

Community engagement and community cohesion

Geraldine Blake, John Diamond, Jane Foot, Ben Gidley, Marjorie Mayo, Kalbir Shukra and Martin Yarnit

An exploration of the challenges to be addressed if government policies to promote community engagement are to be genuinely inclusive of newcomers as well as more established communities.

Community engagement and community cohesion are both current public policy priorities. But there have been gaps in our understanding about how to promote community representation in ways that take account of diversity and population change. This research explores:

- whose views were being heard and whose were not;
- what were the barriers to being heard and how they could be overcome;
- how these barriers could be addressed in ways that would promote community cohesion, rather than increasing competition within and between communities.

Through three case studies, the study also identifies ways in which new communities can be involved effectively, together with more established communities, thereby increasing cohesion and mutual solidarity.



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Executive summary

Governance and diversity: fluid communities, solid structures? What are the key questions and why is it so important to address them at the present time?

Devolution, democratic decentralisation and community engagement have emerged as strategic themes across a range of policies to modernise public services, improving public service delivery through the promotion of citizen participation and community empowerment. The Local Government White Paper on *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (DCLG, 2006) clarified government approaches, and these have been developed through more recent initiatives. As the Commission on Community Cohesion and Integration identified, government has also been concerned to address popular anxieties as to whether newcomers can be expected to make additional demands on public services that are already overstretched, and anxieties about newcomers and other minority communities that have been compounded in the context of the ‘war on terrorism’.

Each of these sets of concerns has been the subject of research to inform public debate and to challenge popular myths and stereotypes. But there have been significant gaps in our knowledge and understanding of how these differing concerns interrelate with each other. How do these newly devolved structures of governance function in the context of rapid population change and ‘super-diversity’ – the presence of several different demographic groups with very different origins and social locations? Public policy needs to be shaped by informed debate on these interlocking questions.

The research for this report

This research project set out to explore these questions in order to inform policy and practice debates and, most importantly, to identify promising ways forward in the current policy context as this has developed in England. The research included case studies in three local authority areas, each with differing degrees of diversity, dynamism and population churn. Subsequent sections provide examples of constructive ways of addressing these issues, tailored to meet particular local circumstances, in each of these case study areas. Given that these are complex issues, and given that one size clearly cannot be expected to fit all in the context of super-diversity, these examples are presented as ‘promising practices’ rather than as ‘good practice’, emphasising the importance of adapting different approaches to take account of local circumstances and local priorities.

Key findings and conclusions

In summary, the research provided evidence to support the conclusion that fluidity and super-diversity do indeed pose additional challenges for community engagement in local structures of governance. Newer arrivals were identified as being those least likely to have their voices heard effectively. These groups included migrant workers from the accession states, as well as refugees and asylum seekers, with varying aspirations and needs. While population churn is far from representing the only challenge, it does add significantly to a number of the tensions inherent in government policies for decentralisation as a strategy for public service reform. And population churn can be expected to continue at least for the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile, the research also identified challenges arising from changes in the structures of governance themselves. Where structures had clear, coherent and consistent frameworks, community engagement tended to be experienced more positively. And conversely, where structures were subject to restructuring and change, there was evidence of disengagement, feelings that were compounded when service provision was fragmented as a result of subcontracting. Fluid structures posed additional problems for newer groups, who found this particularly confusing.

While the case studies provided evidence of some of these challenges, they also provided evidence of promising practices, ways in which local structures of governance were reaching out to enable diverse voices to be heard effectively. And there were examples of initiatives and responses that were geared towards the reduction of competition within and between communities and the promotion of community cohesion, mutual trust and social solidarity, backed by sustainable strategies to promote community development across their case study areas.

While these examples provide illustrations of promising practices, however, these in turn depend upon the development and implementation of community development strategies as centrally important for local governance strategies more generally. And these community development strategies need to be resourced via community development professionals, to identify and work with informal networks as well as with more established organisations and groups within the voluntary and community sectors, taking account of issues of equalities, accountability, democratic representation and social justice. Second-tier anchor organisations and agencies have particular roles to play here, supporting smaller organisations and groups and enabling them to navigate their way around the structures of local governance effectively. Community development needs to be promoted both directly via local structures of governance, and via the voluntary and community sectors, and this role needs to be fully recognised and supported, promoting social cohesion and social

solidarity through strengthening civil society more generally. There are important implications here for public policy at both central and local levels, just as there are implications for the voluntary and community sectors, and for new communities themselves.

1 Governance and diversity: fluid communities, solid structures? The context and the research for this report

What are the key questions that this research sets out to address and why is it so important to explore them at the present time?

Devolution, democratic decentralisation and community engagement have emerged as strategic themes across a range of policies to modernise public services, improving public service delivery through the promotion of citizen participation and community empowerment. These strategies can be identified across a range of public services, including health, for example, as well as across the range of services previously commissioned or directly provided by local authorities. Participative and more deliberative forms of democracy are to be promoted locally, alongside and working in partnership with established forms of representative democracy. The Local Government White Paper (DCLG, 2006) clarified government approaches, and these have been developed through more recent initiatives to implement a number of the White Paper's proposals.

Meanwhile, in parallel, there have been increasing concerns about multiculturalism and social cohesion from differing perspectives (e.g. Cattle, 2001; Denham, 2001; Ouseley, 2001; Ritchie, 2001; Goodhart, 2004; Phillips, 2004). These concerns have been exacerbated with rapid population change and the emergence of what has been called 'super-diversity'.¹ As the Commission on Integration and Cohesion identified, these have included anxieties as to whether newcomers can be expected to make additional demands on public services that are already overstretched, anxieties that have been compounded in the context of the 'war on terrorism'.

Each of these sets of concerns has been the subject of research to inform public debate. A range of publications address the issues involved in devolution, service modernisation and community engagement policies and practices, in the context of continuing debates about ways of relating representative forms of democracy with more direct, participative and deliberative approaches. And previous studies, including those supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, have already challenged the evidential basis for anxieties about newcomers, pointing to the low wages and poor housing conditions experienced by East European migrant workers,

for example (Spencer *et al.*, 2007). But there have been significant gaps in our knowledge and understanding of how these differing concerns interrelate with each other.

How do the newly devolved structures of governance such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) function in the context of super-diversity and rapid population change? Whose voices are being heard, expressing their wants and needs to service providers – and conversely whose voices are not being effectively heard? How do community representatives, themselves, represent difference and diversity within as well as between their communities and established communities locally? And how might these differing wants and needs be negotiated equitably and transparently via local structures of governance, in ways that promote mutual trust and social solidarity rather than exacerbating competition for scarce resources? Public policy needs to be shaped by informed debate on these interlocking questions.

Super-diversity is here to stay and communities are becoming increasingly complex. This provides the context for the implementation of devolved governance. Processes and structures of neighbourhood forums, community engagement, participative processes, dialogue and debate are important enough in their own right. They can, in addition, provide opportunities for meaningful contact across community divides, and so contribute to trust-building and social solidarity. The lack of them, as the Young Foundation has also shown in recent research, can generate dangerous levels of incomprehension and hostility between communities (Dench *et al.*, 2006). Getting local governance right, ensuring that it takes full account of diversity and churn, is increasingly vital then for the promotion of social cohesion strategies. It was for this reason that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation decided to support research to explore these questions further, as part of the Foundation's Governance and Public Services programme.

Reviewing previous research findings

The first task was to review the findings from previous research, identifying the gaps that needed to be researched for this particular study. These findings from previous research emerged as follows:

- *Previous research on government strategies for decentralisation and public service modernisation:* The review identified an extensive literature engaging with the findings from research on decentralisation and local government restructuring more generally (Taylor, 2003a; Lowndes and Sullivan, 2004). This included critical discussion of the potential risks and/or dysfunctions of decentralisation. How far

can decentralisation policies be promoted without jeopardising the goals of equity and equalities, redistributing resources within and between disadvantaged areas according to social need? And how far can citizens' engagement in structures of local governance impact upon the wider structural factors and policies that affect their lives (Taylor, 2006).

- *Previous research findings on participation, community engagement and empowerment:* The Power Report (Power Inquiry, 2006) set out to inform the discussion of Britain's democracy, focusing upon the causes of public disengagement in recent years and how this trend might be reversed. The findings provided a valuable background for the research. There is, in addition, an extensive literature based upon research on how to develop effective strategies to promote participation and empowerment (Lowndes *et al.*, 2006; Barnes *et al.*, 2007).
- *Research findings on migration and population change and government approaches in response:* There is a wealth of research on migration and population change and government approaches in response. These studies have included research into the ways in which new and established communities have been relating to each other, exploring the pivotal role of deprivation and disadvantage (Hudson *et al.*, 2007; Markova and Black, 2007; Spencer *et al.*, 2007). There have, in addition, been publications raising fundamental challenges to government policies in response (Craig, 2007).
- *Studies of particular areas and particular communities:* A number of studies exploring the histories and geographies of particular areas were identified, including the proposed case study areas (Alam and Husband, 2006; Blakey *et al.*, 2006). There were, additionally, a number of studies exploring faith-based communities and studies of the pressures from various forms of fundamentalism (Kundhani, 2002; Farnell *et al.*, 2003; Modood *et al.*, 2005; Dinham and Lowndes, forthcoming).
- *Studies on 'race', ethnicity and multiculturalism:* Disturbances in a number of northern cities in 2001 sparked off key theoretical debates in addition to the policy studies exemplified, for example, by the Cantle Report (Back *et al.*, 2002; Cantle, 2005). Shukra *et al.* concluded that 'Current debates about race relations and immigration are caught in a conundrum: how to challenge the weaknesses of multiculturalism without reinforcing conditions for the rise of a new assimilationism?' (Shukra *et al.*, 2004, p. 192).

- *Local governance and diversity*: Increasing anxieties about ‘multicultural’ Britain have also been paralleled by increasing concern with the need to address diversity more directly via local governance (Brownhill and Darke, 1998). Research has demonstrated that the neighbourhood is often seen as the place where diversity is experienced in everyday life (Amin, 2002). And this then raises the question of the extent to which neighbourhood governance can be practised in ways that address this diversity in non-oppressive ways. There is a developing literature on this, building on current research (Beebeejaun and Grimshaw, 2007).

There have, in addition, been more recent studies identifying the significance of informal networks among new-coming communities and the importance of working with these, if newcomers are to participate effectively in structures of governance (Beirens *et al.*, 2007). These conclusions have particular relevance for our case study research, although they were published after the completion of most of the fieldwork, which limited the scope for direct comparisons and contrasts to be drawn.

Focusing upon the key gaps

The literature review highlighted themes that had been identified as central to the proposed research, providing essential background markers. While the literature addressed issues of relevance for the research concerns with governance structures and fluid communities, however, there seemed to be a major gap still when it came to addressing the interconnections between these two – although this gap was beginning to be filled by subsequent studies, as well as by the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (COIC, 2007), published during our research. It was these interconnections that were precisely the focus for the subsequent fieldwork for this particular study.

The research for this report

Having identified the gaps in existing knowledge, the research set out to address these through exploring the following questions:

- Which groups are being heard? How, and by what mechanisms? How do different communities gain access to power and to services?
- Which groups are active outside the formal structures but not heard or not recognised by the mainstream, perhaps because they are new or fluid or not organised? Could they be heard more effectively, by linking their informal activity

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to formal channels and/or by changing the formal channels? Can the devolution agenda be delivered in a way that opens decision-making to these groups? What role can local councils play in this?

- As new groups are brought into the formal structures, how are the relationships between communities affected? Do communities close the door behind them, or do they work co-operatively with or actually champion newer groups?
- What do new governance structures – such as the structures for Local Strategic Partnerships and for Neighbourhood Management – mean for those expected to represent communities? Is there a risk of further marginalisation, disillusionment and citizen disengagement? Or do community representatives become more engaged and knowledgeable, and better able to influence services and local priorities?
- How do local experiences and patterns of racism – and of responses to it – shape involvement in regeneration and governance?

Three case study areas were identified for further investigation in Coventry, Oldham and Newham. These case study areas were selected to illustrate differing patterns of population diversity and churn – a northern town with relatively long-established minority communities and relatively little population churn (at least until recently), a city with established minority communities and considerable population fluidity and a London borough with one of the most rapidly changing populations in Britain. Given the research focus, the emphasis was upon the areas with most population churn, comparing and contrasting their experiences with those of the area with rather less population churn.

The case study areas were also chosen to illustrate varying approaches to the development of community engagement in local structures of governance. Chapter 3 provides more detailed descriptions of each case study area and their local contexts.

Finally, the case study areas were selected for their potential to offer the opportunity of identifying examples of good practice. The decision to include some comparisons and contrasts with Oldham was also partly based upon these criteria, Oldham having been systematically addressing issues of community cohesion following the civil disturbances of 2001. There were potential learning points to be explored here. As the research progressed, however, it became clear that the term ‘good practice’ was potentially misleading. As the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has recognised, in response to the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, one size does not necessarily fit all. Examples of ‘good

practice' were being developed in complex scenarios, taking account of differing interests, pressures and needs. Rather than suggesting that the research was identifying a set of 'right answers' then, it seemed more useful to describe these examples as 'promising practices' for consideration and possible adaptation more generally. Subsequent chapters illustrate a number of precisely such examples, practices that could usefully be shared more widely to stimulate debate on differing ways forward, taking account of varying local contexts. It should be emphasised that these case study areas are all in England and refer specifically to the English policy context. Given the variation in structures elsewhere in Britain, the research findings cannot be taken to apply more widely, although many will do so.

Once Coventry, Newham and Oldham had been selected for further study, the researchers interviewed a range of stakeholders from local structures of governance and from the voluntary and community sectors, including faith-based organisations and groupings. More detailed interviews were conducted with a number of individuals whose experiences illustrated differing patterns of engagement in structures of local governance. And preliminary findings were checked back with individuals and via focus groups. In addition, the researchers observed a number of meetings and events over the 18 months of the project's life. The aim was to build as rounded a picture as possible.

The findings from the case study research are set out in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, focusing upon whose voices were – or were not – being heard in Chapter 4, experiences of representation and democratic accountability in structures of governance in Chapter 5 and issues of community cohesion and solidarity, as these relate to the changing structures of governance, in Chapter 6. Each of these three chapters includes examples of promising practices – approaches to addressing the challenges posed by super-diversity and population churn – based upon principles of equality, visible fairness and social justice. This sets the context for the discussion of the findings and their policy implications in Chapter 7, together with the context for the policy recommendations that follow.

Summary

- Public policies aim to promote both decentralisation and community engagement in local structures of governance *and* community cohesion in the context of increasing diversity and population churn.

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- While much is known about both of these, there are major gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the interconnections between them.
- The research that underpins this report is based upon three case studies, in Coventry, Newham and Oldham, to explore these issues and to identify promising practices in addressing these challenges.

2 The policy context

The changing nature of local governance

Local governance has become an increasingly complex field. A wide range of publicly funded bodies impact on the life chances of local populations with governance arrangements that engage and involve service users and residents. In the English context, these include:

- Local Strategic Partnerships, with responsibilities for bringing different sectors and interests together to develop strategic approaches to providing services to meet local needs;
- local thematic partnerships such as Crime Reduction Partnerships which include members of voluntary and community groups;
- Neighbourhood Forums, bodies set up as part of service decentralisation by local authorities and their partners;
- New Deal for Communities (NDC) boards which manage regeneration programmes in many of the areas with high levels of diversity and population churn, including West Ham and Plaistow NDC in Newham;
- primary care services, foundation hospitals, GP clinics, adult care services and the new Local Involvement Networks (LINKs);
- Sure Start, which is mandated to reach out and engage the most disadvantaged young children and their parents;
- school governing bodies, which provide elected places for parent representatives (not a simple matter given the differences in the powers of governing bodies in local authority-maintained secondary schools or in academies, for example);
- housing associations, which have taken over much of the remaining stock of local authority housing departments and which cater for the most disadvantaged and recent arrivals, in some cases via well-developed tenant participation strategies.

Even when local residents are aware that their services are managed by all these agencies, they may not realise that such bodies are required to set up engagement frameworks which offer residents the possibility of influencing decisions about

service planning and service delivery, offering opportunities for formal representation via election to a board or committee.

Although local authorities are no longer necessarily principal service providers, they still retain key roles. As democratically elected authorities they have overall responsibility for developing community strategies in partnership with other statutory, third sector and private sector interests, providing democratic leadership in relation to civil renewal and community engagement and – more recently – place-shaping. This latest role has particular relevance to the issues of diversity, population churn and community cohesion.

Place-shaping

Sir Michael Lyons, in his inquiry into local government, advocated ‘a wider role for local government as the voice of a whole community and as an agent of place’ (Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, 2006, para. E.17). This ‘place-shaping’ role, defined as ‘the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens’ (Lyons Inquiry into Local Government, 2007, para. 14), would include: building and shaping local identity; representing the community; maintaining the cohesiveness of the community; understanding local needs and preferences and making sure that the right services are provided to local people; and working with other bodies to respond to complex challenges. In Lyons’s words, it ‘place[s] considerable emphasis on an authority’s ability to anticipate, understand and manage change within their locality’ (2006, para. 4.79) and take responsibility for the well-being of ‘place’.

This way of envisaging the role and potential of local government has been widely welcomed and underpins the new Place-Shaping Statutory Guidance to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Accompanied by more freedom to tell a distinctive ‘story of place’ and to base new Local Area Agreements (LAAs) in locality-based priorities, local partners now have the ability to anticipate the implications of the regional and subregional economic vision, local labour and housing markets, and the likely impact on diversity and churn.

‘Voice and choice’ – holding public agencies to account

The public service reform agenda (Cabinet Office, 2006; DCLG, 2006) entails reducing top-down regulation and inspection and instead relying on greater pressure from citizens and customers to drive service improvement and modernisation in

local areas. This new approach has been summarised as ‘voice and choice’: in other words, service users and residents are given opportunities to have more power and control over the services they use, to play an active role in service design and delivery, and to express their views and preferences. Voice and choice can operate at a community or an individual level. For instance, community groups are enabled to prioritise the mix of services in their neighbourhoods through a local user forum, or a youth parliament devises a plan for a new youth service. At an individual level, users are able to engage directly with providers to tailor the service to fit their circumstances, e.g. through direct payment schemes in social care, choice-based lettings or personalisation via Connexions advisers. In the Government’s view, both avenues – the community and the individual – are key to the vision of more responsive services and increased citizen satisfaction in their locality.

A well-developed example of the ‘voice and choice’ approach can be found in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Local authorities have a new ‘duty to involve’ residents and others and give them greater influence over service decisions or delivery, neighbourhood agreements and charters, and partnership working with the voluntary and community sector. User views will be included in the locality-based inspections and the new National Indicator Set – from which new-style LAAs are drawn – contains several measures of citizen and user satisfaction (DCLG, 2007c). The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 creates new powers to establish parish and neighbourhood councils. And it makes councils responsible for commissioning Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) to influence health and social care services, whether the provider is the council, NHS, voluntary organisation or private sector provider.

Similar legislation aims to encourage parents to play an active role in schools through school councils which will sit alongside the existing governing bodies which include places for elected parent representatives. The new Ten Year Youth Strategy requires councils to actively engage with young people about their needs and issues.

The Local Government White Paper (DCLG, 2006) specifically encourages local service partners to reach out to the ‘disadvantaged ... marginalised or socially excluded’ as well as the ‘more vocal’ residents and communities in the way they design and manage the ‘voice and choice’ arrangements, a recognition that making voice and choice a reality is no easy matter in the circumstances of super-diversity and rapid population change which typify increasing numbers of areas.

Councils will have to improve their citizen intelligence on local needs and priorities in response. Research and consultation with a wide range of community interests – including new residents and recent migrant communities – will be essential if

local services are to 'segment' their market and target and design services that are responsive to the different interests at ward and neighbourhood level as well as measure different satisfaction levels (Dr Foster Research and Tetlow Associates, 2007). Specifically, government departments are required by Public Service Agreement (PSA) 15 to 'address the disadvantages that individuals experience because of their gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief' and by PSA 21 to 'build more cohesive, empowered and active communities': these objectives will inform the LAA outcomes and local partners' objectives and priorities.

This model of change relies on service users and residents being organised and engaged, however, so that they can take part in the user involvement, community governance and partnership arrangements that are central to devolution. Where particular groups are not well organised or visible locally, or where they are organised on a different spatial basis or on the basis of shared experiences, identities and interests, the risks of them being invisible to the 'voice and choice' mechanisms would seem to be considerable. Where migrants or mobile or new communities are not recognised as citizens, residents and/or service users, their needs and views are correspondingly unlikely to be sought out or taken into account effectively (Yarnit, 2006, p. 26).

While councillors are charged with championing the disadvantaged or those whose voices might not be otherwise heard, new communities may not be known to local councillors and – where local feelings are negative – councillors may find it difficult to support new voices with a claim to scarce resources.¹ Subsequent chapters illustrate the potential as well as some of the challenges for local authorities, developing structures to bridge these gaps between people who might otherwise be unheard and their elected representatives.

Public services have always been faced with the need to make decisions about the distribution of resources in the face of competing priorities and claims. In future, this decision-making will need to be more transparent and have to demonstrate that it is fair and accountable – towards what the Commission for Racial Equality has described as 'visible social justice'. This is not straightforward, however. While transparency can help to defuse tensions between competing demands (Hudson *et al.*, 2007), subsequent chapters illustrate some of the challenges involved in achieving this in practice.

Promoting further devolution and strengthening community engagement

The Government has committed itself to 'greater devolution as a basis for better decision-making' and to the empowerment of communities (DCLG, 2007a; HM Government and Local Government Association, 2007). While the White Paper did not prescribe any specific devolutionary governance structures or Neighbourhood Management arrangements, the overall approach of devolution between central and local government, and in turn between local government, Local Strategic Partnerships and neighbourhoods, remains central.

The National Indicator Set (derived from the Public Service Agreements which inform Local Area Agreements) contains a selection of indicators associated with both cohesion and empowerment:

- the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality;
- the percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area;
- the percentage of people who feel they belong to their neighbourhood;
- the perception that people in the area treat one another with respect and dignity.

The nature of the demographic changes illustrated in our study areas, as well as the effects of government interventions to promote mixed communities, means that neighbourhoods are actually becoming increasingly diverse. There are indications that these issues are becoming increasingly recognised, however. Hazel Blears, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, has set a priority of building horizontal or 'bridging' links between and within communities, as well as vertically between communities and decision-makers (Blears, 2007). And in its framework for third sector involvement with Local Strategic Partnerships, one of the 'guiding' principles of representation is equality: 'place equality, diversity and inclusiveness at the core of what you do' (DCLG, 2007b, pp. 7, 17).

Research from the Department for Communities and Local Government suggests that active community development with new communities is needed if bridging as well as vertical links are to be built. Informal bodies, based in new communities, can grow into effective organisations that support their members and link them with service providers and government. And intermediary bodies such as voluntary, community and faith organisations can provide mutual support and reduce the risk

that newcomers end up calling on expensive rescue services, as the Government has recognised (Zetter *et al.*, 2006; HM Treasury and Cabinet Office, 2007; Taylor, 2007). Community development techniques have played a significant role in building social cohesion in Northern Ireland. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion (COIC) has recognised the potential value of this approach implicitly, arguing for ‘developing strong relationships between people of different backgrounds ... within neighbourhoods’ (COIC, 2007, para. 3.12, p. 10). Our research explores these suggestions in the context of our three case study areas, identifying differing strategies for engaging new communities effectively while taking account of the importance of promoting social cohesion – building bridges within and between new communities and more established communities.

Promoting integration and social cohesion

One of the consequences of fluidity of population and fragmentation of interests and experience has been a growing concern about a breakdown in social cohesion. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion found that the overall picture has been more positive than that, however. Cohesion has been measured by the percentage of people who ‘agreed or strongly agreed that people of different backgrounds get on well together’.² COIC reported that 79 per cent of people agreed or strongly agreed with cohesion rates ranging from 38 per cent to 90 per cent, but in only ten of 387 areas was it under 60 per cent. COIC also identified a strong correlation between people’s perception of cohesion and their satisfaction with ‘the area as a place to live’, and a medium correlation with their view that ‘they can influence local decision-making’.³

For the Commission, cohesion and integration are two ‘interlocking’ (COIC, 2007, para. 3.4) principles:

... cohesion is principally the process that must happen in all communities to ensure different groups of people get on well together; while integration is principally the process that ensures new residents and existing residents adapt to one another. (COIC, 2007, para. 3.2)

Although most of COIC’s proposals focused on integration rather than governance, some of them do have relevance for structures of governance, including proposals to:

- establish neighbourhood forums or other ongoing structures that can help ‘bind people together’ and establish trust;

- build a sense of trust in the institutions locally to ‘act fairly in arbitrating between different interests’;
- involve communities in scrutiny and accountability.

Summary

- The meaning of ‘local governance’ is now much wider, going beyond elected councils and political-party representative politics – though both remain very important. A variety of local service providers are required to make arrangements to consult and involve both users and residents – covering schools, hospitals, health and social care, social housing and policing, among others. Neighbourhood working, partnership working and third sector involvement are all key to priority outcomes in localities.
- In all this, councils have a dual role: they are the democratically elected bodies with both formal and informal responsibilities for holding local services to account on behalf of their residents, e.g. through LSPs and LINKs. And as ‘place-makers’ they are being charged with responsibility for shaping their own and others’ services to improve well-being for all communities. This involves engaging with communities, including new and migrant groups, encouraging and nurturing their ‘voice and choice’ and ensuring that their interests are taken into account.
- While the Government has been concerned with restructuring local governance, on the one hand, and promoting social cohesion, on the other, the links between these two aspects of public policy need to be further developed, especially in the context of super-diversity and continuing population churn.

3 Diversity and structures of local governance in the three case study areas

This chapter summarises the findings about diversity and structures of local governance in the three case study areas. While there are differences between the three areas there are similarities too, raising common challenges for community engagement in structures of local governance in areas of diversity and population churn. Since the fieldwork began early in 2007, however, there have been a number of changes, changes that have been impacting upon patterns of community engagement as a result. The concluding chapter returns to this issue of fluidity – in the structures of governance themselves, as well as in the populations that they serve.

Population patterns, diversity, fluidity and change in the three case study areas

The ethnic mix of the populations in the three areas varies considerably. Following the disturbances of 2001, Oldham has been popularly perceived as being divided between two communities, White British on the one hand and Asian/British Asian on the other. In fact, though, Oldham's population mix was the closest to the English average, with 84 per cent of the population in Oldham being White British, compared with 87 per cent for England as a whole. Coventry came next with 78 per cent of the population being White British, while Newham represented the other end of the spectrum with only 34 per cent. Table 1 sets out these percentages together with the percentages of different minority communities, mainly Asian/British Asian in Oldham, mainly Asian/British Asian and Irish in Coventry and a more varied mix of Asian/British Asian and Black or Black British Caribbean and Africans, together with Chinese and other ethnic groups, in Newham. Figure 1 shows the percentages in a graphic form.

Table 1 Ethnicity (%)

	Coventry	Newham	Oldham	England
White: British	78.32	33.78	84.36	86.99
White: Irish	3.46	1.32	0.9	1.27
White: Other White	2.2	4.31	0.88	2.66
Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	0.82	1.22	0.59	0.47
Mixed: White and Black African	0.09	0.68	0.09	0.16
Mixed: White and Asian	0.53	0.68	0.32	0.37
Mixed: Other Mixed	0.28	0.8	0.13	0.31
Asian or Asian British: Indian	8.04	12.14	0.72	2.09
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	2.05	8.46	6.33	1.44
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	0.58	8.8	4.52	0.56
Asian or Asian British: Other Asian	0.61	3.12	0.31	0.48
Black or Black British: Caribbean	1.1	7.35	0.43	1.14
Black or Black British: African	0.56	13.11	0.08	0.97
Black or Black British: Other Black	0.14	1.12	0.06	0.19
Chinese or other ethnic group: Chinese	0.73	0.96	0.19	0.45
Chinese or other ethnic group: Other ethnic group	0.51	2.14	0.1	0.44

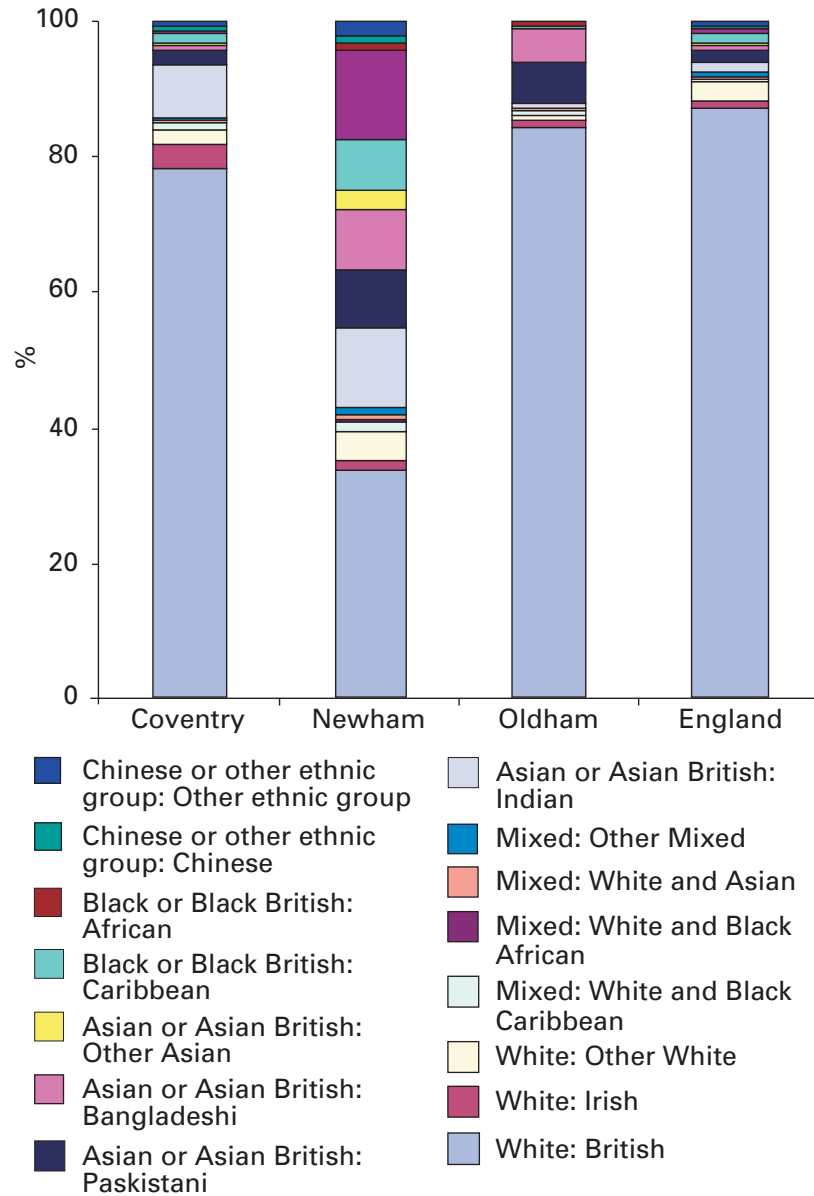
Unsurprisingly, as Table 2 illustrates, these patterns could also be traced in terms of the main religions in the different case study areas. Although Oldham has tended to be identified as having a large Muslim population, Newham’s Muslim population was significantly larger in terms of the absolute numbers involved, and larger proportionately too (24 per cent compared with 12 per cent in Oldham). Hindus and Sikhs were also significantly represented in Newham, and Sikhs were even more significantly represented in Coventry, although even here the proportions were relatively small overall (5 per cent). While differences of faith have featured prominently in recent debates, however, it was also noteworthy that the numbers of those with ‘no religion’ or ‘religion not stated’ together outnumbered those of any other faith apart from ‘Christian’ in both Oldham and Coventry – although not in Newham.

Table 2 Religion (% of total population), 2001

	Coventry	Newham	Oldham	England
Christian	65.26	46.84	72.62	71.74
Buddhist	0.26	0.65	0.11	0.28
Hindu	2.58	6.93	0.61	1.11
Jewish	0.07	0.20	0.04	0.52
Muslim	3.88	24.31	11.06	3.10
Sikh	4.64	2.83	0.03	0.67
Other	0.24	0.27	0.12	0.29
No religion	15.06	9.01	8.92	14.59
Religion not stated	7.99	8.95	6.47	7.69

Source: Census 2001: www.statistics.gov.uk.

Figure 1 Ethnicity



The key factor, in terms of the focus of this research, though, was the rate of population fluidity and change. Tables 3 and 4 provide some clues here. Oldham emerged as the area with the lowest proportion of households who had moved into the area from outside the UK a year ago, and the lowest outflow, while Newham had the highest proportions, followed by Coventry.

Table 3a Flow of household immigration and migration: all people

	England and Wales	Coventry	Newham	Oldham
All people (total)	52,041,916	300,848	243,891	217,273
Percentage of these who are migrants	12.18	13.7	13.4	10.24
Percentage who moved into the area from within the UK	0.11	3.77	4.9	2.0
Percentage who moved into the area from outside the UK	0.71	0.96	1.45	0.27
Percentage no usual address 1 year ago	0.81	0.99	1.9	0.85
Percentage who moved within the area	10.55	7.98	5.14	7.12
Percentage who moved out of the area	0.28	4.11	6.59	2.55

Source: Office for National Statistics (2004) *Census 2001 National Report for England and Wales Part 2*. London: TSO.

Table 3b Flow of household immigration and migration: all people in ethnic groups other than white

	England and Wales	Coventry	Newham	Oldham
All people (total)	4,521,050	48,205	147,761	30,111
Percentage of these who are migrants	16.1	17.77	13.67	13.59
Percentage who moved into the area from within the UK	0.08	4.5	3.96	1.48
Percentage who moved into the area from outside the UK	2.51	2.97	1.65	1.06
Percentage no usual address 1 year ago	1.84	1.95	2.17	1.97
Percentage who moved within the area	11.67	8.35	5.89	9.08
Percentage who moved out of the area	0.17	4.31	5.1	1.62

Source: Office for National Statistics (2004) *Census 2001 National Report for England and Wales Part 2*. London: TSO.

These proportions matched the researchers' perceptions of the different patterns as these varied between the three case study areas. However, the actual figures posed considerable problems. The figures in Tables 3a and b were based upon the 2001 Census, before recent waves of migration from the accession states. Considerable anxieties emerged as local authorities struggled to plan for these differing patterns of change. In Newham, for instance, the local authority had established a research unit to undertake its own research to address these information needs. As a local authority officer in another case study area commented, when asked if migrations from accession states were reducing in the area, following what seemed to be an emerging national trend, 'how would they know?' The problems associated with this lack of accurate, up-to-date data emerge at various points in subsequent chapters and is the focus of one of our recommendations.

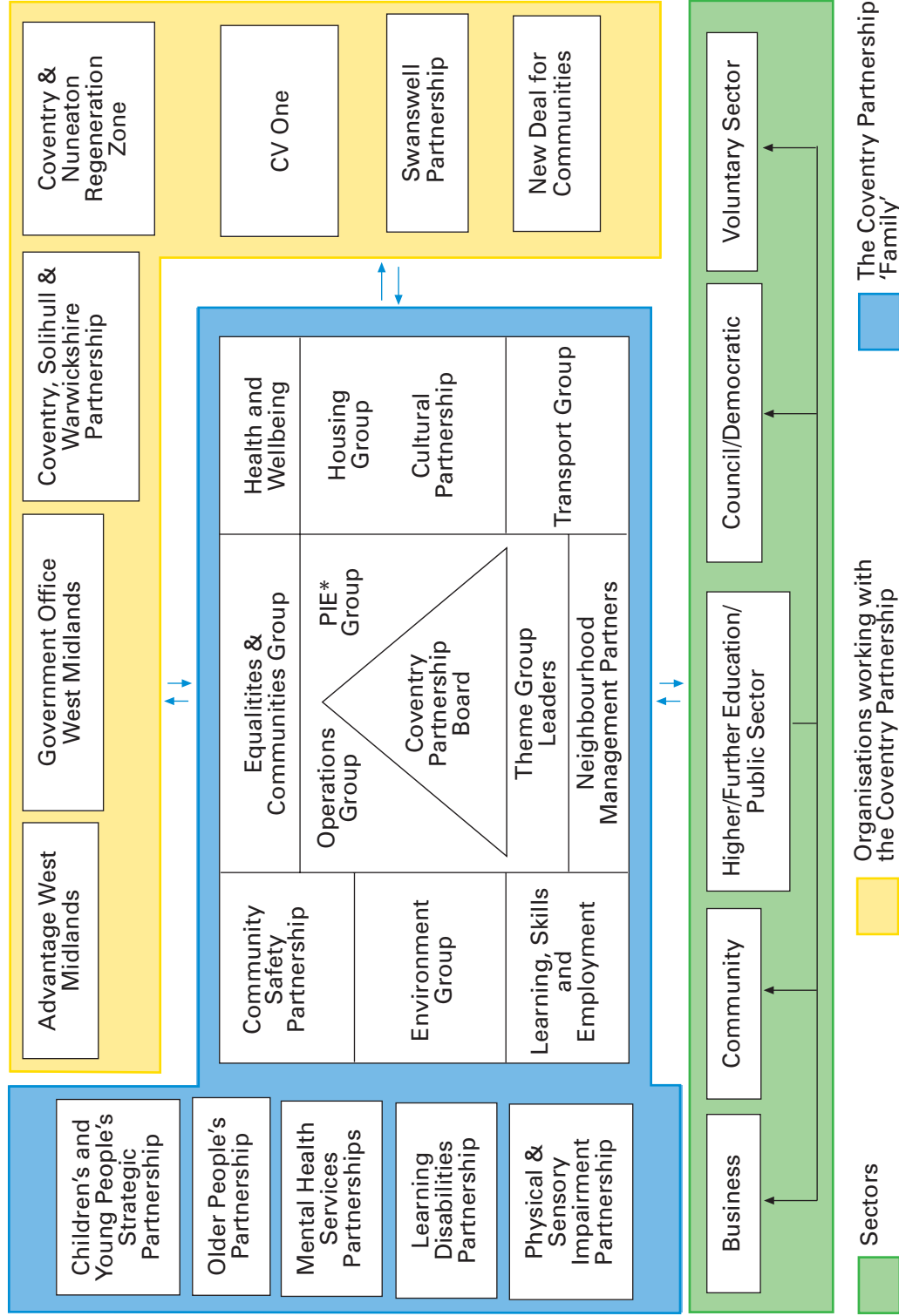
Patterns of local governance and community engagement structures in the three case study areas

Structures of governance in Coventry

In Coventry in 2007 the local authority was Conservative controlled, with 28 Conservative councillors, 23 Labour councillors, two Socialist Alternative councillors and one Liberal Democrat councillor. It has a leader and cabinet system. The Local Strategic Partnership (the Coventry Partnership) has been the key structure of local governance. The Coventry Partnership Board consists of 19 statutory sector representatives (six councillors, 13 public sector agency representatives) and eleven community or voluntary sector representatives (five representatives of the Community Empowerment Network, six from the larger-scale voluntary sector), as well as five private sector representatives. There are no members formally representing particular ethnic communities or the black and minority ethnic (BME) sector as a whole.¹ The LSP has a number of subgroups, including themed groups for Equalities and Community Cohesion and for Cultural Partnership, and Communities of Interest Partnerships. Of the latter, people from the most disadvantaged black and minority ethnic groups have recognition as a community of interest, identified for support within the Community Plan but as yet without their own partnership group. Figure 2 sets out these structures in the form of a diagram.

The local authority and other service providers have also been developing structures for community engagement. Coventry has a Youth Council, for example. This has been developed as part of the Democracy Project run by Coventry youth service for young people aged between 11 and 21, to have an influence on decision-makers in the city and in government. The aim is to ensure a voice for young people in Coventry. The Youth Council meets regularly at the council and elections are held for the UK Youth Parliament. Locally, there are also Ward Forums in Coventry.² Other structures include Patient and Public Involvement Forums and tenant representation on the board of Whitefriars, the social landlord that manages Coventry's local authority housing stock.³

Figure 2 The Coventry Partnership – how it works



* Progress impact and evaluation.
Source: www.coventrypartnership.com/upload/documents/webpage/document1033.pdf.

— Diversity and structures of local governance in the three case study areas

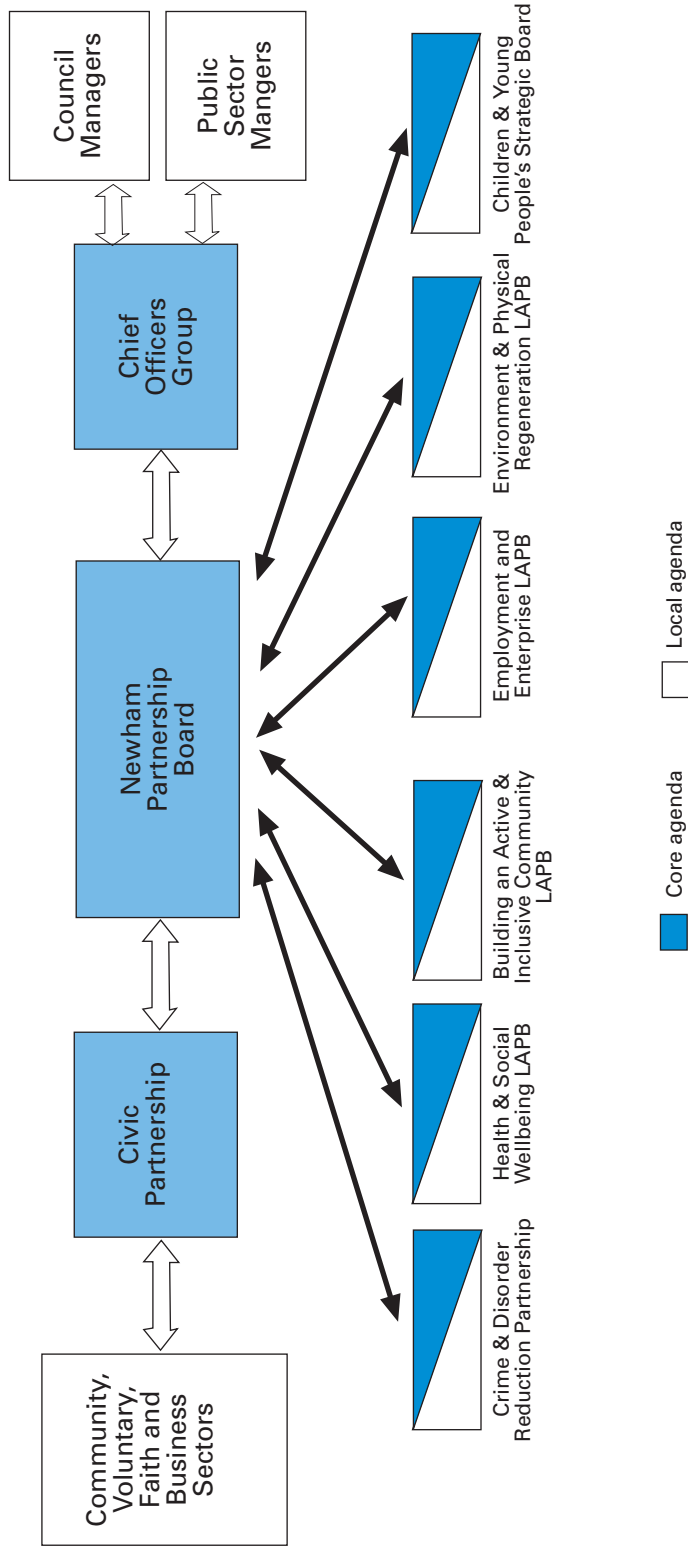
Community engagement has been facilitated in Coventry through the Coventry Community Empowerment Network (CCEN), represented on the LSP board and its themed groups. Coventry Voluntary Service Council (CVSC) is the overall umbrella body for voluntary and community organisations in Coventry.⁴ Anchor organisations play key roles here, then, enabling new as well as established communities to engage in local structures of governance. So, Coventry has a structure for the promotion of equalities, Coventry Ethnic Minorities Action Partnership, and also the Coventry Refugee Centre, which supports refugees and asylum seekers. Regional organisations, agencies and networks such as the West Midlands Faiths Forum provide additional back-up. Subsequent chapters provide more information about other structures, networks, agencies and groups that provide support to newcomers, including the New Communities Forum and Peace House, an independent community organisation with a long track record of activism around peace, social solidarity and social justice issues, internationally as well as more locally.

In summary then, Coventry has relatively clear, straightforward structures of governance, with coterminous boundaries between key services provided by the local authority and the police, for example. This clarity of structures emerges subsequently as a factor in the promotion of effective community engagement in the city.

Structures of governance in Newham

In 2007, Newham Borough Council had a directly elected mayor (one of only 13 in the UK) and cabinet, 54 Labour councillors, three Christian People's Alliance councillors and three Respect councillors. When the fieldwork began in the early part of the year, the Local Strategic Partnership functioned with a small Executive Group with strategic direction provided via the Civic Partnership, which was comprised of the mayor and two mayoral nominations, five other public sector representatives, ten representatives from the Community Board (one from each community forum area), three representatives from the voluntary, community and faith sectors (elections organised by the Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium), a representative from Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium (NVCS) itself, three representatives from the business sector, two Youth Parliament representatives and five representatives (one each) from the Local Action Partnership Boards (LAPB). The Local Action Partnership Boards had been established with each being responsible for addressing specific priorities, such as community safety. Figure 3 includes a diagram of these structures.

Figure 3 Newham Partnership Board



Source: London Borough of Newham (2007).

— Diversity and structures of local governance in the three case study areas

Following a review of the LSP during 2007, the Executive Group was abolished and the Civic Partnership replaced by the Newham Partnership Board (NPB), a body with 37 members – 21 of whom are elected members of the council appointed by the mayor. The other sectors continue to have representation and the voluntary and community sector retains four representatives, but there is currently debate over whether these are to be elected via NVSC or appointed by the mayor.

Newham has been developing a more outgoing strategy for participation, with more focus upon encouraging people to participate via events, rather than expecting people to come to more formal meetings. So the Newham Partnership Board is to be supplemented by the Newham Conference, an annual event open to the public, with the aim of giving voice to a wide cross-section of stakeholders. Further examples of Newham's approach to participation via events emerge subsequently in this report.

There have also been changes to the structures for more local engagement. Community Forums were set up in 2000, covering the different neighbourhoods of the borough, as structures for community engagement. Following a number of boundary changes (some during this research) there were nine forums, each of which was in the process of setting up an 'active community team' made up of volunteers, who will work with the local community lead councillor to plan and organise four free community events each year. At these events, the council will use surveys to capture people's views on the area in order to identify local issues and priorities. These events will in effect replace the Community Forum meetings.

In addition, for young people aged 13–19 there are local Youth Forums, and a Youth Parliament, linked with school councils. Newham elected its first youth mayor in 2007, to represent the interests of young people to the mayor, councillors, businesses, the wider community and other public service providers. The young mayor is to represent all young people, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, class or sexuality, working closely with the Youth Council and young people more generally.

Other examples of structures for community engagement in governance have included Patient and Public Involvement Forums, a Newham Community and Police Forum and a Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. And there was a New Deal for Communities community-based regeneration partnership in the West Ham and Plaistow area.

Newham Homes, the RSL (Registered Social Landlord) that manages the local authority housing stock, co-ordinates six Area Tenant Liaison Committees (ATLC) and each recognised tenants' and residents' association can nominate two representatives annually to their respective ATLC. These committees then have

representatives on the Borough-wide Tenant Liaison Committee (BTLC), which meets regularly to discuss issues that affect all tenants and leaseholders across the borough. There is a patchwork of other RSLs across the borough, each with its own tenant engagement structure.

Participation and community engagement in these structures are supported by both the local authority's Community Participation Unit and the Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium. The local voluntary and community sector infrastructure is supported by a number of anchor organisations including Community Links, the Renewal Project, the Refugee and Migrant Project (RAMP) and the Aston Mansfield Community Regeneration Unit, as well as by subregional support networks including the East London CVS network. The key role played by these anchor organisations emerges subsequently, illustrating their importance in the development of promising practices to promote inclusive approaches to community engagement and social cohesion.

In summary, governance structures in Newham have tended to be fairly fluid, in response to both government policy and changing local circumstances. During the course of this research we focused on the Community Forums, but they were, as outlined above, themselves in a period of change. A strong and engaged mayor and a large Labour majority are also key components of the local picture. The mayor's desire for elected councillors to engage directly with residents, bypassing traditional forums and voluntary sector structures, has driven the increasing focus on community events and activities in the hope that this will engage a larger number and wider range of people in shaping priorities for their local area.

Structures of governance in Oldham

When the fieldwork was being carried out in 2007, Oldham had a leader and cabinet, with no overall political control. There were 30 Labour councillors, 26 Liberal Democrats, three Conservatives and one Independent.

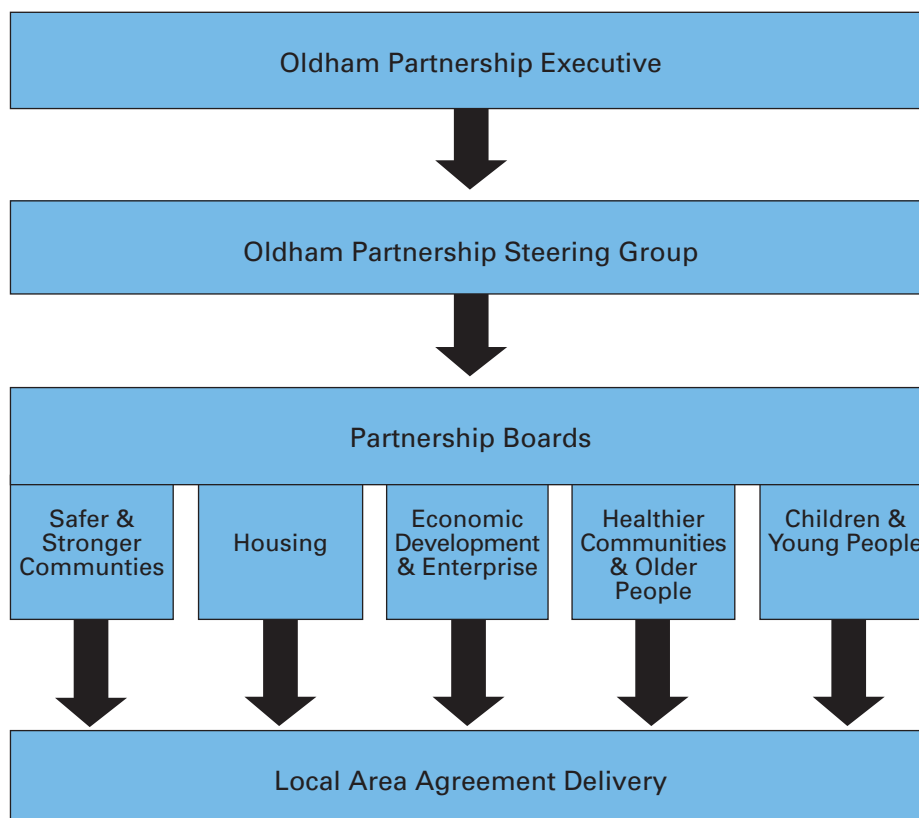
The Local Strategic Partnership (Oldham Partnership) has had an Executive (unusually, not chaired by the council leader or mayor, but by a representative from Oldham Sixth Form College) with representatives from the local authority, the Primary Care Trust, the private sector, the police, the Voluntary, Community and Faith Partnership, the Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus, and the Fire and Rescue Service. A representative from the Government Office for the North West attended in a supportive role, along with a representative of the Community Cohesion Advisory Group (emphasising the commitment to addressing issues of community cohesion in Oldham). The LSP has had a Steering Group and

— Diversity and structures of local governance in the three case study areas

Partnership Boards relating to Local Area Agreement themes (see Figure 4). In addition, a series of Advisory Groups were being given the remit to provide advice and support throughout the Oldham Partnership structure on the issues which cut across each block of the Local Area Agreement. These have included:

- *The Voluntary, Community and Faith Partnership:* This has been guaranteed representation throughout the structure of the Oldham Partnership through a formal protocol. There are voluntary sector representatives on the Oldham Partnership Executive and on the Steering Group. Seats are also reserved on each Partnership Board for voluntary, community and faith sector representatives.
- *The Community Cohesion Advisory Group:* This was established to ensure that the borough continued to build levels of community cohesion through both its strategies and programmes, including consideration of issues around race, religion and intergenerational relationships.

Figure 4 The Oldham Partnership



Six Area Networks have been providing the key formal link between the Local Strategic Partnership and the democratic process available to local residents. These Area Networks have Area Committees, made up of local ward councillors and co-opted members of the local community. They offer a forum for residents and representatives of community groups in the area to discuss, comment on and question councillors about decisions made and being proposed which affect the area. Local citizens are co-opted from each Area Committee to represent the views of their area on the Oldham Partnership Steering Group. Regular reports from the Oldham Partnership are taken to the Area Committees for scrutiny, feedback and comment.

Other structures include the Oldham Patient and Public Involvement Forum and structures for engaging tenants and residents such as those developed by First Choice Homes, which manages Oldham's council housing. There is a commitment to student participation in governance in schools and colleges through school councils, and a Youth Council. The significance of structures to engage young people emerges powerfully subsequently, particularly the Youth Council's role in promoting mutual understanding among diverse groups of young people in Oldham, as part of developing strategies to address issues of community cohesion locally.

The Voluntary, Community and Faith Partnership is a democratically elected body of representatives from voluntary and community groups, drawn from the membership of Voluntary Action Oldham. There are places set aside for low-funded and unfunded groups, larger organisations, Inter Faith Forum representatives and under-represented groups. Members on the Partnership are responsible for representing the views of the sector, not their organisations' views. Members represent the sector on a range of forums and partnerships, including the LSP. The significance of the faith sector's contributions emerge strongly too in subsequent chapters.

The Partnership is being supported by Voluntary Action Oldham. Voluntary Action Oldham has been the main capacity-building, voluntary and community sector development agency for Oldham, providing practical support services to voluntary sector organisations and community groups. It also supports the representative body for the sector, providing representation on many of the panels and partnerships across the borough, including the Local Strategic Partnership, lobbying and supporting the recognition of the voluntary sector as an equal partner within the decision-making processes which affect the town.⁵

Similarities as well as differences

To summarise then, there were similarities as well as differences between the three case study areas. The patterns of diversity varied, and yet there was shared recognition of the importance of addressing issues of difference and population churn, issues that were expected to continue as challenges for community engagement in local structures of governance. There were differing party political make-ups, different council and LSP structures, and different forms of localised community engagement – but in each of the three areas, new structures of governance were evolving in fluid ways, with pivotal roles still for local authorities.

Common themes emerged too, in relation to the importance of voluntary, community and faith-based support structures, including anchor organisations, that have been enabling new communities as well as more established communities to engage with local structures of governance. The fluidity and the complexity of these changing structures of governance pose challenges enough for established communities to navigate, even for those already armed with the knowledge and skills to engage with more traditional structures of governance – taking up issues with local councillors or participating in tenants' and residents' forums, for example. The challenges could be expected to be even greater for new arrivals, coming perhaps from very different contexts, whether politically, social and/or culturally. So how were newer communities engaging with these varying structures in practice? The following chapters provide evidence, based upon the views of those involved in voluntary and community sector networks, organisations and groups as well as the views of professionals and policy-makers locally.

Summary

- There were differences between the three case study areas, both in the structures of local governance and in the extent of super-diversity and population churn in each.
- Local authorities were still centrally important but structures of governance were becoming increasingly fluid and complex, posing major challenges even for established communities to navigate.
- This fluidity and complexity was potentially even more problematic for new arrivals.
- Anchor organisations could play key roles here, supporting communities to enable them to engage in these changing structures of local governance.

4 Who is being heard and who is not being heard?

This chapter explores the findings from the three case studies, identifying who is being heard and who is not being heard so effectively. The chapter starts by examining the differing ways in which participants themselves explain what they mean by 'being heard', illustrating their varying aims and objectives. This sets the context for the discussion of promising practices – ways in which those involved with different structures of governance have been working to develop more inclusive policies and practice – addressing these challenges in the context of population churn, fluid communities engaging with these changing structures of governance.

Varying definitions, aims and objectives

Participation and community engagement have been defined in varying ways, depending upon the differing perspectives of those involved, perspectives that have been analysed and critiqued by academics over recent decades (Arnstein, 1969; Burns, *et al.*, 1994; Hart, 1997). Rather than engaging with these debates in detail here, for the purposes of analysing our research findings we focus, in contrast, upon the varying definitions, aims and objectives that were articulated by those participating – or not participating – in structures of local governance.

What does it mean 'to be heard'?

Participants in the research from formal or informal organisations in new communities defined 'being heard' in different ways, based upon varying aims and objectives. To some extent, this means that although the same questions were being asked, different types of engagement were actually being discussed. In summary, these definitions included:

- *'Being heard' as receiving funding:* For some groups, 'being heard' by the council was not so much a matter of engagement with governance structures; rather it was measured in terms of whether or not they received funding and/or support for specific amenities such as a local centre for their community. Receiving funding to provide services and amenities made them feel recognised as a community, and that was what they required. While this was an entirely understandable aim, however, the provision of separate facilities and services raises important

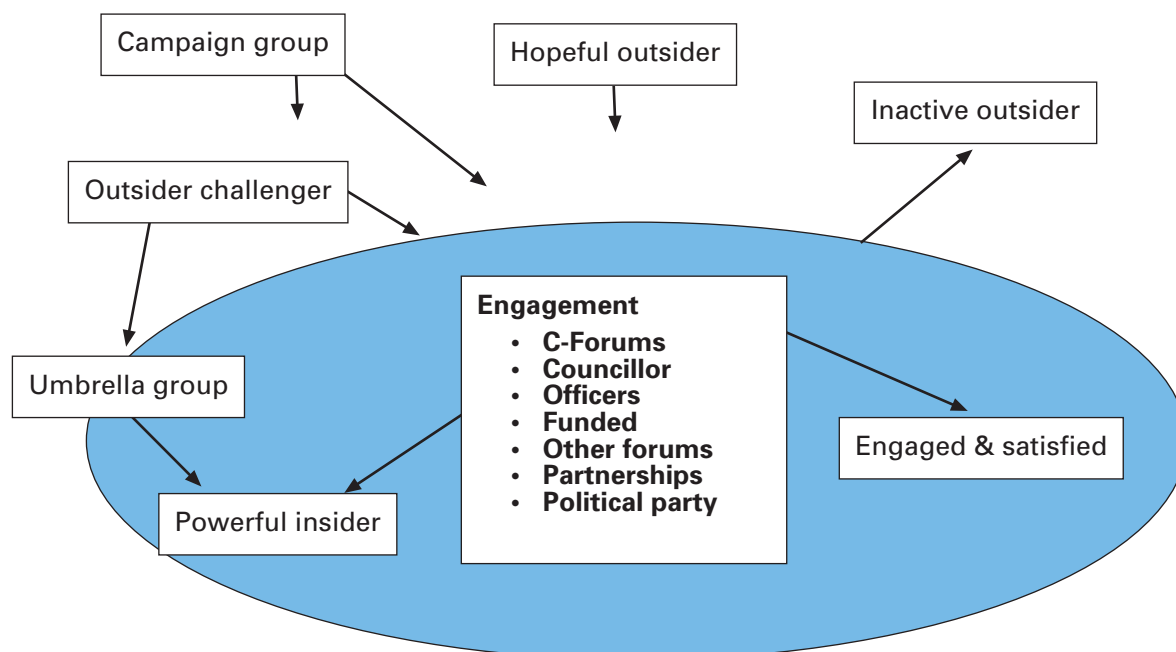
challenges too, potentially re-enforcing social divisions rather than social solidarity, challenges that are explored in more detail in Chapter 6.

- *'Being heard' as being listened to respectfully within the context of continuing dialogue:* Other groups defined 'being heard' in terms of whether or not they felt that their views were being taken into consideration and listened to respectfully. Whatever the outcome, groups working with this type of definition of 'being heard' expected that a proper explanation would be given if their requests were denied. This approach tended to characterise the most effectively established relationships between communities and local structures of governance, demonstrating levels of transparency and trust, typically developed over time.

The fact that a community leader or community representative felt 'heard' did not necessarily translate into a community feeling 'heard', however. Some communities were not even aware that they were being represented, or that their issues were being aired – challenges of democratic representation and accountability that are discussed in more detail subsequently.

Nor were these definitions, aims and objectives necessarily static. On the contrary, in fact, communities and community representatives could – and often did – shift their positions over time. In some cases, communities started as outsiders, campaigning for particular needs to be met, and moving towards closer 'insider' dialogue and engagement with structures of governance. And conversely, there were examples of communities that moved further away, feeling increasingly 'unheard', marginalised and excluded. Figure 5 summarises these varying routes to – and from – power.

Figure 5 Routes to power for community groups



Outsider: There are groups that start off with the approach that they are going to challenge the council from outside, such as many campaign groups, either as a deliberate decision or by default, perhaps challenging the authority on an individual advice case that has come to them. Some of these individuals and groups stay outside as a matter of choice, although they may have excellent access to the inside, in terms of knowing how to make their voices heard effectively – from outside.

Hopeful outsider: There are also groups who hope to become council insiders, to gain influence or funding, and choose to go through formal civic engagement channels.

Experience of engagement: Some hopeful outsiders are not aware of or struggle to find information about how to engage. Those hopeful outsiders who do experience engagement may respond in a range of different ways. The direction that the community group takes is likely to depend on characteristics of the community leaders and on the quality of the engagement mechanism which is in place, as well as the support available, e.g. via anchor organisations in the area. It will also depend heavily on the nature of the issue that the group wishes to raise.

Engaged & satisfied: There are those who feel satisfied with their opportunities to engage at the level of their choice, as and when they feel the need.

Powerful insider: There are those who see opportunities for increasing their power and influence, and increasingly come close to key decision-makers within the council and become insiders. There are also examples of those who engage progressively and through this find themselves enabled to take up new opportunities, including new career pathways.

Outsider challengers: There are those who feel that they have been pushed further away from the council, and choose to challenge more strongly from outside. Some of these groups find alternative routes to insider power through umbrella organisations, which may work in partnership with the council, or have close inside relationships to draw on.

Inactive outsider: There are those who have had persistently negative experiences and so become cynical and inactive.

Barriers to getting 'heard'

The groups that described themselves as feeling 'heard' effectively tended, unsurprisingly, to be those that had found routes to power, overcoming the barriers and challenges to be encountered on their way. In summary, as so many previous studies have already identified, these barriers have included:

- practical barriers such as lack of information and understanding of relevant decision-making processes, lack of transport to meetings and lack of childcare;
- personal barriers such as lack of confidence and/or feelings of discomfort in formal meetings and/or difficulties in the use of English;
- socio-economic barriers including the lack of rights for asylum seekers and the reality of refugees needing to have several jobs to try to support themselves and families back home;
- motivational barriers such as scepticism as to whether involvement is likely to make any difference, cynicism as a result of previous negative experiences, or simply doubts as to whether the desired outcomes could be achieved via local structures of governance at all rather than via some other route (such as through the local MP);

- barriers relating to legitimacy, recognition and acceptance – recognition that is sometimes gained from established organisations or council officers and in other instances by the fact of moving from informal organisation towards formal constitution.

Clearly newcomers face particular challenges here. Well-established organisations and groups are more likely to know how to make their voices heard through formal structures of governance such as LSPs. New arrivals typically lack information and understanding about structures and decision-making processes in a new local context, just as some may be settling into an alien environment with the added barrier of having to operate effectively in English. And they may well face issues that are beyond the scope of local governance structures, such as issues with immigration and asylum. Issues of time emerged too, not only for those with caring responsibilities but also for those working particularly long hours, whether as migrant workers or as migrants struggling to establish their own businesses. They may face additional challenges too, if they do not have recognised organisations or groupings representing their communities, or if they belong to groups which have the reputation of being ‘difficult to reach and engage’ because the group is internally divided. In Newham, for example, one community, the Kashmiri community, was not even being formally defined as a community in terms of its geographical origins, let alone its neighbourhood base in Newham.¹

As with some of the newer communities, like Somalis, established BME populations find themselves put into categories which turn out to be far less homogenous than some service providers and funders imagine. Africans and African-Caribbean people are, according to one black worker, ‘lumped together but fundamentally different, for example in how they migrated here, what facilities they want, what their family structures are’. This sort of ‘lumping together’ can serve to stop some voices being heard, as only one section of a ‘community’ can be listened to, leaving the other sections feeling relatively disempowered.

Established communities can and do face similar barriers too. The language used in meetings may be English. But if the business is conducted in ‘a lawyer’s language that a layman would not understand’, as one participant expressed it, this is also alienating. While difficult enough for established communities to navigate, these barriers may make it even more difficult for newcomers to access and engage with service providers, exacerbating the feelings of isolation that typically accompany the process of adjusting to a new environment.

Disengagement was similarly evident among established and engaged faith community groups, as well as among newcomers. A sense of powerlessness emerged in relation to the impact of large-scale redundancies in the motor industry in Coventry, for instance. Changes to the role of local government also appeared to have increased cynicism among some established groups: this, they considered, was leading local councils to focus on finding 'new ways of measuring performance' and 'statistics' rather than quality service delivery.

But disengagement was particularly marked among newer communities. Understanding engagement routes is key, and unformalised groups can face particular challenges, lacking the capacity to engage, let alone the capacity to apply for funding to meet their specific needs. The Swahili Community Trust in Newham was quoted in this context, as an example of a group that had been struggling for over five years to develop the capacity to apply successfully for funding.

As the Coventry case study demonstrates, communities and groups can and do develop this understanding over time – but not all do. South Asian communities were typically identified here as examples of communities that have become firmly established on the local scene since their arrival a generation or so ago – effectively organised to put forward their views to represent their needs and wants, using a range of strategies from separate organisation and community action to engagement in mainstream political parties.

Engagement also requires an understanding of and engagement with local political processes, and an understanding of which issues can, and which cannot, be addressed and resolved at different levels, for instance, along with understanding the specific remits of local councillors. In Coventry, for example, there were South Asian councillors representing their communities across the different political parties in the council. The importance of engaging with local politics – and the particular importance of linking representative with more deliberative forms of democracy – is explored in more detail below.

Groups and communities could – and did – come to make themselves heard more effectively over time, as a result of capacity-building and community development support. As subsequent examples in this chapter illustrate, there are two-way processes at work here, enabling communities to engage more effectively on the basis of knowledge and critical understanding as to how needs and wants might be addressed at different levels, while enabling service providers to listen to and engage more effectively with local communities and groups, proactively working with groups to identify mechanisms for meeting new community needs.

Getting heard: Oldham's Youth Council

In Oldham, a Youth Council was established some two years ago as part of local authority responses to earlier civil disturbances involving young people in the city. This Youth Council illustrates ways in which young people's voices can be heard more effectively, building relationships of trust and understanding with officers from the relevant structures of local governance. There are currently 47 members of the Youth Council, including young British-born Asian men (although few young British-born Asian women as yet) who are represented in greater proportion than they are in the population of the city more generally. Through the Youth Council, whose structures mirror those of the local authority, young people have come to feel empowered to make their voices heard effectively.

'It's a positive thing – it's getting young people's voice heard', reflected one 15 year old, adding that he felt that decision-makers were 'slowly changing their minds' in terms of taking young people's views seriously. A young British Bengali provided a specific example here, explaining that young people's views had impacted upon the selection process for the recruitment of the executive director of Children and Families Services because of the way in which 'we put our views across' about who would be the best candidate for the post. 'I feel in Oldham young people get listened to', he concluded, adding that young people's views had also affected decisions about the restructuring of schools in the city.

Part of the Youth Council's success has been attributed to the professional values and skills of the key staff associated with this, working and building up trust with young people over a period of time. As a result the Youth Council model in Oldham illustrates the achievements that can be made, breaking down some of the myths and misapprehensions that can occur between young people, local professionals and local communities, in periods of change and population churn.

Which groups are not 'being heard'? How far do fluidity and super-diversity explain whose voice is heard or not being heard?

So which groups and communities were not feeling 'heard'? One of the most marginalised groups was identified as being failed asylum seekers, those who had become effectively 'non-persons', existing in what was described as a 'limbo', having neither the right to work nor the right to state-funded services. There were harrowing accounts of the problems experienced by people in this situation, together

with the dilemmas experienced by public service professionals who were not generally supposed to be providing them with services or support. Supporting people threatened with deportation involved campaigning outside of funded service delivery and advocacy work. In Coventry, for example, supporting a former Coventry Refugee Centre (CRC) worker from Congo who was threatened with deportation required a campaign that linked up a range of regional networks, including trade unions, faith representatives, councillors, voluntary organisations, various African/Congolese community groups and other citizens. The case was broadened around the issue of special charter flights introduced to tackle the problem of pilots refusing to fly when deportees resisted. The CRC's former worker was deported on such a flight.

Newer arrivals were identified as being among those least likely to have their voices heard effectively. These groups included refugees and asylum seekers as well as economic migrants – new arrivals from the accession states such as Poles and Lithuanians. The boundaries between these two groups was far from clear-cut, however, as some African migrants came via European Union states, having originally arrived as refugees, but having subsequently become European citizens with the right to work. The complexity of the differences within and between these newer arrivals posed significant challenges for those concerned to enable their voices to be heard effectively via structures of local governance.

Some of these newer groups expressed particular concerns about being heard in the sense of receiving funding to enable them to meet their own needs, such as the need for a safe space to meet each other. Securing a place to meet – 'a place for our own organisation' – could become symbolic for new groups in terms of whether they were feeling heard or not. But these requests posed additional challenges too. It was not simply that they lacked the knowledge and skills or even the confidence to engage, to put forward their requests. When it came to seeking funding they were also encountering the need to formalise their group, so that they could be effectively accountable for public funds. By definition, however, these requirements posed additional challenges for relatively fluid groups, based as they tended to be upon more informal networks. When groups received support enabling them to constitute themselves more formally, this represented a major step forward. In Coventry, for example, as a result of the community development support work of the Coventry Refugee Centre, 40 informal community groups were enabled to become formalised.

But even this type of support was unable to meet all the challenges involved for newcomers in the three case study areas. As one agency reflected, having supported one Somali group, this still left ten other Somali groups in the city, each with similar wants and needs. There was no realistic prospect that public funds could be made available to provide community spaces for all eleven – even if the provision

of so many different spaces could be justified on policy grounds – but the outcome could be that the remaining ten groups were left feeling even more marginalised and even less effectively heard.

These examples illustrate some of the ways in which fluidity and super-diversity can pose additional challenges in terms of whose voices can be effectively heard in terms of gaining access to funding. While there were particular barriers for newer groups, in the context of population churn, there were barriers for more established communities too. The case studies provided evidence of longer-established minorities who felt similarly marginalised, minorities such as African-Caribbean communities in one case study area and travellers in another. There were, in addition, reflections from established white communities, expressing similar feelings of marginalisation – not being effectively heard, not only in terms of not gaining access to funding, but in terms of not having their views taken on board more generally. There were echoes here of the Power Inquiry's conclusions about the causes of disengagement as a result of not feeling effectively heard in the past (Power Inquiry, 2006). There were potential tensions here, including tensions relating to social class and access to resources as well as tensions relating to ethnicity and race.

In addition to differences in terms of ethnicity, race, culture and social class, there were also differences in relation to age – at both ends of the life span. Elderly people who were relatively isolated emerged along with other groups that were unorganised. And young people emerged as less likely to be heard in general, although there were innovative approaches to addressing this, as illustrated by the example of the Youth Council in Oldham, for instance.

One particular factor that triggered feelings of disengagement related to the structures of local governance themselves. Where structures of governance had clear, coherent and consistent frameworks, community engagement tended to be viewed more positively. And conversely, where structures for community engagement were subject to restructuring and change, there was more evidence of disengagement. 'They build up [structures of local community engagement] and it takes months', one participant commented, going on to suggest that 'as soon as they begin to work, they are scrapped, or the terms and conditions change, terms of reference are amended'. As a result of such changes this participant was clearly feeling increasingly alienated, questioning 'is there a genuine desire to consult?'

Such feelings were compounded when service provision was fragmented as a result of subcontracting. 'In our area if you try to complain to the council', one community activist reflected, 'they say that the housing association should deal with it'. 'When

we have issues we don't know who to report them to', commented another. 'There is a chronic and severe lack of information on how to engage. The problem is that we don't have a map of the decision-makers.' Fluid structures of service provision, then, posed problems for newer groups, as well as for established white communities.

There were, in addition, challenges about which issues could be effectively addressed via structures of local governance at all. Neighbourhood Management structures seemed to be most relevant for particular types of groups and communities, typically tenants' and residents' associations, for example – groups with specific geographical bases. Neighbourhood Management structures were perceived as less relevant for communities of interest such as particular BME communities, especially where these were dispersed across the local governance area more widely. Some of the issues of most concern to these communities were beyond the remit of local governance in any case, issues such as those concerned with asylum, for example, where central government departments had direct responsibility for the decisions in question. There were, of course, issues beyond the remit of neighbourhood governance for more established communities too, such as transport planning. But there seemed particular concerns here for newer arrivals, communities with less clearly defined geographical bases.

One particular challenge for Neighbourhood Management structures emerged in Oldham, where White British and Asian British communities have been described as living parallel lives, concentrated in separate geographical areas. While the extent of such separation has been the subject of debate, there would seem to be important issues to be addressed here. As one of the champions of the Inter Faith Forum reflected, if community engagement structures mirror neighbourhood boundaries in Oldham, this could reinforce differences between communities, rather than providing safe spaces within which differences could be negotiated. The Youth Council has provided just such a space for young people, but this could be undermined if the focus shifted to mirror Neighbourhood Management structures in the city.

So super-diversity and population churn do pose additional challenges in terms of community engagement in structures of local governance. This leads the discussion on to explore examples of promising practices, enabling diverse voices to be heard effectively in structures of governance in relation to issues of service planning and service delivery.

Addressing the challenges and overcoming the barriers

The three case study areas provided a range of illustrations of some of the inherent challenges involved, together with a range of examples of promising practices to overcome the barriers to community engagement in differing structures of governance.

Structures of governance in Coventry: the strengths of building upon clear, coherent and consistent frameworks

In Coventry, structures for community involvement and engagement have been developed over a period of years. The Coventry Partnership Board (the Local Strategic Partnership) has been central, together with its 'family' of theme groups and subgroups. The Board has a rotating chair, emphasising the importance of partnership working across sectors (although the city council was also described as having a very influential voice). The Board has five places for the voluntary sector and five places for the Community Empowerment Network (considerably greater representation for the voluntary and community sectors than has generally been the case, at least so far). This local rootedness would seem to have been an important factor in building communication channels within and between sectors. The Community Engagement Strategy was cited, for instance, as an example of an approach that had been significantly rewritten in response to representations from the community sector.

In addition to its history of partnership working, Coventry is a city with relatively clearly defined boundaries encircling a clearly identifiable city centre. This would also seem to have been a factor, promoting effective communication and shared concerns. As Smith and colleagues have demonstrated, having a good fit between local and agency boundaries has emerged as a significant factor in the relative success of partnership working and the mainstreaming of improvements in service delivery more generally (Smith *et al.*, 2007). This is not, of course, to imply that there has been a total lack of tension or competition for resources within and between communities – potential tensions that have had to be addressed in Coventry just as elsewhere.

Neighbourhood Management: a structure that enables neighbourhood community voices to be heard more effectively than the voices of communities of identity and interest?

Neighbourhood Management structures in Coventry further illustrate the positives of building on previous Area Management and then Area Co-ordination structures rather than constantly reinventing the wheel. There were some expressions of disappointment that when Area Co-ordination went city-wide this had been accompanied by some dilution of resources. While there was recognition that resources had become spread more thinly, however, it was also pointed out that approaches had become more strategically focused as a result, with more emphasis on enabling communities to develop initiatives themselves.

Typically, it has been neighbourhood groups such as tenants' and residents' groups that have been most directly engaged – unsurprisingly, given the locality focus. But officers also pointed to the fact that this does still pose challenges about how to engage those who are not involved in such groups. And it poses dilemmas about how to relate to groups that are not organised on a geographical basis either, including new communities that may be more dispersed across the city and family groups dispersed across the country, as well as longer-established groups such as travellers.

Community Safety: a structure through which different voices are being heard

Community Safety structures emerged in the case studies as examples of forums through which different voices *are* being effectively heard, and where attempts are being made to address varying needs, including the needs of both established and newer communities. Community Safety structures were quoted by officers, politicians and community groups alike as providing examples of Partnership Board structures that worked effectively, responding to local voices. In Coventry, we were told that there was real buy-in from senior policy-makers and officers from the different services involved, and there were effective links with Neighbourhood Management and with neighbourhood groups. Strategic Community Safety Assessments are undertaken across the city annually and then fed back into Safer Neighbourhood Groups and the Community Empowerment Network, so that professional assessments can be checked against local perceptions. The whole approach has been preventative, identifying potential problems and developing interventions at the earliest possible stage (setting up an internet café in one neighbourhood with the local youth service, for example, as a positive response to complaints about young people hanging out with apparently nothing to do and nowhere to go). Fortnightly 'Active Intelligence Mapping' meetings enable officers from the relevant services to monitor issues and to identify hot spots, including hot spots for racist graffiti and for

hate crimes, and crime patterns, including racially motivated crimes, with the aim of dealing with them promptly and effectively.

Nevertheless, despite all these endeavours some communities were still expressing the feeling that not enough was being done. Individuals from refugee communities were continuing to view the police as insufficiently responsive in cases of racial harassment and attack. Suspicion and distrust of policing were exacerbated when the Home Office carried out an immigration sweep in an area in which police had been making efforts to build and maintain relationships with new communities. The major social landlords also came in for criticism. The victims of racial attacks were being moved rather than the perpetrators being dealt with, it was argued, leaving concerns that new refugees were then being moved in, only to experience the same forms of harassment.

Despite these criticisms, however, Community Safety emerged as one of the most successful structures overall. There were parallels with Newham's Neighbourhood Watch Committees. These were similarly described as straightforward, transparent structures, 'doing what it says on the tin'. The Neighbourhood Watch Committee meeting in one area was seen as having been 'the event which got most people involved across all divides'. The biggest success was identified as the fact that the Neighbourhood Watch Committee had overcome East Enders' traditional reluctance to report crime (for fear of reprisals as well as not wanting to be seen as a 'grass'). As a result of improved relationships with the police, this reluctance to report crime had been addressed, as residents came to appreciate that there could be safety in numbers – together with the fact that the Neighbourhood Watch Committee filtered through complaints, passing them on to the police on people's behalf.

Outreach and partnership with the voluntary and community sectors: working to enable different voices to be heard more effectively

In Newham, the research identified examples of promising practices in terms of outreach, to contact, inform and support new arrivals. Anchor organisations in the voluntary and community sectors were playing key roles in these respects. For instance, the Newham Voluntary Sector Consortium was providing support services to facilitate participation in the LSP, including support and training to those elected to the LSP. RAMP (a refugee and migrant support project) was giving advice and support to those newly arrived in the country, starting with their immediate concerns for food and shelter and going on to provide assistance in forming support groups and with civic engagement more generally. Community Links, the Black and Minority Community Care Forum and the Aston Mansfield Community Regeneration Unit

were also providing support specifically targeted at smaller groups, enabling them to develop their capacity to engage, while the Asian Link Network was providing training to enable people to represent views effectively at different forums.

Similarly, the Community Empowerment Network (CEN, based in Coventry Voluntary Service Council, CVSC) has been providing capacity-building to enable different voices to be heard via the Coventry Partnership Board and its associated structures. These sessions have been described as being very accessible and very successful. The Community Empowerment Network has, in addition, employed part-time advocates to promote community involvement in different neighbourhoods, including under-represented but established communities as well as newer arrivals.

Overall, then, the role of anchor organisations in the voluntary and community sectors, including faith-based organisations, emerged as a major factor. Where third sector organisations and groups have well-developed roots and networks, these represent key building blocks. The third sector has the potential to promote outreach work, to disseminate information and advice and to facilitate self-organisation and co-operation within and between communities. This is a significant finding from the research, emphasising the importance of the contribution that the third sector can make to the promotion of community engagement in local structures of governance in the context of population fluidity and rapid social change.

Welcome packs for new arrivals and welcome events

Welcome packs were provided by a number of community forums in Newham, to provide information about the area to newcomers. In one case, a welcome pack was piloted and then delivered to every household in the neighbourhood by the local church. In addition, in Newham, flag-raising events are organised when any new community reaches significant numbers. At these ceremonies the community in question's flag is raised alongside the Union Jack at the Town Hall, symbolising the council's welcome to the new-coming community. This is followed by a speech of welcome by the mayor and a reception, enabling council members and officers to meet community leaders, establishing contact and building communication channels for future community engagement. A similar welcome event for newcomers is organised by the mayor in Coventry.

In Coventry, welcome packs were developed by the Welcome Project, a partnership project funded from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, involving the city council, the Refugee Centre and others. A voluntary community-based organisation, Peace House, has run sessions to instruct trainers in how to use the welcome packs

effectively. The City Council Cabinet Member for Equalities ensured support for the launch of this pack, an excellent event attended by some 80 people, including senior managers from key service provider departments. This was described as a 'really good' initiative, working on both sides of the equation, in partnership, to improve communication about structures and services and how to access them. Unfortunately, however, because of funding constraints, anxieties were expressed as to whether there would be sufficient resources to keep updating the welcome pack.

Pathways of engagement: 'one thing led to another'

Sheila traced the story of her involvement in her local neighbourhood, where she had moved with her husband some 20 years ago. At first, she was working long hours, with little time for getting involved in the neighbourhood. Subsequently, however, as a young mother Sheila became more aware of what was going on locally, and the issues that were concerning local residents. One of her neighbours encouraged Sheila to get involved in a local residents' meeting to address these local problems.

Sheila became vice chair of the local neighbourhood association, going on to become more and more involved in building firm roots for the organisation, street by street. Later on, when asylum seekers began to arrive the approach was to welcome them, providing support and information about how to access amenities and services. As Sheila said herself, 'one thing led to another'. She became chair of one of the Neighbourhood Management Action Groups, subsequently becoming elected as chair of Community Empowerment Network (CEN), a position which led to wider involvement in the region and with voluntary and community sector organisations nationally.

By the end of 2003, Sheila successfully applied for the post of Children's Champion, which has included developing a strategy for engagement with implications for working with adults too. So Sheila progressed from neighbourhood activist to chair of the CEN and Children's Champion, through 'one thing leading to another'. Asked what kept her going, in the face of all the challenges involved, Sheila spoke of her strong relationships with elected members and officers as well as with local people, fuelled by the feeling that 'you are making a difference', backed by sound evidence as to outcomes.

Potential parallels among Youth Council members in Oldham

Participation in the Youth Council in Oldham opened up pathways of engagement for the young people involved too. Through the Youth Council, young people gained information and understanding, and most importantly they gained experience of taking responsibility. They ran a Youth Opportunity Fund, for example, and they managed a website as well as running awareness-raising initiatives (about bullying, for instance). A 19-year-old British Bengali member added that as a result of his experiences he had come to feel passionate about the work. After a few months, he said, 'I started enjoying it ... I love going to council meetings and talking to councillors about political things and arguing' – in the sense of putting views forward, he added, not fighting. He had 'gained a passion for young people by working with young people' and through this 'I have got a passion to be a youth worker. If I'd never did this I'd never have thought about doing youth work as a career'.

'Hopeful outsider' – a less positive view from a new community representative

A 'hopeful outsider' provided a less positive account of community engagement. As an activist leading the delivery of a range of key services to a refugee community on a shoestring, he had approached councillors, the police, a housing association, large third sector organisations and local MPs in the hope of securing funding to provide further services and support. In his view, service providers and council officers would continually approach him when they needed to 'consult' new communities but he felt that the reciprocation that he was seeking in the form of official sponsorship was not forthcoming. He felt that his group, as a small community-led organisation, could not compete effectively against bids from the larger, more established organisations who were also working with refugee communities.

While he and his group were identified by several others who were interviewed as being an important player among new communities – with a presence in city forums – he was still expressing frustration, feeling that his lack of success in accessing resources was limiting the potential growth of his group.

Being left out on the margins, despite attempting to engage, had left this refugee activist feeling unheard and cynical. This was despite having mobilised votes (for the local election) and despite having encouraged significant numbers of supporters to participate in key events such as the launch of the New Communities Forum.

Being ‘heard’ locally is not the whole story though

So far this chapter has focused upon whose voices are being heard in the structures of local governance – and whose voices are not being heard effectively – in relation to local service planning and service delivery. These represent key issues in terms of the engagement of so many groups, centrally important in their own right as well as providing entry points: pathways into further engagement in the structures of local governance. Previous research has already identified the potential connections between getting involved in local service delivery and getting involved as an active citizen more generally (Howard and Sweeting, 2007, p. 119).

Local service issues are not the only focal point, however. The most pressing concerns for some groups are national, if not international, in scope as the experiences of so many refugees and asylum seekers illustrate: problems which involve the Home Office in relation to their immigration status, for example, as well as concerns for relatives and friends left behind in their countries of origin. Once they are established in a place of safety, for many refugees the next priority is to begin to rebuild their lives, rather than launching into new involvements locally – although this may change over time as they come to use local services, just as economic migrants’ perspectives may come to shift if they begin to settle with their families for the longer term.

For others, their key concerns relate to services beyond the scope of neighbourhood or even local structures of governance at all: regional issues such as transport, for example, or national issues such as pensions for pensioners’ forums. And for others again, there are underlying doubts about the relevance of the structures of governance themselves: questions about the relevance of engaging with the local authority, for instance, given the fragmentation of responsibilities when it comes to raising housing issues with multiple social housing landlords. The increase of contracting out was a factor here, including the contracting out of community centres to private companies in one area, with the council described as ‘running like a private company’ itself.

As has already been suggested, we began this research with the assumption that it was the communities that were fluid, while the structures were solid, in areas of rapid population change and ‘churn’. This assumption has been increasingly challenged as community participants have been describing the fluidity as well as the fragmentation of the structures of local governance. Meanwhile communities of interest/identity, including new communities, may be geographically dispersed, rather than being located within the boundaries of specific neighbourhoods, posing further challenges for community involvement in Neighbourhood Management, in particular.

The concluding chapter returns to these challenges for our starting points, the initial assumptions about fluid communities and solid structures of governance that this research set out to explore.

Summary

- New arrivals face particular barriers to being heard in local structures of governance, over and above the barriers faced by many more established communities.
- These challenges were exacerbated by the fluidity and complexity of structures of local governance themselves.
- There were examples of promising practices, including examples of outreach work to engage new arrivals as well as more established communities in local structures of governance, supported by community development work by anchor organisations in the voluntary and community sectors as well as by local authorities themselves.
- But local structures of governance, including Neighbourhood Management structures, were not the only levels at which communities, including new communities, need to be heard, having issues with regional and national dimensions to be addressed.

5 Promoting democratic representation and transparent accountability in the context of fluidity and churn

This chapter explores some of the factors that impact upon individuals' and groups' participation in local democratic structures of governance and in political engagement, as active citizens, more generally. Who speaks for whom, and on what basis? How do participative forms of democracy relate to formal political structures? How do decentralised structures of governance address competing claims for legitimacy, for example, and how do they balance the need for transparent accountability systems with the need for flexibility and creativity, if the voices of the less organised are to be heard? And what might be the risks of further marginalisation, disillusion and citizen disengagement if the structures for democratic representation and accountability fail to address these differing challenges effectively?

There are, in addition, related issues concerning the roles of key individuals and structures, including the roles of umbrella organisations in the voluntary and community sectors and the roles of organisations and groups in the political sphere. Do these individuals and groups act as gatekeepers, selecting 'acceptable' voices while screening out the rest? Or do they facilitate others to speak effectively for themselves – whether through local governance structures or through alternative channels for active citizenship – providing capacity-building support for the longer term as well as advocacy support in the here and now? The first part of this chapter identifies some of the key issues and challenges to be addressed, before moving on to focus upon examples of promising practices.

Democratic representation and accountability: challenges and dilemmas in the context of fluidity and churn

Who legitimately speaks for whom constitutes a continuing challenge. As numerous studies have already documented, there are, in any case, tensions inherent in the relationships between formal democratic structures of representation and more direct and participative forms of democracy (Anastacio *et al.*, 2000; Taylor, 2003b; Purdue, 2007). For those representing BME communities, including new communities, these inherent tensions would seem potentially particularly problematic. Different

communities may have varying cultures of representation and accountability, nor do new communities necessarily organise themselves formally along clearly defined boundaries at all. Among particular regional groupings such as South Asians, there may be major differences of culture, religion, class, political perspective and caste, for example. And even within apparently nationally based groupings, such as Somalis, there may be significant differences within and between groups, just as there may be differences in terms of individuals' citizenship status even within the same group (as refugees, asylum seekers and/or EU citizens). New communities may organise themselves in informal ways, based upon more personal networks of support, that may be invisible to decision-makers within local structures of governance. And informal networks may be less effective channels for the voices of particular groups, including women and younger people, to be heard.

Deciding whose voices are genuinely representative is an ongoing challenge, then, for those concerned with local structures of governance. In Coventry, for instance, following the demise of the local Community Relations Council, there were debates as to how BME communities were to be represented on the key structure of governance, the Coventry Partnership Board. One option was to invite the Coventry Ethnic Minorities Action Partnership (CEMAP) to fulfil this role, an option that was not originally taken, on the grounds that CEMAP was not as yet believed to be representing the range of BME communities in the city. Since then, CEMAP has been provided with support to undertake outreach work and to reach under-represented groups, including new communities – a very positive response to this challenge.

A more complex, but nonetheless fundamental question, relates to the difference between the *quality* or intensity of representation and participation and their *quantity* or extensiveness. How important is it that there are representatives of each community, proportionate to their numbers, on each structure of governance? As one person who was interviewed put it, agencies may be comfortable with a 'checkbox' approach: 'they want a Somali representative to tick the Somali box, an Asian representative to tick the Asian box, but they are not interested in *how* they represent Somalis and Asians', this person commented. Subsequent examples demonstrate the importance of the *quality* of representation and the blend of formal and informal pathways through which communities are represented in decision-making structures, often through key individuals or groups.

Key individuals, groups and organisations

Key individuals, groups and organisations can, and so often do, play vital roles, providing 'bridging social capital' – linking communities and structures of governance.

Here too there is an extensive literature, based upon previous research. The case studies provide evidence of these vital roles, performed by particular councillors, officers and community activists as well as by particular umbrella organisations, including faith-based organisations and groups, as well as networks concerned with the needs of new communities such as refugee and migrant workers' forums. The role of such key individuals is particularly important in situations of diversity and churn. Migrants have tended to turn to known individuals within their own communities for information and advice, in order to navigate the challenges of their unfamiliar situations – a pattern for migrant communities in differing contexts. But, as subsequent examples also illustrate, a dependence on key individuals may bring fragility too – especially in the light of fluidity in the structures of governance, as well as in the communities that they serve.

The role of councillors and of representative democracy

In some areas, community lead councillors hold specific budgets, making access to local councillors even more significant as a way into participation and empowerment. The role of councillors has been described as relatively porous – blurring distinctions between formal and informal representation processes. Positive aspects of this include the ways in which local councillors (including those from minority communities) spend time talking informally with local gatekeepers, a way in which councillors 'are open to voices – a participatory moment within representative democracy', as this was described in one case study area. So being a member of the controlling political party was described by an activist from an African youth organisation as opening 'a very positive pathway' to make himself heard, not only for himself but for other members of his community. He considered that he had received very positive responses to issues that he had raised.

From the research it emerged that the converse may also be the case, however. Having a councillor elected from a particular community can even be seen as a hindrance, rather than a help. As a participant in one of the case study areas explained, in his view the council considered that they had consulted with his particular community if the issue had been raised with the councillor concerned – whether or not this councillor had actually consulted within his community more widely. The community participant in question, meanwhile, took the view that the councillor was, in fact, speaking for the political party which had put him up for election in the first place – 'toeing the party line' rather than representing the community, as the participant expressed this. And councillors can become conduits for the dispensation of 'grace and favour', informal mechanisms for resource allocation on the basis of party political connections. In the view of a member of the

LSP in a neighbouring area – and former councillor himself – ‘local politics is about buying people, dealing with people in their own little groups, playing off one group against the other’s needs’. Similarly, informal leaders may have their leadership status reinforced by being seen to have the ear of formal representatives such as councillors and council officers, adding to their informal authority within their community, whether or not they are actually listening to the wider membership of that community.

The significance of party politics and representative democracy emerged powerfully, then, across the case study areas, both positively and sometimes negatively, from differing perspectives. Access to local politicians and to local MPs was identified as key in terms of opening pathways to decision-making processes. In Newham, the involvement of local councillors was formalised as three councillors are appointed by the mayor to work with community forums. These lead councillors facilitate links with other groups and with other statutory services such as the police, for example, building bridges between communities, including new communities, and local structures of governance.

While a strong connection with local politicians was identified as a positive advantage, downsides were also identified. Being perceived as political outsiders – challenging council policies – was defined as being risky, in some contexts, if community organisations wanted to continue to receive council funding. Definitions of ‘being heard’ as ‘receiving funding’ have already been identified in terms of their inherent tensions.

From across the case studies, then, it was clear that the role of councillors continues to be crucial. The recent Councillors Commission’s recommendations include ways of providing them with effective support. There are relevant implications here for promoting the engagement of new communities in local structures of governance.

Community leaders and informal representation within new communities

Meanwhile informal leaders can find ways in which to formalise their roles, as representatives through community forum-type structures. These can provide mechanisms for minority groups to gain access, facilitating social inclusion. Conversely, these can become mechanisms for social exclusion for those who remain unrepresented, including minorities within minorities and less powerful groups, such as young Muslim women. For example, new communities were described by a white community development worker as being characterised by a primarily male leadership. The particular isolation of women in the home was

identified as a continuing but typically under-recognised problem within some of the new community groups.

Community development workers have to navigate these complexities, a particular challenge in dynamic and diverse areas. One told us: 'When the MP comes or the police want to consult, everybody knows who you go to. They have no formal role, but have developed from being involved for a long while – which is fine, as long as we also nurture new people'. Another reflected that 'With every community there is somebody to represent them, but some are better somebodies than others. There are the movers and the shakers, but sometimes the movers and shakers are moving and shaking for themselves and not for their whole communities'.

One particular feature of the gatekeeping role emerged here, with specific implications for new communities. Interviews with community workers identified instances where gatekeepers from some communities continued to operate in ways that were traditionally acceptable back home. These practices included the expectation of a fee in return for services such as translation or advice and support with job-seeking or introductions to relevant agencies and organisations. While this was seen as contributing to 'bonding capital' within the communities in question, the downside was that newcomers were not accessing free services (such as those provided by anchor organisations such as the local law centre), while the positions of the gatekeepers in question were becoming ever more firmly entrenched.

Community development and key individuals

Meanwhile, anchor agencies themselves were focusing increasingly on service delivery in many cases, leaving less time and space for more open-ended outreach and staying close to communities, including newly arrived communities. This emerged as a particular problem, because community development approaches have particular relevance in the context of diversity and population churn, supporting and enabling new communities' representatives to identify and address issues such as the position of women, people with disabilities and young people in their own communities, and so to represent their communities more inclusively in local structures of governance.

Community development approaches can also contribute to the development of trust between under-represented groups and local structures of governance. In Oldham, for example, there appeared to be a high level of trust which had developed between senior officers and the Oldham Youth Council and other multi-agency partnerships

including the Cohesion Advisory Group for the LSP and the service-specific groups which have been established. Indicators of 'trust' could be seen in the ways in which external examination was being encouraged, the 'opening up' of processes and approaches to user representation – including the appointment of senior staff in children services with young people on the interview panel. The Youth Council was clearly providing opportunities for young people to speak out (or 'Shout About' – the name given to the quarterly events that they organise), representing the views of the 4,640 young people who voted in the 2007 elections for the current 47 members to the local authority and to the Local Strategic Partnership, as well as enabling young people to speak out directly themselves.

Young people's comments certainly included a number of positive conclusions. 'Definitely [they listen]', reflected one 15 year old. 'They value our opinion because we speak to other young people so they have to listen', emphasising the importance of maintaining democratic accountability if representatives are to be recognised as legitimate spokespeople for their constituents.

The Oldham Youth Council exemplified a particular risk, however – the risk of being dependent upon the active presence of and promotion by key individuals, senior officers who have actively championed these initiatives. There have been expressions of concern as to whether, of themselves, these developments demonstrate embedded organisational or cultural changes – although they do, of course, point to the possibilities of such changes.

Devolved structures of governance pose particular challenges here. Developing community engagement in structures of governance requires time and effort, building legitimacy, democratic accountability, inclusivity, transparency and – most importantly – trust. In contrast, however, interviewers identified cases of deepening suspicion, on occasion, when decision-makers were thought to have restructured procedures and processes to avoid local challenges to official agendas, raising the question of whether there was a genuine desire to consult at all. While these types of concerns have emerged from numerous studies already, illustrating ongoing challenges, they may be posing particular issues in areas of fluidity and population churn, with problems enough, by definition, when it comes to the development of trust and sustainable partnership working. This raises the issue of whether the key factor here is the fluidity of the structures for community engagement in governance rather than the fluidity of the communities involved themselves. However, although the case study areas provided illustrations of such issues and challenges, they also provided examples of promising practices.

The story of Fahana, a refugee who was enabled to set up a support group for new arrivals from her community as a result of the support that she had herself received from a local anchor organisation

Fahana has set up a nascent community support group for new arrivals from her community group, who are a persecuted minority. She came to the UK in June 1995 from Somalia, having had to run for her life; she was given leave to remain in 1996. When Fahana arrived in the UK, she received support with the process of claiming asylum from within her community, as well as gaining assistance from RAMP (the Newham community project that supports refugees) In addition to receiving practical support she explained how important it was that 'RAMP knows people's feelings, they sympathise, you can cry. [When] you leave, you feel happy, you forget your problems for the time being'. Building on RAMP's support, Fahana came to know for herself how the different services worked.

So RAMP suggested to Fahana that she might start a small community group, where her community could be supported in making themselves heard. At the time of the interviews, this group was still nascent, running on contributions made by the core members. They had set up an office, and people were all working there on a voluntary basis. But the group was still in need of support. 'Life is tough', they commented, and 'we don't know the funders', which was a particular problem as they needed funds to pay the rent on their office premises.

This had been a long journey for Fahana, escaping persecution, settling and starting to think about civic engagement in the UK. She identified a number of issues about services that she would like to change, but her main priority was trying to help others to negotiate the system rather than campaigning to change it.

Fahana was asked what personal characteristics had made her become the lead person in this group. 'I speak a bit of English', she replied. 'I am confident in approaching anyone that they will help. I am not afraid, because I now have realised that whatever you do here, if it is the right thing, no one will harm you. The Government is willing to help, you just have to know how to ask.'

Comparisons and contrasts

There are contrasts as well as comparisons to be drawn between Fahana's experiences and those of other newcomers. Grajan represents the Polish community on a community forum in Newham. As he himself explained, although he was born

in Poland, he was 'not representative of the fresh wave of migrants as such', having arrived in the UK in 1989. As a self-employed businessman, speaking good English, with a good knowledge of British systems and structures, Grajan described himself as having become 'emotionally more British but not distanced from my Polish roots'. As such, he was able to play a bridging role, enabling newcomers from Poland to overcome barriers. 'The reason I can have good connections to new migrants is that I have 20 years of living in this country', he suggested. As the son of doctors in Poland, and the husband of a teacher here in Britain, Grajan's own background and more recent experiences ensured that he had the knowledge and the confidence to participate and to enjoy his involvement in the community.

Overall he felt positive about the situation in his area which he described as quite vibrant. There were various ethnic groups, some temporary and some established, typically well integrated among themselves even if not necessarily well connected to formal structures of governance. Although the area had various problems, this was generally a pleasant and co-operative neighbourhood, in his view.

Grajan's experiences contrasted with those of some of the more established community activists. One of the Newham Pensioners' Forum activists described his pathway into activism. He had a background of activism in the community, having fought in the Second World War, returning from the forces to become active within the trade union movement. As he himself explained, he had a strongly developed understanding of how to represent pensioners' views and interests effectively via the appropriate formal structures of representation and accountability, meeting with representatives of the local authority, health trusts, transport structures and the local MP, as necessary. He emphasised the importance of the fact that the Pensioners' Forum had good representation from minority ethnic communities, including women.

The experiences of the Newham Pensioners' Forum illustrate more traditional labour movement approaches to representation and democratic accountability, rooted in deep-seated understandings of formal structures and how to engage with these effectively. Without uncritically idealising the labour movement's own structures and practices in the past, it should be emphasised that the trade unions, the Labour Party and the co-operative movement did play crucial roles in passing relevant knowledge and skills on to succeeding generations of activists. The impacts of deindustrialisation on older industrial areas such as Newham, together with the impacts of economic restructuring and casualisation, pose new challenges, however, that are exacerbated by rapid population churn. These changes make it all the more urgent to develop strategies to engage new communities as well as existing communities effectively and democratically within local structures of governance.

Examples of promising practices

Coventry New Communities Forum: developing flexible approaches to enable newer voices to be represented

Aware of the need to enable the voices of new communities to be more effectively represented, the city council has been supporting the development of the New Communities Forum (NCF). Through the Housing Department's contacts with new arrivals, links have been developed with some 45 informal networks and fledgling organisations. These have been identified as key if new communities are to be reached effectively. As one of the officers concerned reflected, 'if those working in formal structures of governance really want to reach new communities then they need to tap into these informal networks rather than waiting for new communities to come to them'. This approach has been supported by senior council members, seeing the development of the NCF as a channel of communication to provide information about services and to enable new communities to make their voices heard and represented effectively and directly – rather than having their views filtered through other agencies, however well-meaning these might be. The Forum works to co-ordinate what would otherwise be isolated and fragmented individuals and groups.

At the time when the interviews were being carried out, the NCF was described as being in a 'fledgling' but promising state, with two co-chairs (illustrating that there was indeed representation from different communities). It was still 'early days', with continuing needs for information and support. Informal community leaders were still learning about council structures and how to work effectively with these. But there were indications of increasing self-confidence among members too, keen to run the NCF's affairs on their own. NCF was formally launched during the time that fieldwork was carried out in Coventry, with over 80 community groups involved, each with their own issues and agendas.

NCF was one among several important attempts, including by anchor organisations, to enable new communities to develop an effective voice in Coventry. Other such interventions have included the development of the Coventry Refugee Centre, which attracted European Union funding for two community development workers to formalise as many informal new community groups in the city as possible, encouraging them to agree constitutions and, where needed, to open bank accounts (more difficult for refugee groups) as a prelude to more formal engagement. This project preceded and then overlapped with the early stages of the New Communities Forum.

Most of these developments have taken place over the last four years. Although all have been beset by challenges, they have contributed to providing space for meetings, facilitating the formalisation of informal groups and facilitating mechanisms for bringing small groups with little influence together into a wider, collective forum, in order to engage more effectively with local structures of governance.

Facilitating the development of democratic representation in local structures of governance for BME communities in general, and new communities more specifically

Meanwhile, Coventry Voluntary Service Council has also provided support to Coventry Ethnic Minorities Action Partnership (CEMAP) in order to facilitate the democratic representation of BME communities in local structures of governance, including the Local Strategic Partnership. This strategy has included reaching out to newly arrived BME groups such as the different groups of Somalis, as well as working with longer-established communities – a significant challenge. CEMAP was in a position to organise very successful consultation events (with over 100 groups participating in at least one of the two such events that were organised in the previous year, 2006). But this was only the beginning of the longer-term process of building effective and inclusive representation in the city.

One of the first tasks was to strengthen BME representation on the Coventry Partnership Board and in its theme groups and subgroups while taking care to build bridges across different communities, including more established communities in Coventry. As one of the officers involved in working with them reflected, new communities have had very limited access and voice in official structures so far, and very few organisations have so far been run directly by new arrivals in the city. So these represent very significant moves forward.

The location of CEMAP within the local Voluntary Service Council and the lengthy development work before it was launched in 2006 allowed it to acquire legitimacy within the broader voluntary sector and in the city more generally. This has all taken several years of groundwork, working to engage diverse minority groups in the city.

The Multi-Faith Forum

The Multi-Faith Forum in Coventry is affiliated to the wider West Midlands Faiths Forum involving twelve faiths from 21 faith forums in the region. The West Midlands Faiths Forum has a high profile and is proactive in engaging with local, regional and

national government policies and partnerships in shaping service delivery. At its 2007 AGM, the Forum reiterated its role in using its networks to welcome migrant workers and 'help the excluded to be heard' as well as 'help the institutions to hear'. Some of the issues affecting Coventry faith groups were reflected in wider discussions at the West Midlands event. There was a recognition that even among faith groups there is not necessarily a level playing field in access to funding and this recognition stimulated the development of an advocacy project to support groups seeking funding.

In the course of the research, a number of tensions have been identified including a number of tensions between officers concerned with developing strategy and practitioners or activists on the ground. Officers have been concerned that the multifarious faith groups speak with a single strong voice when addressing regional bodies, for example, only to hear practitioners and activists unite around the answer that this was just not possible. Such attempts to encourage communities to speak with one voice, however understandable, potentially disadvantage new communities who are struggling to be heard. It is here that models like the New Communities Forum have so much potential, seeking to facilitate the inclusion and representation of a wide range of new BME community groups.

F's story: becoming a community leader and developing new ways of working with local structures of governance in a neighbourhood of transition

F came to the UK from India in 1960, aged 8. F and his siblings went to local schools, but faced difficulties through his late start at learning English. He worked in Dunlop's engineering factory, making aircraft parts, and then got a job with Royal Mail, working his way up from postman to manager positions.

In his forties F was medically retired with osteoarthritis and found it difficult to get another job. After sitting at home for six months, angry, thinking 'why me?', he began to get involved in his community. During his years as a board member with a local community development organisation, he watched the steady regeneration of his neighbourhood – a neighbourhood of transition.

The engagement of residents has challenged what F saw as a previous 'we know best mentality' among officers. At first, the local people involved were hand-picked by officers, but new residents got involved and a new board came in which was democratically elected. The new board was determined it would not go down the route of the old, which had ended up following individual agendas.

‘We did good hard spade work on the ground, and laid the foundations for a new community organisation.’

We’ve achieved so much it’s unimaginable. Ten years ago, you couldn’t walk down Victoria Street in the daytime for fear of crime ... There was a terrible negative perception of the area, which simply no longer exists ... Although all that is gone, what remains is poverty. There is unemployment and under-achievement, even though the schools are excellent. This is because it is a transitional community. People move out as they move on in life ... First generation immigrants have often moved to the suburbs ... *[but]* I have stayed ... I feel privileged to live here: it’s a friendly area.

Becoming a community activist means becoming known locally. ‘If a lamp on my street is not working, people will walk 60 yards to tell me rather than phone the council.’ Clearly, this is rewarding, but can also lead to stress. In F’s case, this contributed to a heart attack, leading F to step down from chairing and shift into a less stressful area of responsibility. He told us:

Personally, *[my involvement has]* been a rollercoaster. You’re lucky to come off in one piece, but the adrenalin means you want more. It can be very emotional ... For example, we organised to take local children to the pantomime, and we got all these ‘thank you’ cards – I got more satisfaction from this than I ever got in my job as a manager, and that goes for the majority of people who are involved too ... I remain positive, about me, about the organisation, about Hillfields.

Summary

- Democratic representation and transparent accountability pose particular challenges in the context of fluidity, super-diversity and population churn.
- Newcomers may be particularly likely to rely on key individuals and informal networks in their own communities for information and advice, but this may have inherent limitations as well as strengths in terms of enabling differing voices to be heard.
- Local councillors can play key bridging roles, but may need more support to do this accountably and effectively.

Community engagement and community cohesion

- Local authorities can support the development of bridging mechanisms, such as new communities forums, working through informal networks as well as providing capacity-building to enable new communities to organise themselves and engage with formal structures of governance.
- Local anchor organisations can facilitate and support new communities, enabling them to develop inclusive organisations and groups.

6 Changing relationships between communities: challenging racism, building community cohesion and social solidarity

Addressing the challenges of building community cohesion

The first part of this chapter identifies some of the challenges to be faced: involving new communities alongside more established communities in local structures of governance, meeting new needs without exacerbating potential tensions within and between communities, challenging racism and building social solidarity. This sets the context for the discussion of examples of promising practices. There are cross-references to be made here to recommendations from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion's report *Our Shared Future*.

Although there are major challenges to be addressed then, evidence of strengths that were being built upon emerged from each of the case study areas. In Coventry, for example, the neighbourhoods of Hillfields and Foleshill were both described as having a positive identity as a place of arrival for migrants. Similar comments were made about the East End of London, where Newham is located. 'Hillfields houses a community that is experienced in welcoming new arrivals', it was suggested. 'It is known as a community that will embrace new people.' These sorts of identities can be harnessed in building what the Commission on Integration and Cohesion described as an orientation to *shared futures*: a form of civil solidarity or cohesion that is not about making everyone the same.

There were examples of strategies to promote community cohesion and social solidarity through shared celebrations including sports events, outings and community festivals. And strategies were being developed to enable people from different communities to live safely, side by side, to tackle racism and discrimination, to promote mutual support and solidarity, to ensure fairness and equality of treatment in the provision of services and employment opportunities and to facilitate community engagement, enabling diverse voices to be heard in the structures of local governance.

But racism was an issue that needed to be addressed directly too. Across the case study areas, there was widespread awareness of the significance of racism

as a factor, impacting upon minority communities' participation in the structures of governance. This was not only a matter of institutional racism. In one case study area, for example, an elderly Asian resident described the ways in which she had been subjected to racist attacks, including having stones thrown through her windows on numerous occasions. Ironically, this elderly lady explained that, since her husband had passed away, she had felt unable to come to forum meetings on her own to discuss the problem, saying that she no longer felt safe to come to meetings in the evening. So although racist attacks were discussed in these forum meetings, she was unable to participate – unless and until transport could be provided. There were indications of endemic racism then, despite clear frameworks for equalities.

As the Commission on Integration and Cohesion demonstrated, it is important not to exaggerate the degrees of separation to be found between different communities, and to recognise efforts to promote community cohesion and solidarity within and between communities. But interviews from the case study areas did identify examples of tensions between established communities (including established BME communities) and newer arrivals, as well as within and between newer communities themselves. Factors involved in the potential exacerbation of such conflicts included fears of competition for scarce resources such as social housing, a significant issue in Newham, for instance.

This was scarcely surprising, given the weight of evidence from previous research documenting the role of competition – or the fear of competition – for scarce resources as a factor exacerbating tensions within and between communities more generally. The key questions for this particular study relate to the implications for community engagement in the structures of governance. To what extent could different voices make themselves heard – in the sense of getting their demands and choices as consumers met – through these structures, without crowding out the voices of less effectively organised groups and communities? Competing demands and differing priorities within and between communities raise fundamental challenges, then, for government modernisation policies, as these emerge through the new localism's changing structures of governance.

While the case study areas provided illustrations of tensions and anxieties rooted in competition within and between new and more established communities, it is important to emphasise that such anxieties had their roots in social class differences too, as well as in differences based upon ethnicity and culture. There were, for example, specific fears among established communities who believed that they were facing potential marginalisation as their area was becoming transformed through regeneration strategies aimed at promoting mixed-class communities – perceived as 'gentrification' in older deindustrialised neighbourhoods, such as Canning Town in Newham, for example.

The case study areas provided illustrations of concerns about the scope for exacerbating such tensions further as a result of interventions (however well-meaning) to provide separate facilities and separate structures for different communities, demands that emerged via local structures of governance as new communities voiced their needs. The research participants themselves had differing views on this. Some interviewees emphasised the importance of providing separate facilities, enabling communities to have a safe space. Separate facilities facilitated a sense of recognition and security in one's distinct cultural belonging, it was argued. This was seen as a prerequisite for engaging productively with others, rather than as a barrier to integration. Others gave greater emphasis to the value of promoting shared activities and events. What was consistent was the recognition of the potential value of safe spaces for groups and communities to meet together, whether or not these were located within separate facilities. In some cases, for example, safe spaces were being provided within the overall orbit of a mutually respected anchor organisation.

Umbrella organisations such as the New Communities Forum in Coventry were playing constructive roles here, enabling some of the smaller groups to come together and collaborate. Meanwhile CEMAP and the Multi-Faith Forum models were encouraging greater contact between leaders of the new community groups and more established communities. The New Communities Forum demonstrates the scope for promoting bonding as well as bridging across new communities while CEMAP facilitates some bridging across new and established BME community groups. Together they have been providing groups with opportunities to identify broader identities and alliances of their own choosing, opening up gradually at their own pace.

Examples of promising practices

Shared community events to bring different communities and agencies together

'Under the Stars' is a four-day programme of summer evening concerts in the park in Newham, celebrating the musical traditions of different communities within the borough. This has proved extremely popular. Reflecting upon open-air concerts in the summer in the borough more generally, a Polish migrant commented on their value as a means of bringing people together. 'The borough has to be applauded for this', he concluded.

Another example of the potential value of shared events is provided by the annual seaside trip organised by Working Together to Change Hillfields (WATCH), a community group in Coventry. Agencies (including the police) have sponsored this event. As a resident board member with WATCH told us: ‘You don’t realise the effect on the community of that: getting 500 people together, talking with each other, with different agencies involved – policemen, wardens and council officers on the coaches in plain clothes, and last year one coach specifically for wheelchair users – everyone is talking to their neighbours for the first time, or to the police for the first time’.

Shared events to promote community engagement

While the community forums in Newham were seen to work well for some people they were perceived as working less well for others. Through its Community Participation Unit, Newham Council has therefore shifted its focus from engagement structures to engagement via activities, developing a varied programme of community events which engage diverse groups of people in a range of different ways. ‘It’s all going to be about doing now’, officers explained. These activities have included reading days in the library and community festivals – with the aim of getting people along and then engaging them in discussion on other issues (consulting them on priorities using questionnaires or other more creative engagement techniques when they are attending these community events). There was a positive appreciation of this approach.

From the interviews, however, it emerged that some community activists questioned aspects of this approach, suggesting ways of strengthening its effectiveness and impact. There were concerns that the council was not building sufficiently on what was already there, in terms of community infrastructures, and that communities were not being sufficiently involved in organising these events, impacting upon their potential value in terms of capacity-building and future sustainability. Questions were also raised about the extent to which the information that was collected at big events was being fed back effectively, together with explanations about any follow-up actions as a result.

Promoting ‘myth-busting’ exercises

Myth-busting has emerged as a recommendation for local action to promote community cohesion, based upon the findings of the Commission on Integration and Community Cohesion. Coventry’s Local Strategic Partnership provided an illustration of a very positive approach to doing just this. Rather than challenging myths in

general, there was consultation with local people, using participative research techniques to identify the precise nature of people's fears. Having collected this information and analysed it, the LSP was able to address these specific fears more effectively, countering them with the facts and presenting these facts on leaflets that were distributed widely. Given wider concerns about the potential misunderstandings that can arise as a result of such myth-busting exercises, in Coventry the leaflets focused upon the realities rather than the myths (to avoid repeating and potentially reinforcing the latter rather than the former).

Proactively addressing symptoms of tension speedily and effectively

Coventry's monitoring of and rapid response to racist graffiti and hate crimes illustrate the value of proactive interventions. This approach was part of the council's overall aims for the promotion of the Community Cohesion Strategy, which had been developed as a priority by the current council when it had been elected as the majority party. The council recognised the importance of identifying tensions between groups when these emerged and working to reduce them speedily and effectively. The council had taken the initiative, for example, of working with Palestinians and Jewish communities and then bringing them together to pre-empt potential tensions at the time of the Lebanon War (in 2006). Muslims were currently feeling 'under siege' in the current climate of opinion, it was suggested, fuelled on occasion by the media (although relations with the local media were generally positive) and by unhelpful discussion of sensitive issues such as the veil. It was important to take a strong lead, in the council's view, to promote community cohesion and equalities in the city.

Developing joint forums within the voluntary and community sectors, including faith-based organisations

One of the ways in which communities have been brought together in the case study areas is through inter-faith forums, such as the Faiths Forum in the West Midlands. This sort of initiative has been particularly important in Oldham, where there are tensions across faith lines in the wake of the civil disturbances in Oldham in 2001. The events of 9/11 in the USA and the London bombings in July 2005 heightened the potential for such tensions. Building upon initiatives developed in 2002, following the disturbances, the Inter Faith Forum was established in its present form in June 2007, including different Christian denominations, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Faith-based organisations recognised that they had very particular contributions to make as sources of support within their own faith groups. Mosques, temples and churches were being widely perceived as safe and trusted spaces, where newcomers could receive advice and support independently of official structures.

In addition, faith-based organisations can and do provide links to other communities and to official structures of governance. One of the key figures in the Inter Faith Forum, a Catholic priest, had also become a member of the Local Strategic Partnership, for example, and chair of the advisory group to the police. With their own paid worker, faith groups were in a position to build the forum into a powerful block to promote community cohesion in the city, and this was becoming increasingly recognised within structures of governance including the Regional Development Agency. The box tells the story of the Oldham Inter Faith Forum in the words of the participants.

Oldham Inter Faith Forum: the story so far

It was February 2002 that the Oldham Inter Faith Forum formally came into existence as one response of the faith communities across the borough to the riots of the previous year. [Since then] our profile has exponentially increased. Before the Iraq War, Oldham's different faith communities stood together in prayer by the Yorkshire Street War Memorial, expressing their hope for peace in the world and their determination to work together for that peace. The fruits of that commitment were seen when, after the bombings in London in July 2005, hundreds of Oldhamers stood together again, this time in Alexandra Park. There they declared their resolve to deny success to those who would try to drive a wedge between the communities of the borough and of the world.

Since our first celebration of the Festival of Light in December 2003, Oldhamers have shown again and again that they want to embrace consciously a fully integrated society and not to 'sleepwalk into segregation'. Each venue hired for the occasion has been filled to capacity with many requests for tickets having to be turned down. The Festival of Light is the pinnacle of our inter-faith activity but there is much more that goes on during the rest of the year.

We have helped to set up the Women's Inter Faith Network and the Young People's Inter Faith Forum, which now have their own programmes of work. The latter most recently had its own 'Any Questions' event with the local Police Commander and the Director of Children and Young People's Services being among others on the panel. Members of the Inter Faith Forum and of these two offshoot groups now serve as inter-faith representatives on several of the borough's partnership bodies.

This year saw the formation and development of the 'Leading to Respect [LTR] Group'. We advertised for Oldhamers between the ages of 18 and 26 to take part in a programme to address extremism. Nineteen young people

came together for six preparatory sessions and then visited Auschwitz and Srebrenica. On their return, the young people have already delivered several moving presentations to different groups in the various communities of Oldham, personal testimonies to their own development. Two of the group have also become members of local community councils. They, like their fellow members of the LTR Group, are already establishing themselves as ambassadors for community cohesion for many years to come.

Oldham's inter-faith work is now known internationally. Last year two of its members delivered lectures at a UNESCO (Catalonia) conference in Barcelona and next year they will be doing the same in Brazil at the World Conference on the Development of Cities.

Enabling different voices to be heard: community development via the voluntary and community sectors

Previous chapters have already quoted a number of cases where anchor organisations in the voluntary and community sectors were playing key roles, supporting newcomers to make their voices heard, to organise themselves and to engage with structures of governance. In Coventry, for example, the CVSC and the Community Empowerment Network had both been involved in providing just such support to new arrivals in the city. Similarly, in Newham, Fahana's story illustrated the importance of the support that she received from RAMP, as well as from the mosque, enabling her to develop a support group for her community in turn.

Peace House: support via the community sector

Peace House in Coventry demonstrates the value of working inclusively, enabling refugees and asylum seekers to self-organise, addressing local issues and concerns within their wider international context and taking up the causes of global violence, such as the arms trade, as well as its effects in terms of forced population movements. Although outside formal structures, Peace House was able to work in partnership with these as well as with more informal groupings of new arrivals including women refugees and asylum seekers.

Peace House had been involved in setting up the Refugee Centre in Coventry in 2000, for example, to provide information, advice and support to refugees and asylum seekers. Although individuals worked with commitment in the Refugee Centre, this was not, at least as yet, run by refugees and asylum seekers

themselves. There were, in addition, questions about the sustainability of future funding – just as there were questions about the sustainability of the funding for training in the use of the welcome packs, developed by Peace House and launched with the support of the city council.

Meanwhile, Peace House was also providing a safe place for other groups such as the Eve Group to meet. The Eve Group is run directly by as well as for refugee and asylum-seeking women – although it also values support from other voluntary sector organisations such as the Refugee Centre and from council officers working with them to enable them to have a voice. Through the strength of the group, refugee women and asylum seekers could also begin to challenge the dominance of men’s voices, enabling them to speak for themselves. Since the fieldwork was completed two new refugee women’s groups have begun to meet (supported by the Refugee Centre and by churches).

The contributions of the community sector alongside the voluntary sector emerged powerfully from each of the case study areas, supporting diverse communities, established communities as well as newcomers, to engage effectively with structures of governance. As the case studies have also illustrated, this support needs to include community development support from the voluntary and community sectors themselves as well as from structures of governance, working towards increasing social solidarity through building the strength and independence of civil society more generally.

Summary

- There are challenges to be addressed, if newer communities’ voices are to be heard in local structures of governance while building solidarity with rather than exacerbating competition with more established communities.
- The case studies provided examples of a number of promising practices, in terms of building community cohesion and social solidarity, such as shared community events and effective local authority communication strategies including ‘myth-busting’ exercises.
- Joint voluntary and community sector forums, including multi-faith forums, could make positive contributions, along with voluntary sector anchor organisations and community groups providing community development support.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

1. Fluid communities, solid structures? How solid are the structures?

This research on 'Governance and diversity' was subtitled 'Fluid communities: solid structures'. The team started with a focus upon 'new communities', raising questions about how these groups were being heard within the local structures of governance in the context of population churn and super-diversity. As Chapter 1 explained in setting out the research questions, the aim was to identify ways in which decision-making in structures of governance could be opened up to new groups, developing inclusive approaches that would promote community cohesion and social solidarity, and support new groups' engagement with and adaptation to their local area.

But our research findings raise fundamental questions about the assumption that the structures are solid. On the contrary, the pace of change in structures of governance has emerged as a major challenge. Continual restructuring of the structures for public consultation has the potential for creating confusion and disengagement among all those trying to engage – both new and indeed established communities. The issue of transparency and accountability in partnerships remains an issue too (Local Government Ombudsman, 2007). Conversely, however, where structures of governance have been clearly and coherently developed over a long period, this has been a significant factor facilitating effective community engagement.

2. Promoting 'voice and choice': how to ensure that this strategy for modernising public services can best respond to the context of population churn

Current policy debates on strategies to modernise public services have been emphasising the importance of promoting both 'voice and choice', identifying users, citizens and communities as the drivers for service improvement (Cabinet Office, 2006). There are a number of tensions inherent in this policy objective. Although these tensions impact upon policies to promote 'voice and choice' with established communities, there are particular challenges to ensure that new communities are enabled to voice their needs with as much impact as the more articulate or more established communities.

3. So what does it mean to ‘have your voice heard’? ‘Being heard’ as being part of transparent processes of deliberative democracy

This raises the question of what it actually means to ‘be heard’. The research identified different meanings attached to ‘being heard’, from ‘want or need fulfilment’, through ‘receiving funding’ to ‘being listened to respectfully within the context of continuing dialogue’. New communities in the case study areas did indeed voice particular needs, such as the need for safe spaces to meet, for example, as well as needs for more universal services.

‘Having your voice heard’, as many of the people interviewed defined this, requires structures of governance that are transparent spaces where differing interests can be articulated, heard respectfully and negotiated transparently, according to agreed criteria based upon values of equity and social justice. The phrase ‘visible fairness’ – echoing the COIC and CRE term ‘visible social justice’ – emerged on a number of occasions. Visible fairness was precisely what was required, it was suggested, if differing and often competing needs were to be negotiated in ways that minimised tensions within and between communities. Visible fairness was identified as central, then, to the promotion of community cohesion and mutual solidarity.

4. The need for a constructive relationship between representative and participatory democracy

Issues of democratic deliberation, voice, representation and accountability raise questions about the connections between participative and representative democracy, the role of elected councillors and the continuing relevance of party politics. The traditional route to power and influence through joining or lobbying political parties remains one way in which new communities can engage and express their needs. But this takes time and impacts more in second-generation migrant communities. Councillors are nonetheless central to the empowerment agenda. As the Power Report recommended (Power Inquiry, 2006), local authorities and community organisations should be promoting active involvement in representative politics and structures.

Although tensions between these two forms of democracy emerged, there were also examples of building constructive relationships between representative and more deliberative forms of democracy.

5. Clarity about how local government decentralisation and community engagement take account of the demographic realities in the area

The Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (DCLG, 2006) encourages local government to involve communities and devolve to communities, as part of strategies to improve service delivery and strengthen democratic engagement more generally. But these policies sometimes tend to be based on the assumption that communities can be identified in terms of particular geographical neighbourhoods, with relative stability, enabling shared interests and priorities to be identified as the basis for continuing engagement over time.

Our research illustrates fundamental problems with this approach too. 'New communities' are not necessarily definable in geographical terms at all. On the contrary, like many other communities based upon shared interests, cultures and/or identities, 'new communities' may be spread across towns and cities and beyond, just as their priorities may focus upon needs that are beyond the remits of structures of local governance to address (as the issues that refugees and asylum seekers were taking to their local MPs illustrate). Neighbourhood Management structures are potentially problematic in relation to the engagement of communities of interest and identity as well as for their inherent limitations when it comes to addressing local issues with wider implications, such as the London Olympics, posing additional challenges for democratic participation and accountability.

6. Assessing how successfully local structures of governance are engaging with new communities relies on robust data

In line with work by the Local Government Association and the Institute of Community Cohesion (LGA and ICoCo, 2007), the research reinforces the importance of reliable local data, regularly updated. There were examples of creative approaches (such as the use of data from school enrolments to identify changing patterns of migration and settlement). But these were retrospective estimates rather than examples of forward planning based on the best information available at the time. These are challenges that require urgent action on the part of government.

7. Identifying 'good practice' and 'promising practices' in contexts of fluidity, contestation and challenge: recognising the importance of continuing debate about the challenges as well as the potential strengths of different strategies and approaches to the promotion of community cohesion

Our research identified high levels of awareness of the importance of addressing the implications of population churn and super-diversity among local policy-makers

and other stakeholders involved in structures of governance. In particular, the research illustrates examples of strategies to take account of the needs and hear the voices of new communities in structures of governance while taking account of the continuing needs and concerns of established communities. There were a number of parallels here with recommendations from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion report, *Our Shared Future*, examples that are listed below – although the Commission made few if any recommendations in relation to governance more specifically.

As *Our Shared Future* also concluded, one size does not fit all when it comes to identifying strategies to promote community engagement and community cohesion, however. Instead of using the term ‘good practice’, then, we have defined these examples in terms of ‘promising practices’. Rather than suggesting that these examples might simply be transplanted from one local context to another, the evidence supports a more reflective response.

Encouraging the use of shared community spaces could promote increased understanding and solidarity between communities, for example, but this could actually lead to increasing tensions instead, unless such shared usages are carefully planned and managed. Separate provision can also be developed constructively and new communities may need the spaces that separate facilities can provide. Anchor organisations may play particular roles here, providing safe spaces within which new community groups can meet. The challenge is to balance the need for separate spaces that can enable a new community to build its ‘bonding capital’ with the need for creating shared spaces to facilitate the development of ‘bridging capital’. This would enable different communities (and individuals within those communities) to relate across the boundaries, negotiate new solutions and build new sources of solidarity.

There are parallels with debates on the value of working through informal community networks, approaches that may be effective in communicating with new groups. But working through informal networks could also enhance the power and influence of traditional leaders to the detriment of less powerful groups such as younger women. Again, these are issues that need to be addressed. These ‘promising practices’ represent approaches that merit careful consideration in the light of continuing debates, taking account of local issues and circumstances.

In summary, these promising practices include:

- welcome packs (regularly updated with training for front-line professionals and community activists and volunteers to enable them to use these packs effectively) and welcome events to engage with new communities;

- community events and ongoing activities such as community festivals, sports clubs for children and young people, community outings and other such events, carefully planned to take account of differing cultural needs and practices and build on shared interests;
- myth-busting exercises to identify local sources of tension and to challenge myths and negative stereotypes, as part of comprehensive communication strategies;
- the development and management of shared community facilities, where these can be provided in ways that take account of differing needs, interests and cultural practices, promoting social solidarity agendas rather than agendas for the assimilation of difference;
- outreach work to develop relationships with new communities, including developing contacts through informal networks, and to facilitate the development of channels through which new communities' voices can be effectively and democratically represented, and work through councillors and front-line staff;
- early identification of and responses to potentially contentious issues and regular mapping of tensions, bringing together different services and agencies to identify any trouble spots and take early and effective action;
- the establishment of joint working groups and forums, such as inter-faith forums and women's groups, to promote collaboration and solidarity within and between communities;
- promoting youth forums and other ways of involving young people, building constructive engagement within and between different communities for the future.

8. The importance of community development strategies and approaches, working in partnership with the voluntary and community sectors

While these examples provide illustrations of promising practices, however, these in turn depend upon the development and implementation of community development strategies as centrally important for local governance strategies more generally. Community development strategies can contribute to building sustainability, overcoming the overdependence on key individuals that can make promising practices so fragile.

Crucially, these community development strategies need to be resourced via community development professionals, to identify and work with informal networks as well as with more established organisations and groups within the voluntary and community sectors, taking account of issues of equalities, transparent accountability, democratic representation and social justice. While community development needs to be promoted directly via local structures of governance, the voluntary and community sectors themselves have key roles to play here, and this role needs to be fully recognised and supported:

- to provide community development support to engage with new arrivals as well as with more established communities;
- to provide outreach support, on a sustainable basis, including support for community-based negotiation and conflict resolution;
- to support local anchor organisations as these have particular roles to play in facilitating the harmonious use of shared amenities, where relevant, and to promote understanding and solidarity within and between communities;
- to support the organisation of shared community events, including festivals, sports events, community outings and welcome events;
- to support community advocacy and campaigns that challenge racism and other forms of discrimination.

Recommendations

While these recommendations are specifically geared to the English context, there are wider implications for the UK. Some of the specific structures of governance to which we refer are English, but many of the structures, as well as the general context of fluidity in governance and churn in population, have relevance across the UK and there is clearly learning to be shared among devolved administrations here.

Recommendations relating to national government policies and approaches

1. To ensure that all activities to deliver PSA 21, 'to build more cohesive, empowered and active communities', take account of the needs of new communities and migrant communities and support activities to engage and empower them, and to ensure that all activities to deliver PSA 15, 'to address the disadvantage that

individuals experience because of their gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief', include members of new and migrant communities and take account of their particular experiences of disadvantage and the barriers to expressing their needs.

2. To prioritise the provision of reliable and standardised data on population churn, enabling local structures of governance to ensure that they have holistic understandings of change, in order to facilitate effective service planning and equitable resource allocation.
3. Building on the Green Paper *Governance in Britain*, the Local Government White Paper and the Department for Communities and Local Government's *Action Plan for Community Empowerment*, to ensure that the impacts of demographic change as a result of migration, population churn and increasing local diversity are taken account of in the design of policy, guidance and central government initiatives related to citizenship, community empowerment and community engagement.
4. To ensure that the Department for Communities and Local Government's *Action Plan for Community Empowerment* considers the findings of this report and:
 - ensures that one of the promised roundtables (summary of Action 15) is dedicated to exploring the issues of engaging and empowering migrant and mobile communities;
 - extends the National Empowerment Partnership to include representatives of new communities, refugees and other mobile communities not represented by mainstream community groups;
 - explores ways of giving voice and choice and improved service accountability to new communities, specifically in relation to their main service contacts (including rented housing services, environmental health, police, Gangmasters Licensing Authority and schools).

Recommendations relating to local government and local strategic partnerships

1. To ensure that community engagement strategies take into account diversity within existing populations, but also plan for the dynamics of population change and churn, having regard to the social, political and cultural diversity within and between communities.
2. To ensure that local place-shaping policies take account of the impact from and the impact on changing demographics.

3. To provide clear and comprehensive guides, drawing on the template being developed by IDeA explaining where, at what level and how different community and service user concerns can be addressed, including the provision of welcome packs for new arrivals, regularly updated, with training to use these packs effectively.
4. To maintain maximum stability and coherence in the structures for community engagement, with the aim of strengthening mutual confidence and trust within and between local communities and service providers.
5. To promote carefully targeted myth-busting exercises, proactively identifying and responding to local concerns and responding proactively to symptoms of tension, as part of wider, proactive communication strategies.
6. To prioritise the PSA 15: addressing equalities issues comprehensively via Local Area Agreements.
7. To ensure that the criteria for the allocation of resources (including funding for particular groups) are clearly set out, coherent and transparent and to ensure that information about the basis for resource allocation decisions is effectively publicised and disseminated, demonstrating 'visible fairness' and providing accessible feedback on why decisions to fund or not to fund have been taken.
8. To recognise the economic and other barriers, and to provide practical support (including support with caring responsibilities, transport, access to training and support in addressing linguistic barriers), to enable community representatives to participate effectively in structures of local governance. This will require holistic local strategies, geared to the particular strengths and needs of diverse communities.
9. To provide community development support, both directly *and* via third sector anchor organisations, including faith-based organisations, to engage with new arrivals as well as with more established communities promoting networking within and between communities.
10. To work proactively with new communities, including working through their informal networks, while taking account of equalities issues, ensuring that all voices are effectively heard, including the voices of relatively marginalised groups such as young women.
11. To provide outreach support, on a sustainable basis, to support negotiation and conflict resolution.

12. To value and support the role of local anchor organisations in facilitating harmonious use of shared amenities, where relevant, and to promote understanding and solidarity within and between communities, enabling communities to self-organise, to access resources and to make their own voices heard effectively.
13. To support the organisation of shared community events, including festivals, sports events, community outings and welcome events.
14. To provide support to councillors facilitating the development of strategies to engage new communities inclusively while promoting community cohesion and encouraging new communities to engage with formal structures of governance, including encouraging individuals to stand as councillors themselves.
15. To recognise that neighbourhood participation structures cannot address all issues and so to support the development of effective city/borough-wide structures too.

Recommendations relating to voluntary and community sector organisations, including faith-based organisations

1. To work proactively with new communities, including working through their informal networks, while taking account of equalities issues, ensuring that all voices are effectively heard, including the voices of relatively marginalised groups such as young women.
2. More specifically to develop links between community representatives and new community networks, acting as 'hosts' and mentors to support new arrivals, working in partnership with local authorities, promoting the use of guides, explaining where, at what level and how different community and service user concerns can be addressed, and collaborating to regularly update these guides and welcome packs.
3. To promote good practice, in terms of democratic representation and accountability within third sector structures as well as within structures of public governance.
4. To respect, support and facilitate new communities in exercising their rights to self-organisation, rather than speaking on their behalf.

5. To participate in myth-busting exercises as part of wider communication strategies, identifying and taking early action to address symptoms of tension within and between communities.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. This refers to 'a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. Such a condition is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade' (Vertovec, 2005).

Chapter 2

1. Many councillors, according to a report for JRF, are aware of their shortcomings when it comes to relations with new communities and to understanding issues of diversity and social cohesion, and would like more support in acting as community advocates and community leaders (James and Cox, 2007).
2. Measured by the Citizenship Survey and by the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) survey carried out by each local authority.
3. Both are now PIs in the National Indicator Set, and thus tracked for every locality, as well as being prioritised in many new LAAs.

Chapter 3

1. There were challenges for the 2001 Census in any case: as an anchor organisation in one of the case study areas pointed out, many, perhaps the majority of, refugees and asylum seekers did not fill out census forms: see www.coventrypartnership.com/upload/documents/news/general/CP%20Members.pdf.
2. See www.coventry.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/council--government-and-democracy/ward-forums/.
3. See www.whitefriarshousing.co.uk/services/getting-involved/index.html.
4. See www.coventry-vsc.org.uk/purpose_and_aim.
5. See www.vaoldham.org.uk/DisplayPage.asp?pageid=7805.

Chapter 4

1. Kashmir being the subject of disputed claims between India and Pakistan, disputes that had knock-on effects in terms of Kashmiris' relationships with other South Asian groups in London.

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