Ward councillors and community leadership

A future perspective

Saffron James and Ed Cox

An exploration of how the role of ward councillors in England is likely to develop over the next five years.

This has become a pressing issue for many councillors and councils in the context of current legislative and policy changes affecting local government. The research explores how the role of ward councillors is changing today and how it is likely to develop. It captures the views of current councillors, council officers and community organisations about the skills and support ward councillors need to adapt to a new role, and the short- and long-term obstacles to change. The aim of the report is to make a practical contribution to the debate about the future role of ward councillors.

The report explores:

■ aspirations for the 'ideal' ward councillor role, including councillors' involvement in community leadership and strategic decision making

■ short-term issues that present challenges for the development of new councillor roles, including the skills and support councillors will need to make the transition to new ways of working

■ the way local authorities, political parties and communities currently work with elected members, and the obstacles to improving these working relationships, many of which are dependent on changes to the culture of local authorities and local political groups.

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About the authors

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Contents

Executive summary

This report investigates how the role of elected members in England is likely to change over the next five years as neighbourhood working becomes more widespread.

For many local authorities, the role of elected members has become a critical issue. A key question is how councillors should operate locally and strategically, in the context of growing interest in neighbourhoods, greater emphasis on local partnership working, the adoption of third-sector commissioning strategies and the pace of change in many communities.

The report presents a bottom-up perspective about the future role of ward councillors, drawing on the views of councillors, council officers and community organisations from four areas. It explores local aspirations for the role, views on the skills and attributes that future councillors are likely to need, the impact that changes are likely to have on members' relationships with communities and council officers, and the implications for councillor recruitment.

It examines a range of issues that will affect the future development of councillor roles including: immediate needs for greater member support, development opportunities and training, and access to local intelligence; and longer-term issues such as embedding ideas about new member roles in local authorities and political parties, creating in councils an organisational culture that promotes and supports close working relationships between officers and councillors, and tackling issues concerned with local party politics and recruitment of new candidates.

A series of policy and practice recommendations are set out to address these issues, including examples and case studies providing illustrations of how some local authorities are approaching member development.

The near future is likely to be a time of considerable change for local government, elected members and neighbourhoods. This report will be of interest to non-executive and executive councillors, council officers, policymakers in local and central government, and community organisations that are considering how to develop the role of elected members in response to proposals in the Local Government White Paper (DCLG, 2006) and the forthcoming bill.

1 Introduction

The future ward councillor role has been a subject of considerable debate in the past two years, as the neighbourhood empowerment agenda gathered momentum in the run-up to the publication of the Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (DCLG, 2006)*.*

For many English local authorities, the role of elected members has become a critical issue. A key question is how councillors should operate locally and strategically, in the context of growing interest in neighbourhoods, greater emphasis on local partnership working, the adoption of third-sector commissioning strategies and the pace of change in many communities.

The debate has been a welcome development for many elected members who see the opportunity to create a stronger role for ward councillors in local decision making as 'unfinished business' from the Local Government Act 2000.

Disaffection with the 'backbench' councillor role is widely acknowledged. Many non-executive members feel that the cabinet and scrutiny split, and the proliferation of multi-agency strategic partnerships operating locally, have distanced councillors from decision making and undermined their position as local leaders.

Several new ideas about the future role of ward councillors have emerged from debates. These include suggestions for a number of distinct new member roles, distinguished by specific functions, such as service commissioners, civic leaders or democratic champions (Cox, 2007). However, the 'frontline councillor' seems to have gained the most ground in policy debates and has become a shorthand for discussions about future member roles.

The frontline councillor role has been described as having the following functions: 'community advocates and community leaders' (ODPM, 2005), 'engaging with, and on behalf of, their communities, including community development, mediation, consultation and promoting cohesion' (Foot and Newman, 2006), 'having enhanced powers' (Cox, 2007) and 'offering vision and direction to local groups, and building support for that vision' (Foot and Newman, 2006).

In *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (DCLG, 2006), the Government makes a strong statement about the importance of ward councillors as local political and community leaders. It encourages local authorities to adopt a package of powers and responsibilities to empower members, including new opportunities to act on local

issues, influence mainstream service choices, be more effective advocates, and hold the council and other service providers to account more effectively.

A number of local authorities already have some of these tools and processes in place and have been working to strengthen the role of ward councillors for some time – for example, delegated ward or locality budgets are widespread, varying in size from £1,000 to £15,000. Other approaches, such as councillor-led community charters or area scrutiny functions, are less common but are being trialled in different ways in different places.

However, progress is incremental. Many local authorities are just beginning to review how they empower and support their councillors. Very few are in a position to consider adopting the majority of these new measures. A host of practical and political issues will need to be resolved before new councillor roles are widely introduced, and this could take several years.

It is in this context that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation invited the Young Foundation and LGiU (Local Government Information Unit) to investigate how the role of elected members in England is likely to change over the next five years as neighbourhood working becomes more widespread, and central government's proposals to strengthen community governance are put into practice by many local authorities.

In this report we explore the question from the perspective of councillors, officers and community organisations from four different areas: Newcastle, Salford, Suffolk and the London Borough of Newham.

This report presents a bottom-up perspective about the future role of ward councillors, exploring local aspirations for the role, views on the skills and attributes that future councillors are likely to need, the impact that changes are likely to have on members' relationships with communities and council officers, and the implications for councillor recruitment.

Our aim is to make a practical contribution to the ongoing debate about member roles by exploring the possibilities for change in the next five years and discussing the practical and structural obstacles that local authorities, central government and political parties must consider – in both the immediate future and the coming years – in order to make these aspirations a reality. However, this report does not include a detailed discussion about the possibilities for new neighbourhood governance arrangements.

Each of the local authorities involved in this project has taken a different approach to empowering and supporting their elected members. We draw on their experiences to identify practical lessons for other local authorities.

The report is divided into two substantive sections. The first section (Chapters 2 and 3) sets out some of the findings of the research about future perspectives on the councillor role. The second section (Chapters 4 and 5) addresses how that role might be established and the policy and practice implications that a new role might entail.

2 Fieldwork: where the research took place

The fieldwork for this study was carried out in four local authorities with different political and leadership structures, and varying approaches to neighbourhood working and community governance, as described in the following short summaries.[1]

Newcastle City Council

Newcastle has a population of 260,000. It has 26 wards with an average of 10,000 residents in each ward. The council has been controlled by the Liberal Democrats since May 2004, with 49 seats to Labour's 29 (no other parties won seats). Newcastle's wards can be subdivided into a further 133 identifiable neighbourhoods.

Newcastle has had forms of ward committee since the 1970s. It has also had area committee structures. Ward and area working was subject to a significant review in 2005 and it was agreed to discontinue area committee structures in favour of three larger area partnerships and to significantly enhance the role of ward committees and ward working.

Following review, provision was made for the following:

■ ward committees to be made up of the three elected councillors in each ward, but with increasing involvement of partners and communities in line with the city's 'Community Participation Plan'

■ a change in the style of bimonthly ward committee meetings to increase their accessibility and improve participation

■ the delegation of a wide range of functions and powers to ward committees in relation to a list of at least 12 different service areas including street cleansing, ground maintenance, street wardens, parks and open spaces, community buildings, recycling, etc.

■ the production and implementation of ward plans, which set out local priorities and standards

■ discrete budgets to provide for a ward co-ordinator and neighbourhood response manager in each ward, an amount for holding meetings and other forms of engagement, and a small grants pot for each ward.

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Newcastle has an Annual Training Plan for elected members, which is linked to corporate and national priorities. This involves three special training days each year. Each councillor also develops their own individual learning plan. Due to the recent emphasis on neighbourhood working, this has been a strong theme for recent training activities and was the focus of the most recent special training day.

Salford City Council

Salford is a city of approximately 220,000 people to the west of Manchester city centre. Its central area is characterised by high levels of deprivation but its outlying areas are more affluent. Labour controls 44 seats, with eight Conservatives and eight Liberal Democrats.

Salford began developing an approach to neighbourhood working in the 1990s through the formation of 'community committees'. In more recent years, there has been a strong push to reinvigorate this process in terms of not only local democratic and community engagement but also improving service delivery.

Its neighbourhood arrangements lie at the heart of its strategy for civic leadership and have become a key mechanism through which it seeks to involve and influence other strategic partners. The stated aims of its neighbourhood working are:

- engaging and empowering communities

- providing leadership in neighbourhoods

- working to improve council services and working with partners to improve theirs

- closing the inequalities gap.

Salford is divided into eight 'community committee' areas. These form the basis on which the governance and strategic planning of services takes place. They are not necessarily of equal size, although each contains two or three wards and is coterminous with ward boundaries. 'Governance' comes primarily though the community committee meetings, which are formally constituted 'council committees', although each has increasingly participative approaches to facilitating public involvement. There is disparity between areas as to how successful each is at involving the community in its meetings, but work

Continued overleaf

is currently going on to raise the game in those that fall beneath minimum standards. Community committees are normally chaired or vice-chaired by councillors and they do take formal decisions on locally devolved budgets and signing off the community action plan. Community committee meetings are backed up with political executive meetings of the six to nine councillors involved in any one area.

Suffolk County

The county of Suffolk has a population of just over 690,000. Like many shire counties, Suffolk is currently served by a two-tier local government structure, which comprises a single county council and seven district councils. Most communities also have an additional tier of town or parish government – there are 375 town and parish councils in Suffolk in total, and 55 parish meetings. Parish councils have small budgets to manage a variety of local affairs and can also be used as consultees by the other tiers of local government on such matters as planning applications.

The county council has had a Conservative administration since the local elections in 2005.The current political make-up of the county council comprises 46 Conservative, 21 Labour, seven Liberal Democrat and one independent member.

Suffolk has a diverse mix of different communities, including larger urban areas, market towns, large and small villages, and seaside towns. Despite an overall level of affluence in the county, there are a number of communities characterised by issues surrounding deprivation and isolation, of both a rural and urban nature.

Local arrangements have been developed in different ways across Suffolk. At county level, Suffolk established its current locality working arrangements in 2000 in a move to strengthen the role of councillors in their local communities. Key to these locality arrangements is the introduction of the locality budgets scheme for county councillors. Each county councillor is allocated a budget based on the population of their ward to help support local projects in their area. The aims of locality working in Suffolk are to enhance leadership at the local level and extend participation in local democracy beyond local elections.

At district level, local arrangements have developed in different ways according to local circumstances. Ipswich Borough Council and Waveney District Council

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have formed area or community forums. These are open-access meetings, which are attended by a range of service providers, councillors and local people, and are intended to tackle large issues. However, some councillors and community representatives caution that some forums perform better than others.

Suffolk's other district councils have not established community forums to date. Instead, some of them have an annual state-of-the-district debate, which residents can attend to raise issues. Other districts offer consultations on issues, such as by-laws, through the council's website.

In 2006, Waveney District Council introduced neighbourhood management in Lowestoft, the most deprived town in the district. Neighbourhood management is led by Lowestoft Together Board, which is made up of active members of the community, voluntary groups and various representatives of local public services.

London Borough of Newham

The London Borough of Newham has a population of approximately 250,000 people and lies in East London. It has the youngest and most ethnically diverse population in the UK. Economically, Newham is one of the most deprived boroughs in the country, with the ward of Canning Town having the highest levels of poverty in the borough.

Newham has a Labour majority, controlling 54 out of 60 seats. Three seats are held by the Christian People's Alliance and three by Respect.

Newham set up its current neighbourhood arrangements in 1999, when it divided the borough into ten community forums. Forums are led by local steering groups comprising residents, business people, representatives of local groups, councillors and a designated community lead member.

In 2002, Sir Robin Wales became the borough's first directly elected mayor. The community lead member role was created in 2002 by the mayor, to lead the community forums in the borough. These members have lead responsibility for advancing the interests of the forum.

In 2006, changes were made to Newham's cabinet system, with the introduction of separate operational and community executive arrangements. In addition, the ten community forums and correlating lead members were reduced to nine.

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Community forum meetings are held twice a month, with agendas addressing local concerns (such as crime, health, local facilities, etc.). Their main role is to organise events locally to engage a wider range of people. The nine forums have also developed neighbourhood action plans to tie services into their work.

In 2004, Newham introduced its Influential Councillor Programme, designed to support and empower non-executive members. The programme helps councillors to develop their role as community representatives and offers personalised support in the form of officer updates, electronic ward-based newsletters, casework and consultation sessions with officers to help lead on local solutions.

3   Ward councillors and community leadership: a future perspective

Many of the policy discussions about the future role for ward councillors have taken place at a national level over the past two years. However, the starting point for this research was local.

The Government is clear that ward councillors should be central to neighbourhood working and community empowerment. Local authorities will be encouraged to adopt many of the new powers and functions for councillors that are set out in the White Paper (DCLG, 2006). However, of this comprehensive list, only the new Community Call for Action will be enshrined in legislation. The remainder will be encouraged through guidance and best practice, leaving local authorities a significant degree of flexibility to determine how they empower ward councillors.

In this context, local circumstances and needs will be significant in shaping how member roles evolve over the next five years.

Aspirations for the future ward councillor role

A clear set of aspirations for the future ward councillor role emerged from this project, as did clear ideas about what the future ward councillor role should *not* involve.

Non-executive and executive members, council officers and individuals from a range of community organisations were asked to consider how the role of ward councillors should change over the next five years to respond to current and future challenges. Interviewees were asked to describe the 'ideal future role', including the main functions of the job and the powers and tools that should be available to councillors of the future.

There was broad agreement across these different groups about the core functions and responsibilities of a future role. Interviewees identified ten core dimensions of the role they felt to be essential if members were to operate more effectively as community leaders in the future, as described below.

Aspirations for the future ward councillor role

1 Councillors should be out on the streets much of the time. We are talking real engagement with *all* parts of the community, not just people who share their values.

2 A councillor should be a skilled advocate for the community with a high profile locally.

3 The first port of call rather than the last – for the community and officers.

4 They should have *real* powers of scrutiny and action, and *real* budgets to do things locally.

5 Councillors should have a much bigger role in the community – in decision making, scrutiny and getting local issues heard.

6 Members should be a real source of local intelligence – for communities *and* the council.

7 Councillors must be able to speak freely about issues affecting their communities.

8 Councillors should be supported by officers, not undermined by them.

9 A councillor should be someone who can educate communities about how to work with their elected member, the council and other bodies.

10 Councillors should be able to make better-informed decisions locally and strategically – that means having access to the right information and intelligence, and playing a bigger role in local partnerships.

It is worth noting that the language used to describe the ideal future role was remarkably consistent across the different stakeholder groups, regardless of the individual circumstances of interviewees (e.g. executive or non-executive councillors, majority or opposition party members, council officer or community organisation) and the local authority context (e.g. political make-up, leadership structure, location).

Shifting focus: Town Hall to community

This vision of the future ward councillor role reflects a significant shift in emphasis towards a job that is more proactive and community-focused than the current role.

Driving this is a desire for councillors to fulfil their role as the 'connector' between communities and the council, and to become more active and effective local leaders. Many members feel it is hard to achieve today because they are marginalised in decision making, lacking the information they need to shape and influence broader plans, and unable to act directly on many very local concerns.

Interviewees identified six areas of change.

1   *Community engagement:* members need to be more actively engaged with all parts of the community if they are to be effective leaders. They need to be empowered and supported to engage widely using a range of different tools.

2   *Advocacy:* members need to be able to speak freely and to openly challenge the executive.

3   *The political role:* members need to affirm the political role and not have to become 'service managers' to be effective.

4   *Local action:* there is a strong desire among members and community organisations for councillors to be able to tackle public realm problems through direct action, driven by frustration among residents that small but persistent issues often go unaddressed because they are insignificant to the council.

5   *Influence:* councillors must have real opportunities to influence decisions about services and spending, and at a point where local priorities and intelligence can be fully reflected in how services are planned and delivered.

6   *Local intelligence and information:* members need more and better quality intelligence about local issues to enable them to make informed decisions and to more effectively influence strategic decision making.

Here we explore these changes in more detail.

Community engagement

The majority of interviewees talked about the need for councillors in the future to be more 'actively engaged' with the communities they represent in order to be an effective champion or advocate for local needs.

'High profile', 'out on the streets' and 'on the doorstep' were phrases used repeatedly by members to stress the importance of local visibility for rebuilding public confidence in their role and for countering criticisms from community organisations that often councillors do not make an effort to engage with different parts of the community, especially 'hard to reach' groups.

Better engagement was particularly important for interviewees from community organisations. The majority felt that community engagement should be an essential function of the ward councillor role, which would help to reduce tensions between members and activists, as one interviewee describes:

> Changes like these could help reduce the strained relationships between communities and councillors – at the moment it feels like there is no communication and members are not accountable.

The majority of members and officers interviewed recognised that making community engagement a central function of the future role would be challenging for several reasons.

First, opinion is divided among today's councillors about the importance of community engagement. While the majority of members interviewed for this project felt that it should be an essential part of the future job, a significant number had deeply felt concerns.

These stemmed primarily from their concerns about their capacity to meet community expectations about engagement. One councillor commented:

> … you have to be careful not to promise too much as you can never do enough and you end up burning out.

These sceptics were also concerned that the public's expectations concerning their ability to get involved in local decision making are growing in an unsustainable way. For some, dealing with council business is a higher priority than spending time in the community and ward surgeries are likely to be the extent of engagement activity for many.

A few councillors also argued that their accountability lies primarily 'through the ballot box' and that is considered a sufficient form of community engagement. One councillor commented:

> I don't see people queuing up to be engaged, a lot of this is just a waste of our time and a waste of theirs. We'd be better off sorting out problems rather than holding talking shops.

Polling data reinforces this picture. A survey by Ipsos-Mori (2002) shows that 67 per cent of people have never met their local councillor (82 per cent in London) and 64 per cent cannot name one.

Members in favour of active community work felt this approach was 'old school', contributing to negative stereotypes about councillors as distant and unwilling to engage with constituents except at election time. However, these members also recognised that such attitudes are widespread and are reinforced by current council structures and political parties, which prioritise council business over community work:

> We need to change our mindset so that it isn't the case that, if you're not on every committee, everything you do is a waste of time.
> (Councillor)

> As officers, we have been very good at keeping councillors in the Town Hall, when really they should be in the community.
> (Officer)

Second, there is a recognition that councillors will need new skills and techniques to engage different communities of interest and place that go beyond traditional ward surgeries and formal meetings. Action planning, negotiating community agreements, household surveys, community websites and councillor blogs were among the suggestions put forward – all of which would require new, and more intensive, types of support from local authorities.

Members who are currently representing diverse communities felt that future councillors would need specific skills to help them understand and identify with a range of cultural values, including different conceptions of democracy and local political engagement.

Advocacy

Interviewees felt strongly that councillors should be able to speak more openly and to challenge the executive where necessary.

Some members felt that White Paper proposals to loosen the restrictions on members speaking out on local issues represented the 'biggest single improvement' to their current role, enabling them to be much more effective advocates, which in turn would reduce tensions between members, residents and community groups.

The pace of change in many communities was identified as an issue for councillors, in particular for members operating in areas with highly diverse or very mobile populations. Members felt that representing such a diverse range of interests would be increasingly challenging in the future.

Some members described their current experience of working with culturally diverse communities that have their own conceptions of local politics and community engagement. In these situations, councillors felt they needed extra support to understand and represent local interests. Other members identified the complexity and challenges of advocating for marginalised groups at a very local level:

> If we empower neighbourhoods and communities, councillors will need to be very skilled to represent marginalised groups in the face of vocal and organised community activists. If we are talking about homeless people, traveller families, drug users and other vulnerable groups, how will a councillor stand up to their neighbours and persuade them to support these people?

Interviewees identified that future councillors will need to be highly skilled advocates to arbitrate between different local groups and the council, and to balance local needs against the interests of the wider community. They also recognised that more needs to be done to recruit elected members from these different social and ethnic groups.

The political role

The research has shown wide variation in opinion about the importance of the future political role between different places and between different types of stakeholder. One councillor stated that the political role was the main reason that he became a councillor and that 'all else is just for show'. A group of officers argued that the pre-eminence of the political role was a virtue of the local democratic system: 'the political role is the most important because ultimately councillors are accountable to voters'. Other officers described this as a 'necessary evil'.

The majority of voluntary and community representatives accepted the political role and one group argued that this was councillors' greatest strength. There were some that took a more critical stance and highlighted the apparent tensions between loyalty to the political party and loyalty to the local community.

There was also a small group who made a strong case that the political role should not be an important factor in the way in which councillors worked and that they should be more 'neutral', focusing simply on the well-being of their ward. This was corroborated by the fact that half of the groups asked to draft job/role descriptions for future councillors made no reference to the political role.

A key reason for contrasting opinions about the political role of councillors lies in growing expectations about the extent to which a councillor will be expected to be a 'professional' and a 'manager' in the future.

Officers and some community representatives had strong views about the councillor role in relation to the provision of services and many held the view that the political role is unhelpful in achieving efficient service delivery, as it somehow diminishes a more rational or professional approach. This is often borne out of the officers' perceptions of local councillors 'meddling [in local situations] to suit their own "political ends"'.

These views can be tied to the idea that, in future, councillors should play some form of managerial role, particularly in relation to locally based officers and to locally based spending. One officer expressed the view that 'if they [councillors] want to control budgets then they need to get proper management qualifications'.

While a number of councillors were enthusiastic for a more managerial approach to the role, this was primarily as a response to the heavy demands on their time and the desire for more adequate remuneration. Most councillors were keen to preserve an important distinction between the political role and that of a manager or professional. One councillor articulated that there should be greater understanding of the importance of the local manifesto, arguing that people need to vote on what the party stands for, not on the ability of officers to implement their policies.

These views are, to a large degree, influenced by the operation of local political parties and the political balance between parties in each area. This is an issue that is covered in greater depth in the section on 'Links to strategic service planning and wider structures' later in this chapter.

Local action

Empowering members to act on local public realm issues was identified by community organisations, councillors and officers as the most effective way to restore public confidence in councillors and local politics.

The majority of members and community organisations identified delegated (or devolved) budgets as an important tool for empowering councillors to tackle local issues. Those members who control delegated budgets felt that they provide a tangible way to engage local people, although they recognised that more could be done to involve people in deciding how the budgets are spent.

Non-executive members without control over delegated budgets felt strongly that, of all the White Paper proposals, delegated budgets would have the greatest impact on their ability to sort out local problems and to improve dialogue and relationships with residents and community organisations.

However, delegated budgets were felt to be problematic by some officers and non-executive members working in urban areas. These interviewees expressed concerns that delegated locality budgets would encourage members to focus on tackling short-term public realm issues rather than looking at the big picture, which was about working to shape mainstream services to support local needs and priorities.

Officers were also concerned that, in some local authorities, delegated budgets were likely to be very small, possibly £1,000 or £2,000, which could encourage competitive bidding for resources between community organisations in deprived neighbourhoods. In this context, councillors would have to exercise caution in deciding how to allocate resources, encouraging public decision making to avoid budgets being captured by dominant local groups.

Officers recognised that geographical context had an impact and delegated budgets were likely to be 'safer' in rural communities where community boundaries could be identified more easily.

Some officers felt that ward councillors should be empowered to act as 'mini-MPs' or 'mini-mayors' for the public realm, with all powers related to the local environment vested in them, including responsibility for managing services and community assets:

> I am interested in moving away from a narrow definition of a councillor as
> a last resort for problem solving, towards the advent of a public service
> manager in a particular place, more like a mini-MP, holding various
> service providers to account.
> (Officer)

> Can we invest all power in a particular place in a councillor, so he or she
> is more like a mini-mayor for the public realm?
> (Officer)

However, members felt this suggestion was overstretching the role and would bring councillors into conflict with council officers over service management responsibilities, and undermine their political role by minimising their ability to scrutinise services and be objective about how assets should be used.

Influence

Interviewees, and in particular non-executive members, felt it was important that a new role for members should give councillors much greater influence over decisions about how mainstream services were delivered to their communities.

Two key areas of change were identified: first, supporting councillors to make much greater use of local intelligence in shaping and influencing decision making; and, second, enabling members to have much earlier input in decision-making processes.

As one executive member describes, this would shift the nature of the ward councillor role from a reactive to a proactive position:

> Councillors must be able to influence *before* things are done, not after
> they happen. With scrutiny as the main function of the job, it feels like our
> input is always after the event.

There was strong support for the introduction of councillor-led community or neighbourhood scrutiny from all stakeholders. This was felt to be a highly effective way to empower members to use local intelligence to shape public services.

The issue stimulated significant debate among members and is explored in more detail in the following section.

Local intelligence and information

Members feel strongly that, to work more effectively in the future, they need to have access to more and better quality intelligence about the community.

Specific information needs seemed to vary from place to place, but councillors commonly feel they lack information about:

- their wards

- executive decisions

- other statutory partners.

Many councillors and locally based officers expressed the need for ward-level information. It was felt that more performance data and satisfaction survey information should be disaggregated to ward level and that this should be provided directly to councillors on a regular basis. Particular concerns were expressed about the performance information available from statutory partners such as the police and primary care trusts to enable councillors to exercise a wider community leadership role.

Links to strategic service planning and wider structures

Councillors will have a growing role to play in relation to the provision of public services. This was widely acknowledged by all stakeholders and especially by officers who were the stakeholder group that most clearly identified the councillor role in terms of service provision.

However, there were significant concerns about how this role is being exercised now and how it might be exercised in the future. These concerns hinge on two key factors:

1   the extent to which councillors can and should be drawn into service management and delivery

2   the ability that non-executive councillors have to shape and influence strategic decision making.

But in reality a series of challenges that could prevent councillors fulfilling the 'ideal' role was presented through the research. Each challenge is described below.

Micromanagement

When councillors were asked to describe which aspects of their role they would feel most comfortable undertaking, there was considerable consensus that it was in service 'troubleshooting'. A number of councillors were keen to tell stories about how they had got involved in very local problem solving, from ensuring an immediate response to local fly-tipping to helping mediate in marital disputes. It is clear that many councillors are initially attracted to becoming councillors as a result of their desire to sort out such problems and many see their ward surgeries as a context for addressing local service issues.

It was generally recognised, though, that this could be very time-consuming and often left councillors with little time for other activities. It also means that councillors will become caught up in the micromanagement of services rather than addressing the strategic priorities of their ward or local authority area. Some councillors felt that there could be a more cynical plot to 'keep councillors busy with ward issues' to prevent them from getting too involved in more strategic affairs.

There were very mixed views on neighbourhood charters, with one group of councillors unanimously opposed to the idea – 'this could cause a postcode lottery', 'if you can't deliver you've got problems' – but with the majority of people across the different workshops strongly supporting the concept.

There was mixed opinion about the potential effectiveness of Community Call for Action. While it was generally welcomed, most councillors were worried about its potential bureaucracy and far more enthusiastic about more proactive measures such as neighbourhood inquiries.

Influencing council executive

Many stakeholders identified a growing gap between the powers of executive members and those exercised by non-executive councillors. This issue was clearly affected by the operations of the party group but also the amount of contact non-executive councillors have with executive members.

Ward councillors and community leadership

Those councillors whose party was not in control were the most marginalised from executive decision making but even those in parties that form the executive had differing perceptions of how much influence they could bring to bear. The most critical factor in terms of influencing the executive would appear to be having a personal relationship with executive members. Those councillors in wards that have executive members expressed the greatest satisfaction in terms of their ability to exercise influence.

Overview and scrutiny was identified as an important means of exercising influence, although it is not used effectively at the moment. In some case studies, the fact that it was not the source of more discussion suggests that it will not be considered as being particularly significant in relation to exercising strategic influence without significant improvement. This assessment is also endorsed by the fact that those who did mention it were clear that there was a need for 'cultural change' if it was to become more effective.

Control over other service providers

Another significant challenge expressed by all stakeholder groups was the sense that 'more and more services are out of council control'. Specific examples mentioned included housing and health services. A number of councillors complained that voluntary and community sector representatives found it easier to get involved in local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and negotiations about local area agreements than elected councillors did, and that it was particularly difficult to get relevant information from other statutory agencies. IDeA's 2006 Councillor Census (LGAR, *et al.*, 2007) reinforces this picture, showing that only 256 councillors chair or vice-chair LSPs (191 men and 65 women councillors).

A few councillors gave examples of where they had been particularly successful in influencing other agencies. In one area it was felt that the involvement of the police in neighbourhood governance structures had been very successful. One councillor gave an example of how she was playing a key strategic role on the board of an arm's-length management organisation for a key area of social housing. It is clear that some of the most enterprising councillors will find ways to exercise strategic influence beyond council services, despite the challenges that face them, but that, in general, it can be difficult for councillors to engage in local strategic partnerships, primary care trusts, housing association boards, etc.

Complex geographies and economies of scale

Linked to the above, a number of people argued that many council services were also increasingly hard to influence because of the complexity and scale over which they are often planned and delivered. While highways was used as an example of a service that lent itself to local planning and discretion, adult social care was contrasted by one councillor as an area that would involve far greater complexities than could be addressed by simple devolution. Refuse collection was also given as an example of a service that would benefit from a large-scale contract across a local authority area to enable economies of scale, which then might preclude significant local influence by ward councillors.

Time, experience and information

Another significant challenge preventing councillors from having effective strategic influence is finding the time necessary. As outlined above, a number of councillors felt that they were kept so busy with local issues they did not have time to read and reflect on information or participate effectively in wider decision-making processes.

A number of stakeholders also highlighted the perception that those councillors with greater length of experience were more effective in influencing strategic issues. This was reflected in the comments of one relatively new councillor who said: 'the longer you've been around, the better known you are and you can get things done more easily'. Other councillors and officers identified the importance of building personal relationships and trust with one another, a process that inevitably takes some time. A community representative observed:

> … very often it's down to how well you know officers … their *[officer]* relationships with councillors are really important.

Councillors also identified the need for information to 'trickle down from on high' in order for councillors to have any effective influence. One councillor commented, in relation to a local strategic partnership: 'we have to go to the community reps to get the partnership reports'. Another stated:

> … it depends on the amount of information you can get – exec. members get the most done because they have the most information.

Defining the future ward councillor role

Based on these discussions, six distinct dimensions of a future ward councillor role can be identified, which could form the basis of a role definition or job description.

Interviewees identified a range of skills and attributes that future councillors will need to carry out this role, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 The future ward councillor role

Role	Skills
Political representative	Ability to connect with all parts of the community and represent everyone fairly.
	Ability to balance local concerns with the political demands of the group manifesto.
Community advocate	Be a skilled advocate for everyone – including people from different backgrounds, cultures and values.
	Have the confidence to speak freely and challenge the executive.
Community leader	Exercise community development skills – support local projects and initiatives, and educate people about local participation.
	Be a good communicator – explain simply what political decisions and structures mean to constituents and community organisations.
	Be sensitive to difference and issues of diversity and equality.
	Have knowledge and skill to engage people in a variety of ways (not just meetings).
	Be a conflict broker.
Service transformer	Understand the complex business of local government and services provided by both the council and others.
	Have the confidence and ability to challenge the executive and hold service providers to account.
	To be able to work in partnership with a range of agencies and interests.
	Ability to understand local problems and use this knowledge locally and strategically in local action planning.
	Setting and monitoring service standards.
Place shaper	Being a local figurehead/role model that people feel they can turn to.
	Be able to shape the very local environment – ability to identify priorities, work with officers and service providers to address public realm problems, manage delegated locality budgets.
Knowledge champion	Be the primary source of local intelligence flowing between the community and the council. Have the skills and ability to collect and analyse local information and use it to benefit the community.

For many councillors the role described above represents a significant shift in emphasis from the town hall to the community.

The majority of members and officers interviewed for this project agree on the direction for the future role. The community organisations interviewed were supportive of changes to empower members, in particular those working in deprived and disadvantaged communities. Interviewees from these organisations felt that the changes had the potential to bring these communities 'into the mainstream of decision making' by giving deprived communities a stronger voice through enhanced advocacy functions and the use of new tools such as neighbourhood charters or the Community Call for Action.

However, these interviewees also felt that some councillors would need more direct experience of working with marginalised groups and deprived communities if they were to represent them effectively. Community organisations working in predominantly affluent rural areas with pockets of deprivation and disadvantage felt the lack of diversity in the current councillor population could work against very marginalised groups. These interviewees felt that some councillors struggled to understand the unique challenges facing disadvantaged groups in affluent rural communities because of lack of direct exposure to their problems.

Officers and community organisations identified the importance of recruiting councillors from deprived and disadvantaged communities in the future:

> It is really crucial that people from all backgrounds are encouraged to stand as councillors in future. We need people who understand the entrenched issues that deprived communities face and understand how to engage people and can mobilise local involvement. That means recruiting more councillors. If not, there is a risk that these communities will be further marginalised.

Some interviewees felt that the White Paper proposals to empower communities and strengthen their voice would provide opportunities for vocal and well-organised local groups but could leave marginalised or vulnerable individuals isolated, as one interviewee identified:

> There is a feeling of real danger that excluded and marginalised people could be further disadvantaged by this agenda, whether they are white working class, minority ethnic communities or vulnerable groups like homeless or traveller families. We could see well-organised local groups monopolising community resources at the expense of disadvantaged

> individuals. Much effort will be needed to engage these people because they will be less involved in the system and less able to participate.

Members and officers recognised that this role will demand a new attitude and new skills that many councillors do not possess, and may not be keen to acquire, in particular in contested areas such as community engagement.

A significant number of interviewees felt that a 'new breed of councillor' would be needed in the future – candidates who can operate locally and strategically, understand community dynamics, be comfortable with the complexity of local government, be committed to local politics, yet at the same time understand that local issues come first.

'Being frontline' is 'being a councillor'

'Being frontline' is the defining feature of the ward councillor role, according to the majority of members and officers interviewed for this project, and this applies whether members are backbenchers or members of the executive:

> If you are an executive member you are still elected to represent people in your community. You still have a frontline role.
> (Executive member)

> I can't understand why someone would be a councillor if they were not frontline.
> (Officer)

However, opinion is mixed about the term 'frontline councillor'. Many officers and members acknowledged it has more active and positive connotations than the description 'backbencher', but others felt it was inappropriate, conjuring negative images of a battleground that were out of context for rural communities.

While officers and executive members use the term freely in the context of abstract discussions about new councillor roles, they acknowledged it is unlikely to be adopted widely and preferred terms like community, local or ward councillor.

In itself, this may seem to be an insignificant issue of semantics. However, it points towards a wider gap between the rhetoric and reality of developing new empowered roles for ward councillors, which was identified by many of the interviewees.

In the next chapter, we explore this tension in more detail and look at the opportunities and obstacles to establishing, developing and supporting the future ward councillor role.

4 Establishing a new role for ward councillors

Adopting the empowered councillor role set out in the previous chapter will require major changes to the way local authorities, political parties, communities and members themselves imagine the councillor role.

The significance of such a change cannot be underestimated, as one community representative describes:

> These ideas are what communities have wanted for years but they are so radical in light of how local government currently operates. Councils are bound up by regulation and a culture that stops them from reaching out to people.

Many of these changes will be dependent on a cultural shift within local authorities and political parties towards valuing frontline functions of the role (such as engagement and advocacy), and supporting members to work in this capacity. In many cases, this means adapting the way councillors are supported, how they are viewed by and work with officers, their relationship to local political groups and their access to skills training.

Some local authorities, notably Newham in this study, have taken significant steps to empower their elected members. Newham's experience provides useful lessons for other local authorities, in particular identifying that even relatively small changes require a large commitment to developing new ways of working, including: new types of training and member support, and time for members, officers and communities to adapt to new roles and change the way they work together. Strong political support is essential to set the direction for a new way of working with members.

These are long-term challenges. Achieving widespread change in attitudes and working practices could take years if not decades and must involve commitment from political parties, council and communities. Interviewees were keen that local and central government recognise the need for realism around timescales for developing and introducing new roles.

However, there are also a host of short-term issues to be addressed, in particular concerning the skills, capacity and support that today's councillors need in order to make the transition from current to future roles.

In this chapter of the report we explore these issues around establishing and communicating a new role for members. We discuss immediate needs including the skills, capacity and information councillors will need to work differently; how to embed ideas about change and develop new working practices within local authorities; and future obstacles to developing a new role, including the role of political parties and practical issues concerning councillor recruitment.

Immediate needs: information, skills and support

One of the most common themes identified by all stakeholders is the immediate need for better councillor support to help members adapt to new demands. This was expressed by different stakeholders in different ways but immediate needs can be sub-divided into three broad areas:

1   information

2   skills, learning and training

3   officer support.

Information

Councillors differed in their perceptions of information needs. A small number felt that they did not receive enough information. Most, though, felt that they received too much and that a great deal of what they received did not address their specific needs. One councillor commented: 'A lot is chucked at us without thinking whether it's relevant and it's easy to get information overload'. Others commented that they regularly delete large numbers of list e-mails without even opening them, as they simply cannot cope with the quantity. Officers were sensitive to this problem, with a number commenting that they struggle to know how much information to share with councillors without 'bombarding them', but it would appear that most err on the side of providing information and allowing councillors the discretion to read it or not.

Councillors also complained that, when they request information, they 'have to really dig' and that it can often take too long to arrive. One commented:

> … there isn't the time to keep chasing officers and by the time it comes you've forgotten why you needed it.

Perceptions varied about access to information about council executive decisions. It would appear that councillors with good connections to executive members (sometimes as their ward colleagues) feel more connection to executive decision making but the majority feel they lack information about key decisions. Often this depends on the way in which the political group operates and whether a local member's party is in control or opposition.

Skills, learning and training

Another area of immediate need was expressed in terms of 'skills'. A number of officers and community representatives questioned whether councillors had the necessary skills to carry out their current roles, while councillors tended to highlight concerns about how they will be equipped to undertake future roles.

Much of this discussion focused on the need for councillor training. While all of the case study local authorities run councillor induction and training programmes, there were some common complaints about existing provision. There are clear cultural differences between case studies as to their approach to learning and development, with members varying greatly in their perceptions of their need for ongoing training and development.

The most fundamental problem identified was that councillors are so busy trying to fit in their councillor role with wider commitments they do not have sufficient time for training, not least when the quality of training is so variable.

There was a fairly consistent message that training needed to be tailored more to address individual needs and that the better programmes were those that enabled councillors to choose from a 'menu' of opportunities. Many councillors cited the inflexibility of training as a key reason for its low take-up. Officers were concerned, though, that allowing councillors to pick and choose meant that there was insufficient incentive for them to go on training at all. A number of participants felt that there needed to be some form of compulsion to undertake training, particularly on issues of equality and diversity, and a more structured approach similar to that required of council officers.

Some members felt that induction programmes were 'too much too soon' and, although intensive sessions with senior officers and others had been helpful, they would be more valuable after a longer time in the role. A number of councillors felt that it was better initially to 'learn on the job'. Others felt that 'pre-election training' would be helpful in encouraging new councillors.

Mentoring was identified as a helpful form of induction and training, although one person suggested that, in many cases, it encouraged new councillors to adopt some of the 'bad habits' of 'old councillors'.

A number of areas of training were suggested in the course of the research. These included:

- equality and diversity issues

- engaging with more strategic issues

- improving community engagement practice.

Officer support

The need for officer support was also frequently identified as an immediate need. Case study areas have very different arrangements, ranging from areas where councillors work closely on a daily basis with a range of locally based officers to areas where there is no direct officer support at all. All stakeholders identified the importance of officer support and there was a range of views as to exactly what that support should entail.

Many councillors saw the importance of officer support in terms of enabling a rapid response to community concerns and service improvement. Some expressed the value they placed on being able to raise a local concern with an officer and knowing that it would then be addressed as a matter of urgency, so avoiding the need for councillors to become involved in the micromanagement of services. Others expressed their dissatisfaction when this process was not in place.

Another common request was for better administrative support: handling diaries and appointments, ensuring access to paperwork for relevant meetings and overseeing casework were all identified as issues that councillors struggle to manage in the midst of wider personal and professional commitments.

Particular concerns were expressed about the need for officer support with community engagement and also with ICT. Interviews made clear that a significant number of councillors felt uncomfortable with the use of e-mail and the internet, and some were using inadequate equipment.

There was a specific concern expressed that officer support was available only during office hours and yet very often councillor activities took place in the evening and at weekends. For this reason it was suggested that there would need to be better 'out-of-hours' support to councillors.

Some local authorities, notably Newham in this study, have taken significant steps to empower their elected members by changing the way officers and councillors work together, developing personalised training and support, providing members with special responsibility allowances and experimenting with localised scrutiny (see case study below).

London Borough of Newham: Influential Councillor Programme

The Influential Councillor Programme was set up in 2004 to help non-executive councillors develop their role as community representatives and leaders. The scheme builds on the community forum lead member role, introduced in 2002, which gave members lead responsibility for advancing the interests of the community in the ten, now nine, community forums that divide the borough.

The Influential Councillor Programme is designed to involve non-executive councillors in matters that affect their ward. Special responsibility allowances have been given to community lead councillors. Support and development opportunities are provided to all councillors in the form of officer updates, ward-based bulletins, casework and consultations sessions, and support for developing community links. Different aspects to the programme include the following.

■ *Local decisions:* local councillors must be consulted on any decision that affects a locality, whether it has been made by the mayor or an officer. They should be consulted on the nature of the decision and any consultation arrangements with the public. Their views are included in any reports to the mayor.

■ *Area consultation meetings:* Influential Councillor consultation meetings are held every four months, with senior officers and staff from external agencies. The consultation meetings provide a forum to share local intelligence and update on current issues, to consult on local decisions and for members in a particular forum area to discuss local issues and how they will work together to resolve these.

- *Community activities:* councillors are encouraged to produce action plans with support from member services. Within this, individual support needs may be identified, such as officer support for walkabouts or site visits, or visits to local groups.

- *Training:* the Influential Councillor Programme offers members a wide range of training opportunities to improve their skills. There is a comprehensive annual training programme, including knowledge- and skills-based courses for all councillors. The training covers a wide variety of skills such as persuading and influencing, problem solving and corporate risk management. Issue-based training has included Freedom of Information legislation and improvements to the environment among others.

- *Personal development:* members are encouraged to identify their skills and areas where they feel they need further training in order to work more effectively in their communities or to keep up to date with issues.

- *Personal support:* member services staff supported members in their local role, from arranging meetings with local groups, to arranging site visits and helping to resolve local issues.

- *Electronic ward-based bulletins:* ward-based bulletins on the council's intranet provide members with information about what is going on in their ward or community forum area. This means that members are better informed to answer constituents' questions, and can present relevant issues to community forums and give updates.

- *Casework/surgeries:* protocols exist to enable member services to manage casework more effectively. These cover how work should be tracked, the timescales for responses, how quality should be monitored and details of a complaints procedure. An electronic tracking device has been launched to monitor casework.

Audits are carried out to monitor the implementation of the scheme.

Policy and practice implications – immediate needs: information, skills and support

Councils need to invest in more effective ward-based information systems, following good-practice models such as Newcastle, Manchester and Southampton, where authority-wide performance data can be disaggregated

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down to a ward/neighbourhood level and disseminated to councillors in a relevant and timely manner.

Councils need to develop a more strategic approach to councillor learning and development. The approach needs to consider:

- a staged/phased approach more aligned to a councillor 'life-cycle'

- greater focus on 'action-reflection' and 'learning-by-doing' methods

- more modular provision, allowing for a more tailored approach depending on councillor interests and responsibilities, and incorporating opportunities for mentoring and other forms of learning

- some form of raised 'expectation' for continuing professional development driven by political groups but with cross-party support

- schemes of formal accreditation that demonstrate incremental improvement and would be recognised by employers and others.

Councils need to identify a named officer to offer direct support to each ward councillor. There needs to be local flexibility about the precise nature of this role and relationship, but the case studies demonstrate that having a 'first port of call' is essential for the future role.

Embedding ideas about change: developing new relationships and working practices

As previously identified, empowering members is likely to impact most greatly on the way officers and councillors work together, and will demand new skills from elected members. In this section we discuss the likely impact of these changes and ideas for embedding ideas about the future councillor role.

The majority of officers felt empowering councillors would require them to change the way they worked with members, moving from the current 'fire-fighting' scenario, where the emphasis is on responding to councillors complaints, to working in partnership with councillors.

Officers felt the shift would enable both parties to take a long-term view about what communities needed, working together to pre-empt problems rather than respond to them. In the short term, this would be likely to increase officers' workload, but, in the medium to long term, this would result in visible or measurable improvements to services.

Both officers and members recognised the benefits of such a change, but also acknowledged that a fundamental change in mindset is needed. Officers recognised there is currently little incentive for them to work proactively with councillors. Members and officers recognised that the information and input councillors give is often undervalued by officers. In many cases this is because officers perceive members to be ill-informed or lacking understanding about service delivery:

> Many officers think councillors are incompetent. We need to try and change our mindset and try to find the value in what councillors say, rather than see them as complainers.
> (Officer)

> Officers need to change the way we see councillors, not as complainers but as service transformers whose insight and experience can shape and improve the services we are responsible for delivering. If we can get to this point, we can start pre-empting problems.
> (Officer)

Officers acknowledged that working closely with members would 'open their eyes to the roles councillors play', improving their understanding of local issues and potentially enabling them to make much better use of local intelligence.

Newham's Manor Park pilot project provides a good example of members and officers working closely together to tackle local needs and problems (see case study below).

London Borough of Newham: the Manor Park pilot project

In 2006 the London Borough of Newham rolled out a three-month pilot scheme in one of its nine community forum areas to emphasise and develop the role of the forum's lead councillor.

Manor Park is a community forum area in the north east of Newham and covers three wards: East Ham North, Manor Park and Little Ilford wards. The area has an ethnically diverse, mobile population and is characterised by high levels of deprivation. Manor Park was chosen as a pilot because it is an area with a wide range of community issues.

This pilot aims to establish a new way of working to improve the well-being of the community by shaping mainstream services to be more responsive to local

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priorities. This approach has been developed to add value to the Influential Councillor Programme.

It has recently been agreed that this approach will be rolled out to the other community forums on a phased basis in the second half of the year 2007.

How it works

The pilot scheme concentrated on the following areas.

- *Service review:* the community lead councillor in Manor Park identified, in consultation with other ward councillors, residents and community organisations, a number of needs and priorities that needed to be tackled to improve the community. This consultation took place in the community forum meetings and by visits to local organisations and community groups.

- *Audits:* street audits were introduced around Manor Park so that problems such as lamp post repairs, graffiti hotspots and damaged pavements could be resolved quickly. Each member of the community forum and local councillors in Manor Park take a street or two and report back the findings by completing a checklist form. Alongside street audits, initiatives to promote a greener environment have been introduced. These include helping schools to keep areas litter free and introducing 'walking to school' projects so that more children become active while also helping to preserve the environment.

- *Food on the go:* councillors and officers visited most of the takeaway shops in Manor Park and asked each to commit to reduce the amount of waste that is generated by their products by providing litter bins and cutting back on the use of packaging, including avoiding offering bags for customers. Thirteen takeaway shops signed up.

- *Recycling:* councillors and officers have visited a number of community groups to promote recycling. Leaflets and posters, which community forum members will take responsibility for distributing, were produced to provide simple information on what and how residents can recycle locally, including a map of local recycling and waste points. At the request of the community translations were also provided.

Outcomes

- Councillors are involved in the community at ward level in a more focused way and were supported in that role. Councillors have a more relaxed and effective working relationship with council officers and with the community.

- Councillors were seen as local champions who were making a difference locally and their visibility improved.

- The pilot has encouraged local debate around key issues and prompted action from councillors and council officers.

However, interviewees recognised that this is a different way of working for councillors, which will demand new levels of professionalism:

> This role changes the way councillors have traditionally worked. It professionalises the role much more.
> (Executive member)

This raised concerns about the potential for the ward councillor role to be depoliticised in the future, in favour of more managerial functions like service, budget and asset management. Both members and officers were keen to emphasise that there were risks in following this path – in particular, alienating members who lack professional skills, yet are active advocates and closely networked in the community.

> You can't take the politics out of the ward councillor's role. Somehow that feels like sanitising it and turning councillors into another level of officers. What is the point of that?
> (Executive member)

However, the need to improve councillor performance and invest in support so members can fulfil the potential for their current and future role is acknowledged.

Members and officers agreed that standards vary widely from place to place, according to the interests, political motivations, skills, personal circumstances and commitment of individual councillors.

In future, expectations of high performance from councillors are likely to increase as the role becomes more complex, especially as they take on more responsibility for local decision making. The challenge is to support councillors to do their job professionally and more effectively, without undermining their position as politicians. This suggests significant investment in skills and development is needed, alongside work with members, political parties, officers and communities, to communicate ideas about changes to the role*.

Towards a councillor compact?

Moving forward, there is overwhelming support from members, officers and community organisations for a clearer definition of the ward councillor role.

Many members claim that ambiguity about their current role causes confusion and tension with constituents and community groups. This is a particular problem in two- or three-tier areas, where there may be up to five elected members representing one area, and very little clarity about where responsibility and accountability for decision making lies.

Commonly, problems arise around strategic services that are not managed by local authorities, such as health or education. Members frequently encounter frustrated residents who do not understand why councillors are unable to help them tackle problems with these services, as these interviewees identified:

> Clearer roles would help. Everybody assumes the council is responsible for everything and sometimes councillors feel that they cannot respond to all the questions and criticisms they receive.
> (Councillor)

> Members need to know what they are getting into. If anything this is the key role of the job specification.
> (Councillor)

It seems there is a clear need to improve public understanding of the ward councillor role. Many members interviewed for this study felt that improving public understanding about how local government works should be a part of a new, enhanced role for councillors.

Establishing a clear-cut definition of the future ward councillor role will be important if members are to take on new responsibilities. Interviewees identified multiple benefits from such an approach, in particular, in communicating the full extent – and limitation – of members' influence and specific areas of accountability to residents:

> I think it needs to be made very clear to the electorate before they elect a person exactly what they will be doing – just how much power these people are going to have and why it is important not just to vote for your friends but for somebody who is going to be effective and efficient in this role.
> (Community organisation)

Importantly, this would also benefit potential candidates, many of whom have little information before they stand about the nature of the ward councillor role. Members and officers were critical of political parties for not providing better information about the scale and expectations of the job.

However, descriptions and specifications for the ward councillor role already exist in various formats. The main political parties and many local authorities have created role specifications to set out expectations around the main functions of the job, although feedback from councillors from this and other studies carried out by the authors suggests that these are rarely shared with residents, community groups or officers.

Interviewees discussed the value of creating a national definition or description of the future ward councillor role, reflecting the aspirations set out earlier.

Community organisations were keen that information about the powers and responsibilities of future ward councillors should be easily accessible to the public, along with information about members that can be held to account by residents.

Members agreed, but expressed concerns about whether a job description was the appropriate vehicle. Given the dynamic nature of the role, a job description was felt to be too narrow and confining, and could too easily become outdated.

Instead, the idea of a councillor compact emerged from discussions with members and officers.

> **Policy and practice implications – a councillor compact**
>
> A councillor compact would act as a voluntary, two-way agreement between the council and elected members. It would set out the council's expectations of the ward councillor role, encouraging basic minimum standards of activity and performance in each of the dimensions and functions of the job, possibly combining specific tasks with suggested approaches, skills and behaviours:
>
> > There is no value in a centralised job description. It would be too narrow and prescriptive. Minimum standards would be much better instead – for example: certain number of surgeries, commitment to certain amount of community work, be contactable easily, do best to uphold highest possible standards in public life.
> > (Councillor)
>
> *Continued*

A compact would also set out the council's commitment to provide minimum levels of support and training for members. This could be based on IDeA's recommendations for all councillors to have access to a package of basic support measures, including: a community induction; support for every councillor to be in e-mail contact from home; enabling councillors to draw on council resources to conduct surveys of local opinion; and providing every councillor with a single officer as a channel for complaints (Taylor and Wheeler, 2003).

This idea builds on the IDeA Member Development Charter,[1] which encourages local authorities to commit to providing structured support and training for councillors following recognised best practice.

The aim of a councillor compact is to embed and support changes to the councillor role by reinforcing the council's responsibility to members, and to create a 'soft' performance management tool to help improve standards for communities around the country.

Some members and officers felt there was value in considering a national template for a councillor compact, which councils and political groups could then build on and tailor to local circumstances. There was also strong support for producing a public version, such as a one-page summary of key information. Who is your councillor? How can you contact her or him? What can she or he do for you?

Widening influence: shaping strategic decision making and engaging other service providers

The importance of councillors being political and community leaders is dependent on their ability to exercise wider influence, particularly over those decisions taken 'beyond' the ward, which nonetheless have a local impact, and also in shaping the many services that are outwith the direct influence of the council.

Both officers and members identified the importance of the overview and scrutiny process in connecting local and strategic decision making. Overview and scrutiny represents the primary way in which ward councillors can question and challenge executive decision making, but many felt that such processes needed to have 'more teeth' for this to be effective.

It was suggested that overview and scrutiny needed to be given greater priority and investment within council structures. Normally, scrutiny processes had only a small amount of officer support in comparison with executive structures and this was often insufficient to carry out the kind of investigation that some felt scrutiny review processes deserved.

There were also fears harboured by some councillors about how easy it was to effectively scrutinise executive members from the same party. Although some were aware of a general understanding that overview and scrutiny should not be subject to the party whip, there was plenty of evidence from many participants that use of the whip was widespread in scrutiny processes.

Another concern relating to overview and scrutiny was the fact that it normally took place in the town hall. A number of councillors felt that scrutiny could be more effective concerning local issues at a neighbourhood level. Some noted the value of neighbourhood management in relation to 'knocking heads together' between local service providers and see some form of neighbourhood scrutiny process as an ideal way to achieve this – particularly in relation to more stubborn problems or where service providers were more reluctant to be held to account.

Of the various White Paper proposals, one of the most popular was the proposed 'duty to co-operate'. Officers and members alike felt that this might enable them to bring more pressure to bear on agencies that were felt to lack sufficient local accountability and to remain 'out of reach' from ward councillors. There was concern, though, that the proposal did not go far enough. Examples were given where representatives of other statutory agencies regularly failed to attend ward meetings or area panels and that some form of 'duty to co-operate' should apply to overview and scrutiny, to local councillors and to neighbourhood-level forums.

> **Policy and practice implications – widening the influence of local councillors**
>
> Workshops highlighted several implications to increase the strategic influence of local councillors, a number of which are strongly related to the Local Government White Paper proposals. They include to:
>
> ■ bring about a 'culture change' in overview and scrutiny with more effective independent support and a prohibition of party whipping
>
> *Continued*

■ put in place better forms of overview and scrutiny at the ward level to allow non-executive councillors more ability to call in local service providers about local issues

■ extend and strengthen the proposed 'duty of co-operation' to make sure it applies in wards and neighbourhoods.

Future obstacles: political leadership and the role for local political parties

Developing new empowered roles for councillors will require commitment to change and strong leadership from local authorities. There is also a need for political parties nationally, and especially locally, to be willing to change the way they support and work with elected members.

Officers and councillors identified a number of issues related to local political parties that they felt could undermine the member empowerment agenda if not addressed. These include: the way local party groups operate, in particular co-operation between opposition and ruling party members; the role of party whips; and local selection procedures.

In many cases, these issues are about the attitudes and behaviour of local political groups. Members and officers felt that there is little that councils can do to influence local political parties, and change needs to be driven at the national level through central party offices.

Interviewees identified other issues that will require intervention at the national level from central government and political parties. These include practical obstacles such as councillor remuneration.

In both cases, officers and members felt changes to the future councillor role might be piecemeal and difficult to achieve if underlying issues concerning local parties and councillor recruitment were not tackled head on.

Local parties: need for culture change

While the political party was recognised as being fundamental to the local democratic process, and a key source of identity and significance for the councillor, many interviewees were critical of the role of local political groups.

The most severe criticism concerned the way in which local parties are perceived as being self-serving and closed in their affairs. More than one person claimed that the local party is run as an 'old boys' club' with more concern for its internal politics than for the wider community.

A key issue identified by councillors is the way local political groups use the party whip. A number of examples were cited where local councillors who appeared supportive of a concern in their ward were whipped to vote against it when it came before full council. There was particular frustration where this had happened at an overview and scrutiny meeting about an issue of direct local concern.

One councillor commented that this was a matter of 'political maturity' and that, in general, some parties disapproved of the use of the political whip in overview and scrutiny but some local parties used it when they 'felt threatened'. He argued that local groups needed to have the 'confidence to give councillors more freedom to act independently'.

However, another councillor pointed out that whipping was an essential aspect of the way democracy worked and that people needed to understand the importance of the local manifesto and 'what the party stands for' when they vote.

This points to a broader cultural issue concerning political parties' lack of support for the frontline aspects of the ward councillor job, assessing councillors' performance based on the amount of time they spend in the town hall. Officers and members were concerned that local political groups could undermine attempts by local authorities to develop new roles for members by not supporting councillors to focus on engagement or advocacy work.

Some members felt the White Paper was an 'opposition charter', providing opposition councillors with the tools to really make a difference locally without being in power. This in itself might discourage some local authorities from committing to develop the ward councillor role.

Many of the above issues stem from the fact that membership of local political groups is very low and this has led to something of a 'siege mentality' among group members.

Other important factors appear to be the size of political control and the length of time a political party has been in office. Where there has been control over a period of years and where that control is relatively comfortable there was general concern that a degree of 'complacency' set in. It was in these areas that there sometimes

appeared to be a lack of political dynamism and greater problems in recruiting councillors and encouraging councillors to go on training. In some areas where political control was more contested it would appear that local parties were more proactive in attempts to recruit dynamic and inspiring councillors.

This approach was said by one community representative to 'push up the quality of councillors in the area'. Equally, other examples would suggest that greater stability gives councils the confidence to experiment more.

A number of participants spoke about the particular challenges faced by 'independent' councillors. In one area it was said that 'it is almost impossible to last as an independent' – even if one can get elected on a single issue. Few from any stakeholder group seemed to think that there would be significant growth in the number of independent councillors in the future.

A number of people highlighted that 'voter apathy' was a key problem faced by political parties and stressed 'the importance of increasing turn-out'. Respondents from all stakeholder groups identified public cynicism with national politics as a key cause for disengagement with local politics, and there was a strong sense among local councillors that they had very little influence on the national political scene, although a number of community representatives also criticised the attitude of councillors who, drawing support from the party, were perceived to run their wards as 'local fiefdoms'.

Political parties and councillor recruitment

There is genuine concern among all groups interviewed about the scale and complexity of the future ward member role, and the impact this may have on councillor recruitment.

Interviewees felt that, in theory, the prospect of a new, empowered role for ward councillors could make the job attractive to a wider range of people. However, in practice, there are issues about the scale of the role that could make recruitment much more difficult.

The lack of diversity in the current councillor population is an acknowledged problem. Government and the main political parties have recognised the need to attract young and working-age candidates, especially more women and minority ethnic representatives, to address the age, gender and social bias that currently favours white, middle-class, middle-age men (LGAR *et al.*, 2007).

Nationally, political parties are taking steps to recruit a broader range of candidates. The three main political parties have introduced equal opportunities procedures into their selection processes at the local and national level, yet a combination of fewer candidates from minority backgrounds and underlying or indirect discrimination perpetuate under-representation (Young Foundation, 2007b). However, evidence of this filtering through to local party selection procedures is currently limited (Wheeler, 2006).

Local political groups have an important role to play in opening up recruitment procedures, as recent research about political recruitment has identified (Wheeler, 2006). In one area, two people asserted that the 'complacency' of the controlling party was a key barrier to the recruitment of minority communities.

Some members were in favour of diversity representatives acting at the local level, as this interviewee describes:

> Diversity and equality are very important issues. We need an action plan for the local political group and a diversity rep to co-ordinate these matters.

However, councillors in another area challenged the White Paper's call for greater diversity and representativeness among councillors, stating:

> … diversity is a matter for *[local]* political parties, as it mustn't add to the problems we've already got in trying to recruit local candidates.

Practical obstacles to councillor recruitment

Alongside issues with local recruitment procedures, there are a number of practical issues identified by interviewees that are likely to create real obstacles to recruiting the 'new breed of councillors' needed for the future role.

As previously mentioned, members and officers are concerned about the scale of the future ward member role.

Census data indicate the average ward councillor currently spends 21.9 hours a week in their role. Members spend an average of ten hours a week attending council meetings and party meetings; seven hours engaging with constituents in public surgeries or answering constituents' enquires; and five hours engaged in other relevant commitments such as training and seminars (LGAR *et al.*, 2007). Relatively

little is known about how this varies for executive and non-executive members. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that many ward councillors feel overstretched and struggle to fulfil all the requirements of the current job:

> We have turned local government into a professional organisation where people have to work 50 to 60 hours a week to do a councillor's job.
> (Member)

Interviewees felt the complexity of the future ward councillor role will increase the demands on members' time, making it increasingly difficult for people to do the job alongside other work and family commitments. This is likely to make recruitment of working-age candidates even harder, as IDeA, LGiU and others have recognised:

> We are asking too much of one person. As much as everybody would like to move in this direction, it doesn't allow professionals or ordinary people with families who need to earn a salary to be involved.
> (Member)

> Who are going to be councillors of the future when such professionalism is expected and a lot of councillors just want to help people *[and are unwilling to learn the technical aspects of the job]*?
> (Executive member)

There are practical steps that local authorities can take to support councillors and minimise some of the stresses associated with time management. Some authorities, like Newham and Suffolk, provide childcare or hold evening meetings to accommodate working councillors.

However, not all council business can be carried out in the evening, as one executive member pointed out:

> Councils work with so many partner agencies that it's just not possible to hold every meeting out of hours to accommodate our members.

The idea of a ward councillor as a 'part-time volunteer' is no longer a practical one for many members. It is now out of step with the demands and complexity of the job, and broader social trends such as longer working hours and more women in full- or part-time work.

Many feel it is time for a genuine national debate about how the future role is resourced and supported if political parties are to avert a future crisis in local

leadership. The idea of councillor remuneration is not new, but many members and officers feel it is a crucial part of reinvigorating the role.

Lack of support from employers was cited frequently by members as a source of tension in their current role, and is felt to be another obstacle to recruiting working-age members in the future. Interviewees felt employers generally place little value on having councillors in the workforce and are often reluctant to support them to carry out council business if it requires flexible working or time off during working hours:

> Years ago there was an understanding that, if you were a councillor, wherever you worked would give support to that. This is no longer the case, you'd be lucky not to wreck your career.
> (Councillor)

> Companies need to understand that it is in everyone's interest to support councillors as much as we can to carry out their roles.
> (Executive member)

The majority of officers and members felt there is very little that local authorities can do to address this problem. These findings echo recent research by Political Skills Forum (Wheeler, 2006), which argues the case for a national campaign targeting employers to communicate the importance of the councillor role. Interviewees identified a strong case for such a campaign and it was felt only central government had the authority to deliver this message:

> We need to target employers and that must come from central government; no one would listen to local government.
> (Executive member)

Members also saw value in a national campaign to promote the ward councillor role to the public, in particular to try and present a 'new face' for local political leadership. All stakeholders felt that, generally, local councillors and local politics have a poor reputation that is further tarnished by disenchantment with national politics:

> It would be brilliant if the public understood that councillors, regardless of party, want to improve the area they live in and lifestyles of people – they are not in it for self-promotion.
> (Executive member)

Members recognised that they have a role to play in helping to improve that image, but they need political parties, locally and nationally, to endorse and support a new role for ward councillors.

Policy and practice implications – political parties and councillor recruitment

The ward councillor role must be reinvigorated and reformed to make it more attractive and relevant to voters, communities and potential candidates.

The demands of the role, today and in the future, are out of step with the reality of people's work and family lives. Councillors need much greater support from political parties, local authorities and central government.

Reform is needed in the following areas.

■ *National standards for party groups* – there should be a series of 'national standards' for the operation of political party groups, particularly in relation to issues of diversity, recruitment and selection.

■ *Reduce or prohibit whipping outside full council* – there should be cross-party support to significantly reduce, if not prohibit, the use of whipping in all aspects of local democracy other than full council.

■ *There needs to be significant improvement in councillor remuneration* – opening a genuine national debate about member allowances and support.

■ *Raising the profile of the councillor* – a national campaign to promote the value of the councillor role to employers and the public.

5 Conclusion: summary of policy and practice implications

Our research has identified a wide range of implications for national and local policymaking, and for the practice of local authorities and political parties. These are summarised in this chapter.

Councillor compacts

1   Our primary recommendation is the development of local *councillor compacts*.

    A councillor compact would act as a voluntary, two-way agreement between the council and elected members. It would set out the council's expectations of the ward councillor role, encouraging basic minimum standards of activity and performance in each of the dimensions and functions of the job, possibly combining specific tasks with suggested approaches, skills and behaviours.

    A compact would also set out the council's commitment to provide minimum levels of support and training for members. This could be based on IDeA's recommendations for all councillors to have access to a package of basic support measures including a community induction; support for every councillor to be in e-mail contact from home; enabling councillors to draw on council resources to conduct surveys of local opinion; and providing every councillor with a single officer as a channel for complaints (Taylor and Wheeler, 2003).

2   There would be value in considering a *national template* for a councillor compact, which councils and political groups could then build on and tailor to local circumstances.

3   Councils should also consider producing a *public version*, such as a one-page summary of key information. Who is your councillor? How can you contact her or him? What can she or he do for you?

A role description

In developing councillor compacts, Table 1 (which also appeared in Chapter 3 of this report) might be helpful for those seeking to describe the dimensions of the local role.

Table 1 The future ward councillor role

Role	Skills
Political representative	Ability to connect with all parts of the community and represent everyone fairly.
	Ability to balance local concerns with the political demands of the group manifesto.
Community advocate	Be a skilled advocate for everyone – including people from different backgrounds, cultures and values.
	Have the confidence to speak freely and challenge the executive.
Community leader	Exercise community development skills – support local projects and initiatives, and educate people about local participation.
	Be a good communicator – explain simply what political decisions and structures mean to constituents and community organisations.
	Be sensitive to difference and issues of diversity and equality.
	Have knowledge and skill to engage people in a variety of ways (not just meetings).
	Be a conflict broker.
Service transformer	Understand the complex business of local government and services provided by both the council and others.
	Have the confidence and ability to challenge the executive and hold service providers to account.
	To be able to work in partnership with a range of agencies and interests.
	Ability to understand local problems and use this knowledge locally and strategically in local action planning.
	Setting and monitoring service standards.
Place shaper	Being a local figurehead/role model that people feel they can turn to.
	Be able to shape the very local environment – ability to identify priorities, work with officers and service providers to address public realm problems, manage delegated locality budgets.
Knowledge champion	Be the primary source of local intelligence flowing between the community and the council.
	Have the skills and ability to collect and analyse local information and use it to benefit the community.

Information, skills and support

Councillor compacts also need to address the information, skills and support needs of elected members. Our research highlights the following specific needs.

4   Councils need to invest in more effective *ward-based information systems*, following good-practice models such as Newcastle, Manchester and Southampton, where authority-wide performance data can be disaggregated down to a ward/neighbourhood level and disseminated to councillors in a relevant and timely manner.

5   Councils need to develop a more *strategic approach to councillor learning and development*. The approach needs to consider:
   - a staged/phased approach more aligned to a councillor 'life cycle'
   - greater focus on 'action-reflection' and 'learning-by-doing' methods
   - more modular provision allowing for a more tailored approach depending on councillor interests and responsibilities, and incorporating opportunities for mentoring and other forms of learning
   - some form of raised 'expectation' for continuing professional development driven by political groups but with cross-party support
   - schemes of formal accreditation that demonstrate incremental improvement and would be recognised by employers and others.

6   Councils need to identify a *named officer to offer direct support* to each ward councillor. There needs to be local flexibility about the precise nature of this role and relationship, but the case studies demonstrate that having a 'first port of call' is essential for the future role.

Overview and scrutiny and the 'duty of co-operation'

Our research also highlighted a number of implications to increase the strategic influence of local councillors, several of which are strongly related to the Local Government White Paper proposals (DCLG, 2006). They include the following.

7   Both national and local government need to consider how to bring about a *'culture change' in overview and scrutiny*, with more effective independent support and a prohibition of party whipping.

8   Councils need to put in place better forms of overview and scrutiny at the ward level – such as *neighbourhood inquiries* – to allow non-executive councillors more ability to call in local service providers about local issues.

9   National government should *extend and strengthen the proposed 'duty of co-operation'* to make sure it applies in wards and neighbourhoods.

Political parties and councillor recruitment

Our research also showed that political parties must play their part to reinvigorate and reform the councillor role to make it more attractive and relevant to voters, communities and potential candidates.

Reform is needed in the following areas.

10 Parties should agree a series of *'national standards' for the operation of political party groups*, particularly in relation to issues of diversity, recruitment and selection.

11 There should be cross-party support to significantly *reduce, if not prohibit, the use of whipping* in all aspects of local democracy other than full council.

12 There needs to be significant *improvement in councillor remuneration* – there should be cross-party co-operation in opening a genuine national debate about member allowances and support.

13 Government should instigate a *national campaign to promote the value of the councillor* role to employers and the public.

Notes

Chapter 2

1 Summaries were accurate at the time of research, January to July 2007.

Chapter 4

1 IDeA, Member Development Charter (available at http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/aio/773164).

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Appendix 1: Research methodology

The research was carried out in the London Borough of Newham, the County of Suffolk, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Salford City Councils.

These local authorities were selected because they have contrasting leadership models, different political leadership and all contain disadvantaged neighbourhoods with different regeneration initiatives in place.

The fieldwork in Newham and Suffolk was conducted by Saffron James and Diana Esguerra from the Young Foundation and involved: a futures workshop with non-executive ward councillors from deprived wards; four semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with council officers and community representatives, as well as two semi-structured one-to-one interviews with executive councillors.

The fieldwork in Newcastle and Salford was carried out by the LGiU and involved councillor, officer and community representative focus groups as well as mixed workshop activities. It also involved seven in-depth interviews with two councillors, two officers and three community representatives.

Appendix 2: Research participants

We would like to thank all the individuals and organisations who participated in this project including:

Cllr Shama Ahmad, Newham, Forest Gate North

Jose Alexander, Chair, East Ham Community Forum, Newham

Patrick Arnold, Housing, Swinton, Salford

Pete Ball, Chair, Salford East Community Committee

Sir Jeremy Beecham, Cllr, Newcastle, Benwell and Scotswood Ward

Simon Bishop, Benwell and Scotswood Ward Co-ordinator, Newcastle

Cllr Christine Bowden, Deputy Mayor and Adviser for Human Resources and Industrial Relations, Newham

Valerie Brown, Director, REIN (Race Equality in Newham)

Cllr Lisa Chambers, Suffolk, Newmarket & Red Lodge

Cllr Ayesha Chowdhury, Newham, Beckton

Mary Clancy, Head of Democratic Services, Suffolk

Cllr Alan Craig, Newham, Custom House and Canning Town

Natalie Craig, Sports Development Officer, Salford East

Cllr Richard Crawford, Community Executive Adviser, Newham

Tommy Curran, Watersports Swinton, Salford Community Leisure

Pat Devlin, Pendower Neighbourhood Centre, Newcastle

Bob Docherty, Community Representative, Swinton Anglers

Mike Dungworth, Senior Training and Development Officer, Newcastle

Reverend Ann Easter, Chief Executive, Renewal Programme

Bernadette Elder, Community Involvement Manager, Salford East New Deal for Communities

Debbie Forde, Member Services Officer, Newham

Will Gibson, Chief Executive, Suffolk ACRE

Rabbi Simon Grant, Director, Salford East Jewish Children & Family Services

Ward councillors and community leadership

Rev Stephen Griffith, Vicar in Denton, Newcastle

Clair Harvey, Partnerships Manager, Suffolk

Cllr Pat Holland, Newham, Custom House and Canning Town

Alex Hopkins, Head of Policy, Improvement and Partnerships, Suffolk

Cllr Hulmes, Salford, Irwell Riverside

Cllr Ann-Marie Humphreys, Salford, Kersal

Richard Hunt, Head of Service Development, Culture, Sport and Communities, Suffolk

Cllr Lawrence Hunter, Newcastle, Lemington Ward

Cllr Gerry Keating, Newcastle, Blakelaw Ward

Cllr King, Salford, Broughton

Cllr Ayub Koram Ali, Newham, Manor Park

Paul Leslie, Assistant Director, Community Links

Cllr Sandy Martin, Suffolk, St John's

Cllr Graham Middleton, Newcastle, Denton Ward

David Murray, Head of Community, Newham

Farah Nazeer, Chair, Manor Park Community Forum, Newham

Ruth Nelson, Wardley Swinton Community Centre user, Salford

Cllr Graham Newman, Executive Councillor, Suffolk

Cllr O'Neill, Salford, Swinton South

John O'Sullivan, Chief Executive, St John's Housing

Alison Pearce, Community Development Worker, Salford East

Cllr Keith Rawlingson, Suffolk, Chantry

Cllr Ben Redsell, Suffolk, Woodbridge

Cllr Morris Rose, Suffolk, Bungay

George Rowe, Community, Health and Social Care Directorate, Salford

Cllr Bryony Rudkin, Suffolk, Chantry

Bob Russell, Neighbourhood Manager, Waveney Community Forum

Cllr Bill Schardt, Newcastle, Blakelaw Ward

Steve Sheridan, Valley, Swinton, Salford

Cllr Sue Sida-Lockett, Deputy Leader, Suffolk

Amy Stillwell, Blakelaw Ward Co-ordinator, Newcastle

Claire Taylor-Crisp, Community Development Officer in the North Lowestoft Fairshare Trust Project

Nelly Ternant, community representative, Newcastle

Rebecca Threlfall, Neighbourhood Manager, Salford East

Cllr Simon Tucker, Newham, Royal Docks

Sister Ursula, St Anne's Convent

Sue Wannop, Castle Ward Co-ordinator, Newcastle

Doug Wilkinson, Senior Neighbourhood Response Manager, Newcastle

Joan Williams, Broughton Trust, Salford

Cllr Regina Williams, Newham, Stratford

Ronagh Witthames, Director of Development, Suffolk ACRE

Brian Wroe, Assistant Director, Community, Health & Social Care Directorate, Salford.