work now underway aims to reduce the digital divide between communities, thereby enabling seldom heard and vulnerable groups to have their say in how services are run, and get easier accesses to services they need.

Whether the vision of the LSP is set out in a strategy for community cohesion, or a Sustainable Community Strategy, or a Local Area Agreement, it is essential that the voluntary and community sector are supported to contribute their perspective on what kind of services are really needed in the community, and how best to balance the interests of different communities. With the right support, voluntary and community organisations can be a conduit to residents, even those who are seldom heard.

Furthermore, if the voluntary and community sector are properly represented within local strategic partnerships, they can become champions for innovation. For example we are working with the sector to develop greater understanding amongst young people in our schools about different religions. This involves a young rabbi and a young imam jointly working with young people to break down preconceived negative perceptions of Judaism and Islam: a powerful response to the need to promote positive relationships and build a strong sense of collective citizenship.

Not only do the voluntary and community sector support delivery of the ambitions of Local Strategic Partnerships, they are a wellspring of creative solutions and dynamic forces for change and improvement. Many groups grow organically, originating from within the community itself; the proximity of such groups to the communities they serve can enable a strong focus on meeting needs and promoting outcomes.

A pressing and long-term challenge that is given insufficient focus is how we can all effectively promote integration and cohesion. In Ealing we are clear that voluntary organisations are central to our desire to improve the provision of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). For example, voluntary and community organisations help providers of ESOL from a variety of sectors to target their provision more effectively, and to refer groups who are most in need to appropriate provision tailored to their particular needs. Ealing is participating in a national pilot on how third sector

organisations can help all providers to define a “gold standard” for ESOL provision for newly-arrived communities. As part of this work, the pilot will help to identify training needs for voluntary and community ESOL providers that are best placed to meet the needs of the community, and support them to deliver high-quality, targeted provision.

Evidence of a vibrant and active voluntary and community sector always strengthens local civil society, and where this is absent it quickly shows. Local authorities and local strategic partnerships have a real responsibility to help create a thriving environment for voluntary and community sector groups. The role the sector currently plays in local strategic partnerships, particularly in promoting strong, engaged and cohesive communities, is likely to become increasingly important, and both sectors need to do more to support and nurture this growth.

## Closing thoughts



**Paul Coen**  
chief executive  
Local Government  
Association



**Stuart Etherington**  
chief executive  
National Council  
for Voluntary  
Organisations

NCVO and the LGA agree that in order to have strong local communities, both representative and participative democracy must be valued and enabled to thrive. Both our organisations have welcomed the recent loosening of central government control, and believe this shift in dynamic has significantly changed the relationship between central government, local government and the voluntary and community sector (VCS). We have been pleased to see the issues and concerns of so many of our members rising to the top of the agenda.

These essays all recognise the need for both representative and participative forms of democracy locally. The different ways in which people come together and are represented are vital to the improvement in quality of life for local people which is our shared agenda. Ways to achieve this have recently been the subject of much debate. Moving on to focus on how local government and the VCS can truly work together to more effectively empower individuals and communities in the future is the next important step.

### Community leadership

Local councillors have an essential role, providing representation, information and advocacy for their communities. Voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) can and do strengthen this role: bringing different perspectives and enabling a range of different voices to be heard; providing knowledge, experience and expertise regarding local issues; and offering vital additional links into and out of parts of the community.

As democratically elected bodies, local authorities have primary responsibility for providing leadership for their local area and for promoting local democracy. Councillors have a responsibility towards the whole local community and in their role must listen to the variety of local voices and negotiate and mediate between competing interests and claims. Local authorities are in a unique position, having to meet and, where necessary, reconcile the needs of an increasingly diverse citizenry. They have to make difficult decisions with scarce resources and sometimes convey unpopular messages. Decisions, taken for the greater public good, will inevitably result in both winners and losers. Elected politicians are the ones with the mandate to make these decisions, taking on board the relevant pros and cons and, importantly, communicating back to local communities the reasons for the decisions they take.

The quality of local decision-making is enhanced when the democratic mandate is supported and informed by a variety of approaches that help engage with a fuller range of local community voices and interests. No local authority can automatically assume that it has reached all parts of the community, that it has the support of all parts of the community, or that it alone is best able to identify issues or solutions. They can however make informed decisions about the wider community interest. Many VCOs have a legitimacy amongst local communities that differs from that of local councillors. To reap the benefits of these complementary aspects of local democracy, the councils and councillors of the future will need to be confident in a more complex participatory environment.

## **Community engagement and empowerment**

We have seen much progress in partnership working over the last decade. Developments in neighbourhood governance and neighbourhood management that bring ward councillors, public service providers and voluntary and community groups more closely together in neighbourhood partnerships, area committees and community forums, have been effective in many areas. Community development approaches, community and parish planning and innovative engagement techniques are also harnessing and building on the strengths of our two sectors. As a result we are starting to see higher levels of mutual respect and understanding between participants in these processes both within local authorities and VCOs. Never the less we both recognise that there is still a considerable way to go on this. We hope that the introduction of the new 'duty to involve' and some of the developments proposed in the new community empowerment white paper (not published at the time of writing) should prompt an acceleration of progress seen in recent years. The drive toward greater personalisation of services and devolved budgets is also set to change the dynamics of our sectors' local relationships as each plays varied advocacy, brokerage and delivery roles.

## Achieving the right balance

It is clear that both local authorities and the VCS have vital and complementary strengths and both are needed for a strong and healthy society. The questions are: how do we reach the right balance between representative and participative forms of democracy at a local level? And, how can the two be supported to work more effectively together?

Without a doubt local government and voluntary and community sector colleagues need to be at the forefront of this debate. Both NCVO and the LGA are keen to nurture and support more vibrant and constructive dialogue and local working relationships in future. We welcome the views of all our members and a wider range of commentators on the way forward. We would once again like to thank all our contributors for their contribution to this publication and the wider debate.

### LGA's local democracy campaign

The LGA wants to create a new politics where citizens positively engage with an exciting, relevant and vibrant local democracy. To make this happen we need government of all kinds to devolve power, funding and responsibility to the lowest possible level. We want to give people more of a say in the decisions that affect their lives so that public services better meet people's needs and expectations. To support this ambition the LGA is running a local democracy campaign designed to get more people enthused about democracy and increasing turnout at elections. More information about the campaign can be found on the local democracy page of the LGA website [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk) or by emailing [laura.caton@lga.gov.uk](mailto:laura.caton@lga.gov.uk).

### NCVO's work on citizen engagement

NCVO believes that citizen engagement and voluntary action are at the heart of civil society. Our work in this area aims to highlight the positive role of voluntary and community organisations in promoting collective action and bringing people together to strengthen communities. The relationship that voluntary and community organisations have with local government is a key element of our work in this area. There is clear mutual advantage in voluntary sector organisations and local authorities working together to address the needs of local communities, of both interest and geography. To find out more about our work in this area visit the dedicated pages of our website [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/citizenengagement](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/citizenengagement) or contact [policy@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:policy@ncvo-vol.org.uk)

If you would like to contribute your thoughts and ideas to our on-going debate about the respective roles of local government and voluntary and community organisations in local democracy, please contact us at [votesandvoices@ncvo-vol.org.uk](mailto:votesandvoices@ncvo-vol.org.uk).

# Biographies

## **Liz Richardson - senior researcher, Institute for Political and Economic Governance (IPEG), University of Manchester**

Liz is a senior researcher in the Institute for Political and Economic Governance (IPEG) at the University of Manchester. Prior to joining IPEG in August 2006, she was co-ordinator of LSE Housing, based in the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at the LSE. She has taught postgraduate courses in management studies, and housing and urban policy. Her research interests are: community engagement in decision-making and user involvement in public services; civic renewal and civil society; public service delivery; neighbourhood governance structures and the ownership, management and production of social housing. Her research has had a strong policy and applied focus.

## **Rob Whiteman, chief executive, London Borough of Barking & Dagenham**

Rob Whiteman joined Barking & Dagenham as chief executive in January 2005. Rob is passionate about public services being of the very highest quality and optimal cost; and at Barking & Dagenham has built effective partnerships in order to use the local area agreement and the LSP to build capacity in the community so that the residents benefit from regeneration opportunities such as London 2012 and Thames Gateway. Graduating with a BA (Hons) in economics and government from the University of Essex, Rob started his management career at WH Smith plc before moving into the public sector. A period at LB Camden's finance department was followed at LB Lewisham as deputy chief executive, where Rob promoted new models of engagement such as the borough's groundbreaking young mayor project as well as integrated public services through One Stop Shops. In his spare time Rob has carried out many public duties such as a JP, school governor and assisting local charities. He lives in the neighbouring borough of Newham with his partner and three teenage children.

## **Julia Unwin CBE, director, Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

Julia Unwin has been the director of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation since 1 January 2007. She was previously deputy chair of the Food Standards Agency and worked as an independent consultant operating within government and the voluntary and corporate sectors. In that role, she focused on the development of services and in particular the governance and funding of voluntary organisations. She also served as a member of the Housing Corporation board for 10 years and a charity commissioner from 1998 until 2003. Among other voluntary roles, she was chair of the trustees of the Refugee Council from 1995 until 1998. Julia has long experience as an advocate for the users of housing, health and social care services. She is a member of the Prime Minister's Council on Social Action, a member of the Ethics Committee at the University of York and a governor of the Pensions Policy Institute.

## **Stephen Thake, reader in urban policy, London Metropolitan University.**

Stephen Thake is a member of the Quirk Review group advising the secretary of state at the Department of Communities and Local Government on asset transfer. He leads the team

evaluating the Adventure Capital Fund, sponsored by the Cabinet Office, Department of Communities and Local Government and London Development Agency. His knowledge of leading edge practice in disadvantaged neighbourhoods across the UK as well as parts of North America and Northern Europe has enabled him to propose policy frameworks and programme initiatives designed to create a sustainable community sector. He has also advised on and undertaken policy analysis and programme evaluation for central government departments, regional development agencies, the Church of England, local authorities and community-focused organisations. Recent publications: *Delivering against expectations: interim report on the Adventure Capital Fund* and *Community Assets: the benefits and costs of community management and ownership*.

### **David Jenkins, chief executive, Dorset County Council**

David Jenkins is chief executive of Dorset County Council and secretary to the Dorset Strategic Partnership. He is chair of the management board of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership for the south-west of England. After starting his career in teaching, he qualified as a solicitor, and has held legal and managerial posts with Oxfordshire and Hampshire County Councils, and with the Local Government Ombudsman. He is a past chairman of the Association of County Chief Executives.

### **Colette McKeaveney, chief executive, Age Concern Luton**

Colette McKeaveney has been the director of Age Concern Luton for over 10 years. In that time Age Concern Luton has become the biggest voluntary sector organisation helping older people in the town. Age Concern Luton provides practical, home-based services such as a shopping and cleaning scheme, home repair project, befriending service, social and lunch clubs, advocacy and a floating support scheme.

### **Cllr Sue Anderson, cabinet third sector champion, Birmingham City Council**

Councillor Sue Anderson is Birmingham City Council's cabinet champion for the third sector and cabinet member for the Adults and Communities Directorate. She is also a member of the advisory group for the IDeA-run National Programme for Third Sector Commissioning. As third sector champion, Sue oversees the partnerships which the council develops with the third sector. Under her leadership, Birmingham has been given several awards including Beacon status 2007-8 for 'Increasing voluntary and community sector service delivery'. Sue has always been interested in and involved with the Third Sector in Birmingham. She is currently a trustee for the Pulse Trust and president of the Birmingham County Royal British Legion. In the past she ran a Third Sector organisation called Talking Health, which worked to reduce health inequalities, particularly amongst Asian communities in Birmingham. Councillor Anderson is also a member of the LGA health commission, chairs the Birmingham Health and Well-being Partnership, is a governor of several schools and of the Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust, and has been, a non-executive director of Heart of England NHS foundation trust.

### **Tony Hawkhead CBE, chief executive, Groundwork**

Tony Hawkhead is chief executive of Groundwork. Groundwork is a national environment partnership organisation, with a network of local trusts operating across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Tony is also a non-executive director of Youth Works, a joint venture between

Crime Concern, Groundwork and Marks & Spencer, and of Groundwork Wales. Youth Works aims to provide positive alternatives for young people in poor areas who are particularly at risk of turning to crime or anti-social behaviour. Tony is also a member of the LGA climate change commission, which reported at the end of 2007. Before joining Groundwork, Tony was chief executive of the East London Partnership, a private sector led and funded organisation working to help regenerate Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets.

### **Darra Singh OBE, chief executive, Ealing Council**

Darra Singh became the chief executive of Ealing Council, in July 2005, having been the chief executive of Luton Council for the previous four years. His career began as a housing caseworker on Tyneside and subsequent roles included working for housing charity SHAC and the London Housing Unit, before becoming the chief executive of two housing associations and a regional director for Best Value at the Audit Commission. In June 2006, Darra was appointed to chair the Commission on Integration and Cohesion by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and in September 2007, Darra was appointed as a non executive director on DCMS' board. More recently, Darra was elected as chair of the Society of Metropolitan Chief Executives.

### **Stuart Etherington, chief executive, National Council for Voluntary Organisations**

Stuart Etherington was appointed chief executive of NCVO in 1994. Previously he was chief executive of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, a major UK charity. Throughout his career, Stuart has been involved in the leadership of voluntary organisations and policies surrounding them. As such he has become a leading commentator, both through his writing and his media profile. Stuart was a trustee of Business in the Community, the chair of the BBC Appeals Advisory Committee and a member of the Community and Social Affairs Committee of Barclays Bank. He is also chair of Guidestar UK and a board member of Guidestar International. His recent government appointments include the Treasury's Standing Committee on Euro Preparations and the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. He has also served on the Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit's Advisory Board on the Voluntary Sector and HM Treasury's cross-cutting review on the role of the voluntary sector.

### **Paul Coen, chief executive, Local Government Association**

Paul joined the Local Government Association as chief executive in mid-June 2006. Prior to this, Paul worked in local government for 16 years. Initially, as director of commercial services for Hertfordshire County Council in the early 90s, he was responsible for developing a more commercial approach in the management of the council's services. On the basis of his early success, Paul subsequently became director of business services and later deputy chief executive of Hertfordshire County Council, before moving on to be chief executive of Surrey County Council in 1995. In Surrey, Paul led the council through a fundamental review of all its services, leading to a sustained improvement of the council's financial position and service performance. On 1 January 2005 Paul became chief executive at Essex County Council which was awarded four stars by the Audit Commission in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment at the end of that year. Born in the north-east of England, Paul graduated from Manchester University in 1977 with a BA in government and spent his early career in purchasing and contract management as a graduate trainee for British Coal.





The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) is the largest general membership body for charities and voluntary organisations in England. NCVO represents over 5,900 organisations involved in all areas of voluntary and social action at the national and local level.



The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 500 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and four partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.



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