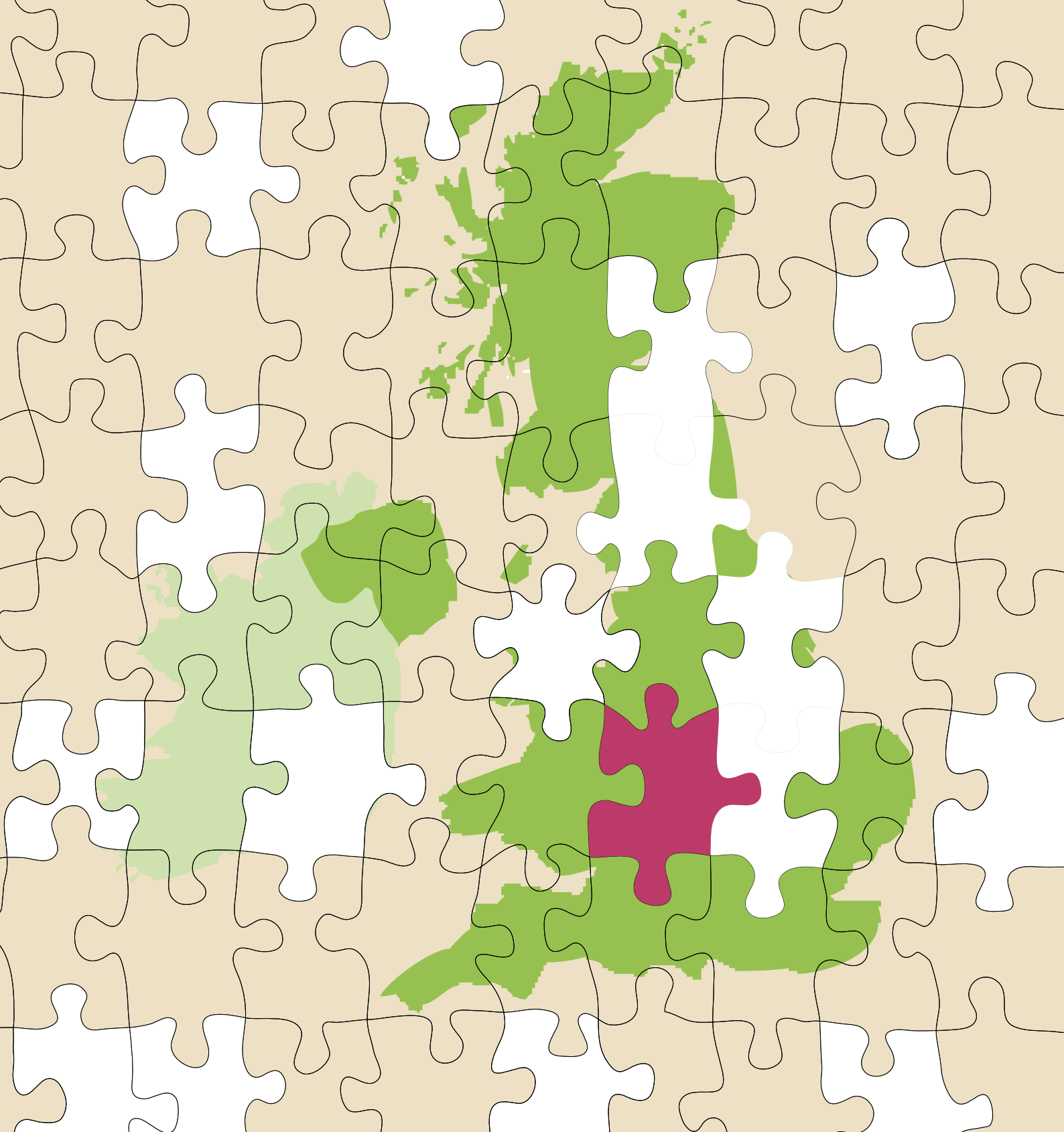


**Governance, neighbourhoods and  
service delivery II**



# **The ensuring council**



## About the organisations



### Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE)

APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) is a not for profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK. Promoting excellence in public services, APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority front line services, hosting a network for front line service providers in areas such as waste and refuse collection, parks and environmental services, leisure, school meals, cleaning, housing and building maintenance.



### Local Government Research Unit (LGRU)

The Local Governance Research Unit, based at Leicester Business School (De Montfort University), is an internationally recognised centre of excellence for theoretically informed, robust and rigorous policy relevant research into British and comparative local governance. Its recent work focuses on community cohesion and local citizenship, neighbourhood governance, local democracy and local politics. The Unit is committed to providing a strong and vibrant link between academic research and the needs of the research user. It undertakes research for a wide variety of bodies, ranging from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, pan-European bodies such as the Council of Europe, through to Government departments, such as the Department of Communities and Local Government. It also provides consultancy, research and policy-advice to individual councils and others concerned with aspects of local governance. The Unit has strong research links with other leading universities in the UK and across Europe and the USA.



### Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV)

The Institute of Local Government Studies of the University of Birmingham is committed to enhancing democratic governance of local communities. It seeks to encourage and support working across organisational boundaries within the public sector and between it and the voluntary and private sectors. The department is a major centre for research and for postgraduate programmes, both taught and research based. It also runs a small number of undergraduate programmes. INLOGOV is a leading provider of many continuing professional and management development programmes for governance practitioners from both the UK and overseas and has numerous research collaborative links with other universities and national education and training centres globally.

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**Governance, neighbourhoods and service delivery II**

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# Preface

With the economic recession having a devastating effect on communities, families and businesses and beginning to impact upon front-line local government services and the future prospects for public spending, the time is ripe to review many of the initiatives and developments that have been at the forefront of local government policy and legislation over the past few years. None more so than the “double devolution” policy of driving down greater autonomy in decision making and service delivery to the neighbourhood and locality.

Three years ago APSE launched a research programme in partnership with the Institute of local government studies (Inlogov) and the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) designed to explore contemporary issues relating to local government and service delivery, which included a consideration of the neighbourhood agenda and its impact on governance and service delivery; and the local economic footprint of public services.

This is the second report in a series on governance, neighbourhoods and service delivery, the first report of which was published by APSE in July 2008. Our latest report develops the themes set out in the original research based on a survey and telephone interviews, together with more detailed case study analysis of three local authorities, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Nottingham. We are most grateful to those councils for their support and co-operation in taking part in this research.

It is inevitable that as pressure on public funds and local authority budgets grows, the resources committed to neighbourhoods will increasingly be called into question. However, at a time in which the economic impact of recession is felt most acutely at the neighbourhood level, it is arguable that local authorities need to provide greater support in ensuring the wellbeing of neighbourhoods and in building resilient and sustainable communities.

Our research shows that neighbourhoods have an important role to play in revitalising civic engagement and improving service delivery particularly with regard to issues such as community safety and the quality of the local environment, but there are limits to what neighbourhoods can achieve particularly in relation to the wider local authority responsibility for the stewardship of ‘place’ and the strategic leadership necessary to tackle issues such as climate change and ensuring local economic prosperity.

I would commend this report to you and hope that it will provide you with much food for thought and examples of good practice in developing your own approaches to neighbourhood governance and service delivery.

Cllr Shaun Gallagher

*APSE National Chair*



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# Executive summary

## 1. The ensuring council and the role of neighbourhoods

'Neighbourhoods' remain one of the dominant policy themes for local government despite the impact on the national and local policy agenda brought about by the recession and the budgetary pressures on service delivery. The *Stronger Prosperous Communities* White paper in 2006 re-asserted the policy agenda for neighbourhood governance and many councils throughout the U.K. have developed neighbourhood and locality governance arrangements, reflecting the importance of the neighbourhood as a means of devolving more power and responsibility down to the community level. But to what extent can neighbourhood governance reconnect local government with communities and how can the tensions it creates be managed organisationally?

In this second report on '*Governance, neighbourhoods and service delivery*', we consider how the different organisational forms of neighbourhood governance have been implemented in practice. The report examines three case studies from Birmingham, Edinburgh and Nottingham on the institutional design of neighbourhoods and uses further survey work to supplement the case study research. We argue that the time has now come to redefine the role of the local authority as *an ensuring council*. That is one that has the capacity to ensure policy co-ordination across all areas of policy and practice and that the neighbourhood agenda itself should not be allowed to constrain that essential leadership role of local government. Neighbourhoods have a role, they are there to revitalise civic engagement and improve service delivery. But the micro-management of locality should not be allowed to dominate the wider strategic stewardship of 'place'. The local authority as the only representative democratic body, has a vital role to play in managing 'trade-offs' between the demands of the neighbourhood and the effective management of resources to secure broader strategic goals, such as tackling climate change and creating a resilient local economy capable of withstanding economic shocks and the impact of recession. Indeed councils have to manage the tensions inherent in the neighbourhood arena which could conflict with the vital place shaping role of local government and it is elected councillors that have to negotiate the dynamics of this relationship.

## 2. Five challenges for neighbourhood working

So neighbourhoods are not a panacea for all of the problems facing local government. We have found that neighbourhood working has become progressively embedded in local policy and practice and is becoming the primary site for policy co-ordination and partnership working specifically for the delivery of community safety and environmental services. The organisational form which this takes equates closely to the decentralised divisional authority defined by Mintzberg (see the first report *Governance, neighbourhoods and service delivery*) where semi-autonomous divisions are brought together under a central administration and given limited control over service delivery across neighbourhoods.

We have identified 5 sets of challenges for neighbourhood working:

- **What is the primary rationale for neighbourhood working?** - Neighbourhood working remains essentially 'messy' and lacks an overall coherence. Setting out the rationale for neighbourhood governance is an important role for the local authority.
- **What degree of autonomy should neighbourhoods have?** - Neighbourhood working can lead to a saturation of the local policy environment in which there is a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities. There is a need to define limits to the autonomy of the neighbourhood itself.

- **How should neighbourhoods be supported?** - Neighbourhood working can put increased pressure on councillors and officers who have the responsibility of operating between the neighbourhood and the strategic. Providing effective support will be crucial to enabling those roles to be properly discharged.
- **What should be the role of local councillors?** - Neighbourhood working can exacerbate the tension in the democratic role of front-line councillors. How they exercise judgement and manage those tensions is crucial to the future success or failure of neighbourhood working.
- **How can neighbourhoods operate effectively within the wider strategic role of local government?** - Neighbourhood working needs to be set within the wider context of local governance in which councils have to manage the macro-politics of place and the micro-politics of neighbourhood.

### 3. Limits to the evolution of neighbourhood working

In reality, whilst neighbourhood working has become embedded within the management and operational service delivery arrangements of local authorities, we need to recognise the limits to this form of governance. It raises a number of important issues about the future of neighbourhoods:

- **Minimising opportunity costs** - In bringing local service delivery and governance arrangements closer to communities, the site of the neighbourhood might well amplify the opportunity costs associated with decision-making. Authorities might therefore do well to audit the opportunity costs of such activities, the pressures they place upon the likes of 'divisional managers' and how these costs are visible in limits to the strategic decision-making capacity of authorities.
- **The risks of creating political fiefdoms** - There is the potential within neighbourhood structures to create 'political fiefdoms' in which neighbourhood priorities become the main focus of elected member roles; and, in some cases this definition of priorities may even be dominated by other particular interest groups. This can potentially deflect from the wider role of councillors as democratic representatives, pushing non-executive and backbench councillors further away from their roles in strategic place shaping and holding the executive to account.
- **The disaggregation of the strategic apex of the local authority** - There is a diminishing capacity to deliver at the level of the neighbourhood. The fragmentation and 'hollowing out' of local government together with the outsourcing of services further removes from the neighbourhood the direct capacity of officers and politicians to actually shape services in response to the needs and demands of communities.
- **The compatibility of civic rationale with divisional neighbourhoods** - Neighbourhoods are primarily about improving local services. The most common rationale for neighbourhoods is normally the civic rationale of community engagement, but in practice neighbourhoods are more often than not orientated towards service improvement. This raises questions about the appropriate mechanisms for community engagement and whether local area forums or community councils are the most effective means of achieving this. There may be other ways of building capacity to improve local service delivery which achieve broadly the same ends.
- **The challenge of well-being** - In the current economic climate neighbourhood working will come under increasing scrutiny in terms of its ability to achieve wider social, economic and environmental objectives. What it comes down to is a political choice about strategic priorities. Available resources are likely to dictate the future level of neighbourhood working and this could come into conflict with economic necessity.

It all comes back to the primary purposes of local government. Neighbourhood working has become a useful means of reconnecting with citizens and reflecting community needs and concerns in service delivery and will therefore continue to be an important tool for local authorities in the future. The effective delivery of neighbourhood working within the wider strategic framework of local government, means that far from diminishing the role of local 'politics' to that of the mere micro-management of neighbourhoods, we should seek to ensure further that there are clear choices about priorities and objectives for localities reflected in representative democracy. This involves being clear about the purpose of neighbourhood governance and organisational structures; defining the role of local councillors more clearly and ensuring that they can negotiate the space between 'locality' and 'place'; determining the most effective means of neighbourhood service delivery and the level at which it is provided; and finally ensuring equity in rationing the available resources and the choice of priorities so that the wider interests of communities can be properly represented through an "ensuring council".



# 1. Introduction: understanding neighbourhoods

## 1.1 Purpose of the study

This study is the second report of a wider investigation into the dynamics of governance, neighbourhoods and service delivery. In the first report<sup>1</sup>, our research drew attention to the increasing demands, both national and local, attached to the policy agenda of neighbourhood governance, questioning how far neighbourhood working could actually address social, economic and political challenges whose origins often lay outside the micro-dynamics of the neighbourhood. Rather, we stressed how any moves towards neighbourhood governance involved a series of trade-offs between participation and influence, access and competence, cohesion and pluralism, choice and equity.<sup>2</sup> Focussing upon questions of institutional design, we supported investigations into how neighbourhood bodies will have their own internal logics or rationales<sup>3</sup>, which shape particular practices and ways of working and which structure their capacity to meet particular challenges. How local authorities made such trade-offs between different logics or rationales for neighbourhood working is ultimately a political decision, depending upon different local contexts and histories. Echoing Lowndes and Sullivan, we thus called for a wider policy debate in which politicians, policymakers and communities across local authorities ‘develop a conception of [...] “a good political life” at the neighbourhood level and then explore in detail the implications for citizens, representatives, leaders and public servants.’<sup>4</sup>

This second report is one response to such a call. It investigates how local authorities in practice have negotiated moves towards neighbourhood governance. In so doing, it examines the different institutional designs surrounding neighbourhood working, drawing out the potential lessons or policy implications of particular ways of working at the neighbourhood level. The bottom line for the neighbourhood agenda, we argue, is to revitalise civic engagement and make improvements to service delivery. What we explore in this report is how this can be achieved while maintaining the necessary strategic, and most importantly, democratic, oversight of local service provision. There are a number of potential risks associated with the disaggregation of what we have termed the strategic apex of local authorities, and the incompatibility of policy initiatives such as outsourcing with the particular dynamics of neighbourhood governance. Neighbourhood governance drives above all a micro-political logic, in that it responds primarily to the sectional demands of individuals and groups within the community. This pursuit of particularistic interests masks tensions with the universal or collective logic of both place-shaping and local government. In this sense, we argue that it is local government that can, and should, exercise more universal policy judgments across the wider locality.<sup>5</sup>

In many ways, this report thus launches a further call to ‘bring local government back in’, to re-evaluate the impact of recent policy initiatives upon the core capacities of local government to deliver policy change across local communities. In his recent book on the politics of climate change, Lord Anthony Giddens calls himself for the creation of what he terms should be an ‘ensuring state’ with the capacity to determine political and economic convergence across policy sub-systems.<sup>6</sup> Political convergence is the

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1 M. Bramah, S. Griggs and M. Smith (2008) *Governance, Neighbourhoods and Service Delivery*, Manchester: APSE.

2 V. Lowndes and H. Sullivan (2008) ‘How Low Can You Go? Rationales and Challenges for Neighbourhood Governance’, *Public Administration*, Vol. 86, No. 1; H. Churchill (2007) *Devolving to Neighbourhoods. A Review of the Evidence*, Manchester: Centre for Local Governance, pp.17-18.

3 Lowndes and Sullivan (2008), ‘How Low Can You Go?’

4 Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) ‘How Low Can You Go?’, p. 20.

5 S. Griggs and D. Howarth (2008) *Negotiating Democratic Disaffection*, paper to 9th Essex Conference in Critical Political Theory: Capitalism, Faith and Nature, University of Essex, Colchester, 12-13 June.

6 A. Giddens (2009) *The Politics of Climate Change*, Oxford: Polity Press.

capacity to ensure policy coordination across all areas of policy and practice. Economic convergence is the capacity to ensure that economic interventions and programmes designed to maintain economic competitiveness do actually ‘join up’ with what we might term the social and environmental well-being of communities.<sup>7</sup> Together, these twin responsibilities of political and economic convergence draw our attention back to the core capacities of local government to undertake strategic place-shaping and how moves towards neighbourhood working might enhance or hamper the levers at the disposal of the ‘ensuring state’ to deliver convergence and lead the policy agenda. It is our belief that the time is now ripe to consider how we best deliver an **‘ensuring local authority’** that meets the demands of the changing political and economic context. And here in this report as a contribution to this debate, we hope to trigger discussions as to how far further moves towards neighbourhood working will advance the construction of an ‘ensuring’ local authority at the local level.

## 1.2 The highs and lows of neighbourhoods

When we set out upon the first part of this study, we declared ‘neighbourhoods’ as the new ‘problem–solution’ dynamic for national government, proclaiming the likes of ‘double devolution’, neighbourhood renewal and New Labour’s broad commitment to the ‘neighbourhood’ as a privileged site for governance and service delivery. However, more recently, we might question whether, at least within national government, the neighbourhood agenda retains the same salience as it did in previous New Labour governments. Are we moving towards the ‘end’ of a policy cycle in which initial enthusiasm for neighbourhood working gives way to the resigned recognition of its limitations? There is growing evidence to support such a claim. Since the 2006 publication of the *Strong and Prosperous Communities* White Paper, Durose, Lowndes and Reese do indeed argue that ‘neighbourhood’ within government policy has had to give way to the politics of ‘place’ which itself is accompanied by the conceptualisation of a more strategic leadership role for local government. They draw attention to the ‘new’ dynamic of the city-region, the impact of Local Area Agreements, and the potential of Multi-Area Agreements as all seeking to privilege the macro-dynamics of place over the micro-dynamics of neighbourhood. The effectiveness of neighbourhoods, they argue, has in government circles increasingly come under attack, particularly in relation to the capacity of neighbourhood interventions to tackle unemployment.<sup>8</sup>

A cursory examination of *Communities in Control*, the 2008 White Paper, does lend some support to such an interpretation of the decline of ‘neighbourhood’. In this recent empowerment White Paper, there remains a focus upon neighbourhood management, with neighbourhoods equally understood in terms of the civic rationale of community engagement and empowerment. However, ‘neighbourhood’ is only one of many policy instruments or interventions acknowledged and it is by no means the most privileged in the White Paper. Of course, this is to be somewhat expected in a white paper on empowerment and not on neighbourhood governance. Yet, more importantly, the empowerment agenda itself can be, and often is, interpreted as a logic of individualism, which focuses upon mechanisms such as ‘choice’, petitions and information strategies at the cost of the collective/community and spatial orientations of the neighbourhood.

As such, we might well be currently witnessing a rebalancing of the individualist ‘exit’ strategies and the collective ‘voice’ strategies that characterised earlier New Labour governments. Accompanying this process is a potential re-conceptualisation by government of neighbourhoods as mere sites for improved service delivery.<sup>9</sup> However, the fact remains that the absence of a coherent position across government depart-

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7 Giddens (2009) *The Politics of Climate Change*, pp. 91-94

8 C. Durose, V. Lowndes and J. Reese (2009) *Neighbourhoods in Transition: Where Now for ‘neighbourhood’ in UK policy?*, paper to conference on Neighbourhood Working: Where Do We Go From Here? Towards a New Research Agenda, De Montfort University, Leicester, 07 May.

9 I. Smith, E. Lepine and M. Taylor (Eds) (2007) *Disadvantaged by Where You Live? Neighbourhood Governance in Contemporary Urban Policy*, Bristol: Polity Press; H. Sullivan (2009) *Neighbourhoods as Sites, Spaces and Spheres of Governance*, paper to conference on Neighbourhood Working: Where Do We Go From Here? Towards a New Research Agenda, De Montfort University, Leicester, 07 May.

ments makes it difficult to draw any conclusions as to the demise of neighbourhoods at this point in time. Any suggestion of demise is in any case somewhat premature as the neighbourhood agenda retains its purchase across local authorities where neighbourhood working has become progressively embedded in local policy and practice. Whilst recognising the vagaries of the changing national policy agenda surrounding neighbourhoods, this report turns its attention to the impact of such local policies and practices.

### 1.3 A brief note on methods

The findings that inform this report are based upon a study of 15 local authorities, offering a cross-section of different party political leaderships, and including both unitary and district, and urban and rural, authorities from across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Two primary methods of data generation and analysis were employed. Firstly, we undertook a web-based survey and telephone interviews, which asked a number of questions concerning the processes and structures for neighbourhood working in their locality. These questions concerned primarily the institutional design of neighbourhood working, addressing questions of 'institutional hardware' such as the size of neighbourhoods, the membership and decision-making rules of formal governance structures and the nature of service delivery at the neighbourhood level. Secondly, we undertook three case studies of local authorities, with targeted interviews and literature survey of existing reports, policy documents and media articles in each of these case studies. The analysis of the case studies enabled us to go beyond the study of 'institutional hardware' to investigate the 'institutional software' of neighbourhoods or the different organisational discourses that support neighbourhood working across local authorities.<sup>10</sup>

The selected case studies were the cities of Birmingham, Edinburgh and Nottingham. Together, these cases demonstrate different political legacies and policy histories of neighbourhood and area working as well as particular social and economic contexts across their localities (see below). Most importantly, all of the case study local authorities have implemented recent changes to neighbourhood working. In Birmingham, following a council-led review of community engagement in 2007, another round of restructuring of the institutions of devolved governance in the city has mapped out 25 'priority neighbourhoods' across the city, of which 13 have been selected for more 'intensive' interventions. In Edinburgh, following reviews in 2005 of both community councils and the local development committees, twelve neighbourhood partnerships were introduced in June 2007, supported by the introduction of neighbourhood working, a new Services for Communities Department and the creation of six neighbourhood teams across the city. In Nottingham, neighbourhood managers were appointed by the Council during 2006 and under new arrangements agreed by the Executive Board in November 2007, the authority has established sixty neighbourhoods across the city, which build into the political wards across the city and sit below the intermediate administrative tier offered by area committees.

**Birmingham** has a long tradition of decentralisation and neighbourhood working, dating back to the 1980s and 1990s, not least its *Going Local* programme which devolved management of a range of operational services (housing, leisure, sport and culture, community safety, transportation and street services) to ten constituency committees.<sup>11</sup> The City has over one million residents and as such dominates the West Midlands region of England. It is the largest local authority in the UK and the largest council in Europe, with 120 councillors representing 40 wards across the city. In 2004, the Labour group lost control of the Council to a Conservative-Liberal Democrat

<sup>10</sup> We borrow this distinction between 'institutional hardware' and 'institutional software' from the work of John Dryzek. See J.S. Dryzek (1996) 'The Informal Logic of Institutional Design' in R. Goodwin (Ed) *The Theory of Institutional Design*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

<sup>11</sup> H. Sullivan (2000) *Community Governance: An Evaluation of Area Approaches in Birmingham*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham: School of Public Policy; A. Coulson and H. Sullivan (2000) 'Developing the Representational Role of Elected Members: Local Involvement, Local Action in Birmingham', *Local Government Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4; A. Coulson and M. Smith (2007) Decentralisation in Birmingham, unpublished paper, INLOGOV: Birmingham.

Alliance. Its population is racially diverse with over 30% originating from non-white ethnicities. When the city is broken down into wards and neighbourhoods, this proportion rises in some inner city areas.

**Nottingham** has a long tradition of area working, being 'a pioneer in developing Area Committees.'<sup>12</sup> The City is located in the East Midlands of England and has a resident population of approximately 284,000. The city has 55 councillors across 20 electoral wards, remaining staunchly Labour over the past thirty years, to the extent that in the last local elections in 2007 the ruling Labour administration gained four seats to take its majority to 29 seats. Deprivation is spread across the City, but concentrated in certain areas: a quarter of the population live in the most deprived top national 5% of Super Output Areas and just below half of the population live in the top national 10% most deprived areas.

**Edinburgh**, having established, like other Scottish authorities, 'community councils' in the 1970s, introduced five (later six) local development committees to improve public access to decision-making and consultation forums across the authority. The City of Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland and has a resident population of approximately 468,000. It is the seventh largest city in the United Kingdom and the second largest Scottish city after Glasgow, with 58 councillors representing 17 wards across the city. In 2007, following the introduction of multi-member wards and a single transferable vote system, the Liberal Democrats and Scottish National Party formed a coalition against the Labour and Conservative parties to take control of the city. As the larger of the two political parties, the Liberal Democrats hold both the post of Lord Provost of Edinburgh and of Leader of the Council.

In terms of how we 'made sense' of the complexities of the case studies, let us briefly return to the organisational analysis of Mintzberg (see our earlier report for a more in-depth discussion). In his work, Mintzberg argues that organisations are made up of five core elements: strategic apex, line-management, operating core, technostructure, and support staff. These five elements are assembled in various combinations to form 'ideal' organisational types such as the professional bureaucracy with a relatively autonomous operating core or a centralised machine authority with a developed line-management. In this study, we deployed Mintzberg's 'ideal' organisational types as a means of problematizing emerging patterns of neighbourhood governance, examining local developments through the lens of the centralised machine authority, the decentralized professional authority, and the decentralized divisional authority.<sup>13</sup> It is important to emphasise that we employed these organisational forms as metaphors, as ways of seeing practices on the ground and surfacing potential policy tensions within neighbourhood working. As such, they remain ideal types as, in practice, neighbourhood institutions will borrow from different designs and be much more 'messy', with variable practices and degrees of decentralisation across service areas. Indeed, what we deem to be the 'organisation' might well extend beyond the traditional organisational boundaries of a local authority in the context of emerging governance networks and performance regimes.

As with all studies, there are questions over the claims that can be made from 'illustrative' case studies and survey data sets. How far can we generalise from limited cases? Are they representative? Such questions are particularly pertinent in this study given the diversity of patterns of neighbourhood governance across localities, the sheer number of authorities across the United Kingdom, the different regulatory practices that have emerged since devolution and the pace of change in local authorities. This study does not intend to offer a 'photograph' of what is actually going on in neighbourhood across all authorities. Its claims are much more modest. We temper our claims to generalisation by recognising the importance of local context and the subjective observations and judgments of researchers and wider stakeholders. Rather, we see our research as another contribution to a wider dialogue and critical problematization of the logic of neighbourhood working. Its aim is to encourage debate and reflection. In

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12 Report to the One Nottingham Executive Board, *Neighbourhood Management Framework*, 20 November 2007.

13 H. Mintzberg (1983), *Structures in Fives: Designing Effective Organizations*, Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

## Mintzberg and Structures in Fives<sup>14</sup>

The *strategic apex*, at the head of the organisation, is composed of its executives, directors and elected leaders. It develops strategic goals and vision, determining how the organisation serves its mission and meets the changing demands of external funders or regulators. The *middle-line hierarchy* is the chain of middle-line managers or business. These individuals manage and delegate work to the operating core according to the direction set by the directors within the strategic apex. The *operating core* sits at the base of the organisation. It includes all those employees

who work directly to produce goods and services. Parallel to the middle-line hierarchy sit the *technostructure* and the support staff. The technostructure consists of the organisations' analysts and specialists notably policy and performance departments who work to standardise and improve practices across organisations. *Support staff* provide discrete sets of services that sustain the work of the organisation in the achievement of its core purpose(s) for example employees involved in such activities as transport, public relations, accounting or human resources.

other words, we seek to engage with those working on the neighbourhood agenda by simply asking the following question: 'this is what we think we have found out, what does it mean for you?'

### 1.4 Main findings and the structure of the report

In the first part of this report we discuss the key findings of our case study analysis and survey of neighbourhood governance across 15 local authorities. Notably, whilst we confirm, in the absence of an explicit 'blueprint' from central government, the diversity of neighbourhood arrangements across local authorities, we also recognise the pressures towards convergence across local authorities around existing institutional arrangements (such as wards and neighbourhood policing beats) and what we term the 'greener, cleaner and safer' policy agenda. The policy and practice of neighbourhood working, we suggest, remains on the whole, focussed upon service shaping and delivery strategies, with neighbourhoods becoming the primary **site for policy coordination and partnership working**<sup>15</sup>, specifically for the delivery of community safety and environmental services.

Such conclusions lead us to argue that the practices of neighbourhood working are currently best understood, in terms of the organisational forms offered by Mintzberg, as moving local authorities more or less towards the logics of decentralised divisional authorities. The **decentralised divisional authority** operates forms of constrained decentralisation where semi-autonomous divisions which are brought together under a central administration are given control over service delivery across neighbourhoods.

In the second part of this report, we go on to analyse how far neighbourhood working poses particular challenges for local authorities in mediating the complex relationship between the micro-dynamics of neighbourhood governance and the macro-dynamics of the strategic leadership of 'place'. We identify five sets of challenges facing local authorities:

- Firstly, we question how far neighbourhood working remains 'messy' in its incorporation of competing rationales;
- Secondly, we question how far neighbourhood working contributes to the saturation of local policy environments;
- Thirdly we question how far neighbourhood working puts increasing pressures on particular actors who operate as boundary-spanners, co-ordinating interventions both across neighbourhoods and between the neighbourhood and the strategic;
- Fourthly, we question how far neighbourhood working exacerbates tensions in the democratic representative role of frontline councillors;
- Finally, we question how far neighbourhood working undermines the capac-

<sup>14</sup> H. Mintzberg (1983), *Structures in Fives: Designing Effective Organizations*, Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall; H. Mintzberg (1979) *The Structure of Organizations*, Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; T. Schmidt (2006) *A Review of Structure in Fives: Designing Effective Organisations*, available at [http://thesis.msc-cse.com/pdf/article\\_mintzberg.pdf](http://thesis.msc-cse.com/pdf/article_mintzberg.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> See Smith, Lepine and Taylor (Eds) (2007) *Disadvantaged by Where You Live?*; Sullivan (2009) *Neighbourhoods as Sites, Spaces and Spheres of Governance*.

ity of local authorities to navigate successfully between the macro-politics of place and the micro-politics of neighbourhood.

In conclusion, we consider the future of neighbourhood working and consider how our findings contribute to the wider policy debates surrounding the politics of place, the strategic role of local government and the shaping of 'a good political life' at the neighbourhood level. We thus re-examine the challenges of neighbourhood working within the context of the moves towards what we have termed divisional neighbourhood working. In so doing, we set out a series of strategic policy questions for practitioners and elected members:

- Firstly, the opportunity costs of neighbourhood working and the pressures they place upon the likes of 'divisional managers' and how these costs are visible in limits to the strategic decision-making capacity of authorities;
- Secondly, the risk of creating political fiefdoms where neighbourhood working deflects elected members, particularly non-executive members, further away from the strategic considerations of place-shaping;
- Thirdly, the disaggregation of the local strategic apex across the local authority and its partners, not least where the outsourcing of local services arguably further removes from the neighbourhood the direct capacity of officers and politicians to actually shape services in response to the needs and demands of local communities;
- Fourthly, The long-term compatibility of appeals to a civic rationale of community engagement for neighbourhood working with existing practices of divisional neighbourhood working which lies more firmly within a service improvement rationale;
- Finally, the challenge of economic well-being where the alleged inability of neighbourhood programmes to tackle the likes of unemployment detracts from their benefits in terms of social and environmental well-being, particularly in these times of economic crisis.

As we have argued above, we end the report with a call for a wider debate over the core capacities of an 'ensuring local government' and how the emerging logic of neighbourhood working contributes (or not) to the construction of such an authority.



## 2. Neighbourhood governance: a survey

Here we examine the key findings of our study of the moves towards neighbourhood governance across local authorities. We discuss these findings in relation to the size of neighbourhoods, the boundaries that define neighbourhoods, neighbourhood partnership structures, the roles and responsibilities exercised by neighbourhoods, neighbourhood services and budgets, and the integration of neighbourhoods into local organisational and decision-making processes.

Of course, a cursory glance at the agenda of neighbourhood governance across the local authorities that we surveyed confirms what elected members, local officers and communities experience in their daily practice: it's 'messy'. In many ways, 'neighbourhood' has become short-hand for any form of sub-locality working, synonymous with 'area', 'forum', 'town' or 'parish'. It has come associated with service improvement, partnership working, political renewal, community engagement and empowerment. Disentangling these different understandings and practices is one of the key challenges we face if we are to draw any lessons for policy and practice. It is against this challenging background that we now turn to the discussion of the different size of 'neighbourhoods' across localities.

### 2.1 The size of neighbourhoods

National evaluations of neighbourhood management have tended to settle on a population between 5,000 and 15,000 people as the optimum scale for neighbourhood working.<sup>16</sup> The average population size of neighbourhoods has been found to be 8,500, with the most frequent categorisation of the size of neighbourhoods being over 5,000, but less than 10,000 people.<sup>17</sup> Our survey evidence supports these findings; with the majority of authorities we investigated working with neighbourhoods with populations of below 15,000 people. In Nottingham, its neighbourhoods have a catchment area of around 4,800 people. In Birmingham, neighbourhoods can have a population of as low as 1,000 people. For example, within the Selly Oak Constituency, one of the 10 constituencies identified by the local authority across the city, there are 35 neighbourhoods, with the catchment area of one neighbourhood covering around 1,000 people living primarily on one housing estate.<sup>18</sup>

In fact, we did find considerable variety in the size of populations covered by neighbourhood working. The size of neighbourhoods varied across individual authorities, particularly those with both rural and urban constituencies, with one such authority contrasting its 'rural' neighbourhoods with a population of between 500 and 2,000 with its 'urban' neighbourhoods which brought together between 6,000 and 8,000 people. Significantly, some authorities defined catchment areas with populations up to approximately five times the optimum scale for neighbourhood working, from 36,000 through to 50,000 and even 72,000 people. In Edinburgh, each of its twelve neighbourhood partnerships, which were introduced in June 2007, has a catchment area that covers an average population of 39,000. These neighbourhood partnerships operate in conjunction with the 41 community councils that currently operate in the city (out of a possible 46), each representing communities of around 10,000 people, and the six neighbourhood teams that operate across the city. Community councils nominate members onto the neighbourhood partnerships, which are themselves coordinated and supported by neighbourhood teams.

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<sup>16</sup> See for example SQW (2008) *Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders: Final Evaluation*, London: DCLG; SQW (2008) *Neighbourhood Management – Beyond the Pathfinders: A National Overview*, London: DCLG.

<sup>17</sup> SQW (2008) *Neighbourhood Management – Beyond the Pathfinders*, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> *Selly Oak Constituency Development Plan April 2009 to March 2010*.

## Community councils: a neighbourhood forum?

Edinburgh, like other Scottish authorities, established 'community councils' following the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.<sup>19</sup> Community councils are statutory bodies, with a voluntary elected membership, making them 'the most local form of elected representation in Scotland.' Their role is a representative one in that they

express the views of local communities to local authorities and other public organisations. Local authorities are obliged to consult them on planning applications and involve them in the community planning process (Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003).

## 2.2 The building blocks of neighbourhoods

The building blocks of neighbourhoods often encapsulated the tensions between the desire to discover 'natural communities' on the one hand, and the contingent pressures from existing political and service boundaries on the other. The boundaries which defined neighbourhoods thus varied across authorities. They were defined according to ward structures, 'natural communities', census output areas, towns or villages and parishes. Often these building blocks were combined so one authority founded its neighbourhood structures on political wards which were subsequently modified where appropriate to take account of 'natural communities'. Historical inheritances also meant that parish and town council boundaries operated alongside the mapping of neighbourhoods according to natural communities and political wards. Commonly, however, the authorities surveyed invoked the formation of 'clusters' as the policy driver behind the drawing of the boundaries of sub-locality or neighbourhood working. Yet, 'clusters' were defined differently, with one authority for example equating 'clusters' to police beats and another interpreting 'clusters' as bringing together a collection of wards and/or parish and town councils. One authority drew the boundaries of its 'clusters' anywhere up to the size of five wards, although each cluster was divided into smaller neighbourhood zones which totalled 53 across the city.

The mapping of 'natural communities' was evident in Birmingham where the boundaries of its 25 priority neighbourhoods are constructed around 'natural neighbourhoods' as advised by the local people who live within them, and in discussion with the police to align better with operational policing boundaries. Similarly, in Nottingham, the boundaries of its neighbourhoods appeal to 'bottom-up' identification of neighbourhoods which residents recognise, but which equally map pragmatically onto existing community policing beats and electoral wards. This alignment of neighbourhoods with the boundaries of police beats is in part driven by recent moves towards neighbourhood policing, but it potentially reflects, as we demonstrate below, the predominant focus of neighbourhood structures on community safety. In Nottingham, the National Intelligence Model used by the police leads the development of management information for neighbourhood working and one senior officer in the Council described the neighbourhood teams as 'joined at the hip' with their locally based police colleagues. Indeed, another officer stressing the importance of partners matching boundaries for neighbourhood working argued that in their authority that 'police, primary care trust and local authority: we all match.'

Overall, those designing neighbourhood institutions may well start off privileging the civic rationale of 'natural communities', but there is always a risk that they end up being overtaken by the force of the combination of social, political and economic rationales and institutional legacies.

## 2.3 Neighbourhood partnerships: a dominant institutional form?

Our survey suggests that local authorities tend to opt for the formal governance structure of a neighbourhood partnership – over two-thirds of the authorities surveyed

<sup>19</sup> Scottish Executive, cited in Association of Scottish Community Councils, *What Community Councils are. What Communities Council are not*, Glasgow: ASSC, available at [www.assc.org.uk](http://www.assc.org.uk).

doing so. Neighbourhood partnerships, as one might expect, bring together alongside the local authority and councillors a range of stakeholders from public agencies such as the police, health, and fire service as well as from community and voluntary organisations, and private business. The merit of their design is that they have the capacity to operate more directly as a means of joined up governance, operating as one officer commented as a 'mini-LSP board' meeting on average once a month or once a quarter. They are also more likely than area committees, our survey suggests, to be chaired by representatives from the community, with the possibility of rolling chairs from the statutory and community sector or different chairs agreed across different neighbourhood partnerships. This practice whilst widening stakeholder participation raises questions over the formal accountability of many neighbourhood partnerships to democratically-elected local councillors. Indeed, whilst one midlands authority had its neighbourhood partnerships chaired by a local authority officer, only one authority surveyed had its neighbourhood partnerships chaired by an elected member.

However, in terms of institutional design of these neighbourhood partnerships, our survey suggests that authorities have often morphed the distinct institutional forms of neighbourhood partnership and area committee upon one another. Area committees are predominantly chaired by ward councillors, with boundaries based on political wards, with a majority membership of ward councillors. Where there are co-opted representatives and partners on such committees, they often have no voting rights.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, what we tend to see in practice is, on the one hand, area committees engaging a wide range of stakeholders within a rationale of improved partnership working and thereby potentially creating competing legitimacy claims to those of elected members and local authorities. On the other hand, neighbourhood partnerships engaging a wider range of stakeholders then can often privilege the accountability and representative mechanisms of elected members, creating potentially unmet expectations of engagement amongst wider groups of 'expert citizens'.<sup>21</sup> Of course, one clear way of avoiding such potential pitfalls is to narrowly define, as some authorities have, the actual remit of any neighbourhood partnership or committee such that it remains an advisory body which offers no effective challenge to local representative political leadership. This does however limit the civic rationale for neighbourhood working, which aims to enhance citizen participation and active communities.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.4 Roles and responsibilities of the neighbourhood

Our analysis of local authorities suggests that community engagement remains one of the key drivers of neighbourhood working, with engagement being the most often cited function of neighbourhoods (over three-quarters of authorities investigated). Two of the authorities surveyed identified community engagement as the single function of neighbourhood working, thus privileging the civic rationale of neighbourhood working. However, such a civic rationale was more often than not married to the identification of a set of functions and roles of neighbourhoods which we can group together in terms of service shaping, scrutiny, and community planning. In fact, a number of authorities have conceptualised the neighbourhood as a site for the scrutiny and planning of its services, citing such responsibilities for the neighbourhood as priority setting, the formulation of neighbourhood plans, and the challenge of existing patterns of service design and delivery.

However, this predominance of the civic rationale for neighbourhood working should not overshadow the fact that over half of the local authorities we investigated articulated as a key function of neighbourhood working both improved coordination of service delivery and partnership working, particularly with the police and health (community safety for example is one of the key service areas delivered at the level of the neighbourhood (see below)). One interviewee commented that, within the

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20 We develop this distinction from the work of H. Sullivan, M. Smith, A. Root and D. Moran (2001) *Area Committees and Neighbourhood Management: Increasing Democratic Participation and Social Inclusion*, London: LGIU.

21 We draw here upon the distinction between 'expert citizens' and 'everyday makers', see H. Bang (2005) 'Among everyday makers and expert citizens' in J. Newman (Ed) *Remaking Governance. Peoples, Politics and the Public Sphere*, Policy Press: Bristol.

22 See Lowndes and Sullivan (2008), 'How Low Can You Go?'

## The City of Edinburgh and its neighbourhood partnerships

Edinburgh introduced twelve neighbourhood partnerships in June 2007. These partnerships are supported by neighbourhood working through the Council's Services for Communities department, with the creation of six neighbourhood teams across the city. The membership of each partnership is composed of representatives of the Council, police, health, the voluntary sector and the community (represented by community councils). The partnerships are chaired by a local councillor – in the role of Convener – and their activities, membership and structures are guided by issues that are recognized as important in the area: typically they] combine the councillors from two council wards with representatives of community councils. Neighbourhood partnerships are tasked with agreeing local priorities, identifying ways in which these priorities will be addressed through the development of local community plans, influencing city level strategies and plans, scrutinising the delivery and performance of key council services such as street cleaning, urban parks, libraries, local development, road maintenance, and traffic and parking issues. The partnerships meet several times per year.

Neighbourhood partnerships have the status of advisory committees, with a broader membership than traditional committees, and with participants having full voting powers but no delegated pow-

ers. However, a number of budgets have been delegated to neighbourhood managers who act on the advice of the partnerships. Each neighbourhood partnership develops sub-groups to address local priority themes, such as housing and the built environment' or 'health and well being'. They can make recommendations to improve local service provision to the Council and partner organisations, comment on strategic decisions for the local area, award a range of grants to community groups for local projects, and commission services or projects in support of the delivery of priority outcomes (from the Single Outcome Agreement) at a local neighbourhood level. They form the local dimension of the community planning process, developing and monitoring the delivery of local plans and feeding evidence into their formulation. Neighbourhood partnerships provide opportunities for communities to express their views, set out the priorities to improve quality of life in local areas, and gather local evidence and information to help develop a local community plan. The Council retains overall control in the sense that each partnership is chaired by a local councillor and in addition to the capacity to award a range of grants, 'the remit of the partnerships is to offer advice to the neighbourhood management teams which are staffed by officers and hold the core budgets devolved to them by the Council.'

context of neighbourhood working, the predominant rationale of their authority had less to do with civic engagement and more to do with improved coordination and targeting of service delivery through the 'unclogging' of area responsibilities for services within one neighbourhood action team. Another officer spoke of the desire to avoid duplication by offering at the neighbourhood 'one voice' and 'one place to go to' for the community. Indeed, as we discuss below, it is through this definition of the 'neighbourhood' as a primary site for improved policy coordination and partnership working that neighbourhood working has increasingly come to be seen to integrate into wider place-shaping strategies of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

This focus on neighbourhoods as sites for improved policy coordination by local authorities, their departments and partners sits alongside more flexible approaches which have strived to identify distinct packages of roles and responsibilities for different neighbourhoods across a single authority. This is particularly the case with neighbourhood management and regeneration initiatives which have not always applied across the whole of the locality. The national evaluation of neighbourhood management pathfinders suggests that authorities may well combine 'light touch' resident engagement across all neighbourhoods with a 'more intense form of engagement – neighbourhood management – in the more deprived neighbourhoods, or areas undergoing significant transition.'<sup>23</sup> We witness such an approach in the case of Birmingham and the identification of 25 'priority neighbourhoods' across the city of which 13 have been chosen for further 'intensive work'.

Overall, however, designs for neighbourhood governance tend to have an operational

23 SQW (2008) *Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders: Final Evaluation*, p. 85.

and community development orientation. Although their introduction is tied up with aims to boost empowerment, those aims are entwined with a service improvement rationale that privileges better service coordination, the identification of needs and the bending of mainstream programmes towards meeting those needs. As such, empowerment becomes reduced to service improvement.

## The Strategic Approach of Birmingham

Following a recent council-led review of community engagement, *Be Birmingham*, the local strategic partnership, has mapped out 25 'priority neighbourhoods' across the city of which 13 have been chosen to receive more intensive interventions. Each of the 25 priority neighbourhoods has produced a neighbourhood partnership plan and has been allocated a sum of £50,000 to implement the plan. This approach brings with it a set of additional challenges, not least how community perceptions are managed

between neighbourhoods and how initial intervention criteria are determined and politically negotiated. In Birmingham, the City Council has made an allocation of £100,000 from its Community Chest to every one of the 40 wards in the city in an effort to ensure that the residents outside the priority neighbourhoods do not feel excluded. Political pressure from some elected members to extend the criteria for selection to include a much wider group of neighbourhoods has also so far been resisted.

## 2.5 Neighbourhood services and budgets: focus on crime and environmental services

Where the delivery of services is decentralised to the neighbourhood, our survey findings suggest that this occurs in what might be broadly termed community services: policing and community safety and environmental services such as street cleansing, park maintenance, and specific projects to street scene. In some authorities, housing and housing maintenance are also decentralised to the neighbourhood. From our research, we would expect this form of decentralisation to neighbourhood teams to continue, with a number of respondents confirming plans to extend the number of services delivered at the level of the neighbourhood. Such moves are part of the logic of neighbourhood partnership working.

Significantly, as we have suggested above, responsibility for this operational or service delivery can sit within neighbourhood action teams which operate alongside wider neighbourhood forums or partnerships aimed at community engagement. This has the potential, in the absence of effective coordination, to divorce resource and capacity from the arena of community engagement and in so doing to create unmet expectations within communities. For example, let us briefly consider a neighbourhood partnership which has been designed as an advisory committee, but is tied to a community engagement rationale of priority-setting and planning. Here it is possible to generate wide dissatisfaction among community activists and leaders who are 'invited' to operate in a partnership which has potentially little or no purchase over core budgets which are managed by neighbourhood action teams. In other words, the capacity and resources to influence service delivery lies 'outside' the neighbourhood partnership,

The contribution of neighbourhoods to what we might term 'green, clean and safe' issues is replicated in Birmingham and in Nottingham. In the priority neighbourhoods in Birmingham, a neighbourhood action plan is often built in practice around a template of Key Performance Indicators addressing quality of life and social control issues such as the behaviour of young people, the 'number of litter picks in a neighbourhood' and the regularity of 'graffiti removal'. Equally, in the priority neighbourhoods themselves policy is more concerned with 'reshaping existing services' rather than introducing new money, and with 'reducing duplication' across services such as health and schools rather than creating new services. In fact, in Nottingham, the 2007 framework reproduced the 'green, clean and safe' template from other areas' neighbourhood developments, recognising that 'experience elsewhere suggests community safety, street scene services and youth provision are the services most Councils have concentrated on for area working.'<sup>24</sup>

24 Report to the One Nottingham Executive Board, *Neighbourhood Management Framework*, 20 November 2007.

Within more than half of the local authorities we examined, neighbourhoods had their own budgets. For the majority however, this was a relatively small budget of approximately £40,000. One authority allocated only £1000 to its neighbourhoods, whilst a third did not devolve any budget to be spent by neighbourhood bodies. Indeed, one authority had recently withdrawn neighbourhood budgets, because, as one of its officers claimed, the financial costs of administering such budgets were far higher than the initial £20,000 allocated to each neighbourhood. However, we should not too quick to conclude that neighbourhood forums or partnerships have no financial resources to operate as an arena of decentred governance. Neighbourhood action teams in some authorities may well control the distribution of core funding across their neighbourhood. As one neighbourhood lead officer brought out, 'we have a devolved budget of £750,000 across the cluster, aimed at 'closing the gap' between neighbourhoods, but I directly manage the core budgets of housing, environmental services...' In other words, much depends on the distribution of core funding and mainstream budgets.

## 2.6 Neighbourhoods and organisational structures

In terms of where the neighbourhood sits within the local organisational and managerial structures of local authorities, our survey suggests once more than there is much diversity. They tend to sit for the majority of the authorities surveyed within a neighbourhood services department or a community services department, itself within the local authority. Overall, this supports claims that the local authority predominantly leads neighbourhood working, with the majority of neighbourhood structures sitting with neighbourhood services or community services in the local authority, with one even reporting directly to the Chief Executive Policy Unit. However, one authority has its neighbourhood structures sitting across neighbourhood services, community services and the local community planning partnership. Finally, one authority has operational responsibility sitting with its neighbourhood services department but responsibility for oversight and scrutiny sitting with the local strategic partnership. Indeed, one authority has recently moved its neighbourhood services from the local strategic partnership back into its culture and economic development services.

### Neighbourhood Working in the City of Nottingham

In the city, there are 9 area committees, each based upon two or three electoral ward boundaries, covering around 30,000 people. Under new arrangements agreed by the Executive Board in November 2007, Nottingham has established sixty neighbourhoods across the city. Each neighbourhood has a catchment area of approximately 4800 people, with neighbourhoods building into the political wards across the city and sitting below the intermediate administrative tier offered by the area committee.

Area committees are chaired by an elected member and composed of local councillors, tenants and residents, voluntary and community groups, local area partnerships, public organisations such as the police and fire service, and local businesses. Each area committee, which meets every two months, has responsibility for the development, approval and monitoring of neighbourhood action plans, leadership of area regeneration and renewal, the undertaking of area consultation, the promotion of well-being, and the allocation of grants of up to £5000 to community or voluntary organisations. Equally, they agree priorities for the likes of street lighting, grounds maintenance, approve for example housing environmental improvements and traffic schemes, and are consulted on licensing applications, strategic planning applications, schools re-organisation and local planning issues. Finally,

area committees also monitor and scrutinise service delivery (including refuse collection, void properties, community safety and voluntary sector grants), and feed in to Best Value reviews, and to the Executive Board and the Advice and Scrutiny committee on policy performance and local needs and priorities.

The work of each area committee is supported by a Neighbourhood Area Management Teams, which are composed of a Neighbourhood Manager, Neighbourhood Action officers, and an Area Administrator, although they can also include Priority Neighbourhood Coordinators and Health Action Officers. The Neighbourhood Area Management teams focus on the delivery of 'local and visible 'quick wins', delivering Local Community Plans and improving access to local information. The Local Community Plan acts as the framework for allocating resources to transform neighbourhoods and communities. The Area Committee, supported by their Neighbourhood Manager, negotiates local agreements with partners on 'how priority actions can be delivered and by whom.' Three levels of engagement in neighbourhoods are proposed: Universal (Agreed level of service that everyone can expect); specific time-limited problem-solving; and neighbourhood management of complex needs in the most deprived top 5% nationally.

However, there were authorities where neighbourhoods sat 'outside' the local authority within the LSP or community planning partnership. Indeed, this was the case in more than one of our case studies where the nine area committees in Nottingham, an administrative intermediate tier of organisation, have their partial equivalents in Birmingham in that city's 10 Constituency Strategic Partnerships, and in Edinburgh in the Neighbourhood Partnerships. These all sit above neighbourhood management areas, but all remain under the coordination of a strategic apex which is formed by the local strategic partnerships.

In Nottingham, with neighbourhoods forming the most local organisational level and area committees operating as intermediate tiers, the Local Strategic Partnership, renamed 'One Nottingham', forms the apex of the local organisational and policy structures. Importantly, there is a clear distinction made between, on the one hand, the 'Officer/Governance Structures' and, on the other, the 'Member/Governance Structures'. This distinction begins with the *One Nottingham* Executive (officers) and the *One Nottingham* Board (members) and is worked through the administrative structure to the local level of Neighbourhood Action Teams and Ward Councillors. The key councillor governance structures for neighbourhood working are the One Nottingham LSP - Communities and Neighbourhood Theme Partnership; Executive Board and Portfolio roles; Area Committee/Chairs and Ward Councillors at the neighbourhood level.

In Edinburgh, above the neighbourhood partnerships at the strategic level sit a number of Strategic Partnerships and the Edinburgh Partnership which exercises overall leadership in community planning, thus working closely with neighbourhood partnerships particularly to capture learning between the two tiers of community planning. In fact, the Edinburgh Partnership is responsible for producing the Single Outcome Agreement and Local Community Planning for the City of Edinburgh and in this way might be considered similar in its structure and duties to an English LSP. The neighbourhood teams report directly to the Director of Services for Communities in the City Council.

In Birmingham, at the intermediate level in this new structure there are 10 Constituency Strategic Partnerships and at the highest level there is both a Neighbourhoods Partnership and a *Be Birmingham* Neighbourhoods Board. The latter board is the executive group for neighbourhood working and meets four times a year under the chairmanship of the Assistant Chief Constable of the West Midlands Police.

## 2.7 Preliminary conclusions: making sense of diversity

We began this discussion by pointing to the diversity of the practices of neighbourhood working. Our survey confirms such local diversity in terms of the size of population covered, local capacity, skills and resources, members' roles, the degree of devolution, the formality of structures and methods of accountability will all vary; and, all will influence practices on the ground.<sup>25</sup> Such local variation has been widely acknowledged and welcomed.<sup>26</sup> It arguably enables local authorities to adopt a variety of approaches that take account of local political dynamics, policy and organisational legacies, distinct geographies and identities, and particular economic, social and political resources across communities.

However, whilst recognising local variation, our research does pose a number of broad challenges for policy and practice if authorities are to pursue further neighbourhood governance and service delivery. Here we first discuss institutional questions around the size of neighbourhoods and the 'state of play' of neighbourhood working before turning in the next part of the report to the questions of strategy and place-shaping.

Our research suggests that some authorities might usefully consider the appropriateness of their use of the term 'neighbourhood' and the population size of what they have defined as neighbourhoods within their authority. The term 'neighbourhood' was often applied by authorities to a constituency which we might better define as

<sup>25</sup> We draw here on the Transforming Neighbourhoods initiative by the Young Foundation, see for example N. Bacon, with S. James and V. Savage (2007) *Transforming Neighbourhoods. Lessons from Local Work in 15 Areas*, London: Young Foundation.

<sup>26</sup> See for example SQW (2008) *Neighbourhood Management – Beyond the Pathfinders*.

an 'area'. The national evaluation of neighbourhood management pathfinders distinguishes 'neighbourhood working' from 'area working' once the population covered by locality working rises above 20,000 people.<sup>27</sup> Of course, this is somewhat of an arbitrary and uniform measure, which goes against the recognition of neighbourhoods as locally-defined political constructs, as the outcome of a political process in which citizens and policymakers across localities come to define or name a particular space or site as their 'neighbourhood'.<sup>28</sup> However, it raises questions for practice as to how far appeals to neighbourhood working retain their credibility with stakeholders once authorities attach 'neighbourhood' to larger units than for example housing estates or a collection of streets. Naming localities as 'neighbourhoods' is not a neutral exercise; it actually brings into being particular spaces as 'neighbourhoods' and in doing so it generates particular expectations or grievances among stakeholders, often causing former grievances to resurface in new political spaces.

Equally, the size of the population of neighbourhoods across certain authorities surfaces a policy contradiction between the population size of neighbourhoods and the espousal of civic engagement as one of the underlying rationales for neighbourhood working. In localities with a population of above 15,000 people, it becomes increasingly difficult to offer 'meaningful' community engagement.<sup>29</sup> And, against this benchmark, a number of the authorities we surveyed would thus find it difficult to meet the objectives of a civic rationale for neighbourhood working, having constructed neighbourhood partnerships with catchment areas of 50000 or more.

### Distinguishing Neighbourhoods and Areas: the City of Nottingham

'The term **'area'** should be used to describe a geographical division of the City primarily for administrative purposes – whereas the term **'neighbourhood'** should be used to describe a smaller geographical location that a local resident could reasonably associate with... Typically, it will be larger than a single block of streets, but smaller than an electoral

ward. Very often it will be bounded by major roads, railway lines, canals or rivers. It will have a name people recognise. People living in a neighbourhood will often share a sense of local belonging and identity with local shops, play areas, schools or leisure activities etc. providing a focus.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, neighbourhood working, we conclude, remains on the whole, focussed upon service shaping and service delivery strategies, becoming the primary site for policy coordination and partnership working. As such 'sites of governance', neighbourhoods are the territory for top-down interventions. They have not developed into either 'spaces of governance' where they become arenas for new practices between state and non-state actors or into 'spheres of governance' where they engender new social, political and economic settlements between different actors involving not least significant devolution of collective decision-making.<sup>31</sup> Authorities have thus tended to construct the neighbourhood as the site for the delivery of community safety and environmental services, with their own limited budgets. Such services typically sit within the category of services that are deemed appropriate to devolve to the neighbourhood, alongside youth and play services, local transport, and health and well being.<sup>32</sup> These moves are accompanied by appeals to broader rationales of civic engagement, but these appeals may themselves generate unmet expectations among stakeholders and threaten the sustainability of neighbourhood working over time. For most authorities, it remains one step to focus on the neighbourhood as a site for partnership working

27 SQW (2008) *Neighbourhood Management – Beyond the Pathfinders*, p. 27.

28 J. Jacobs (1994) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, cited in Durose, Lowndes and Reese (2009) *Neighbourhoods in Transition: Where Now for 'neighbourhood' in UK policy?*, p. 6.

29 SQW (2008) *Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders: Final Evaluation*, p. 85

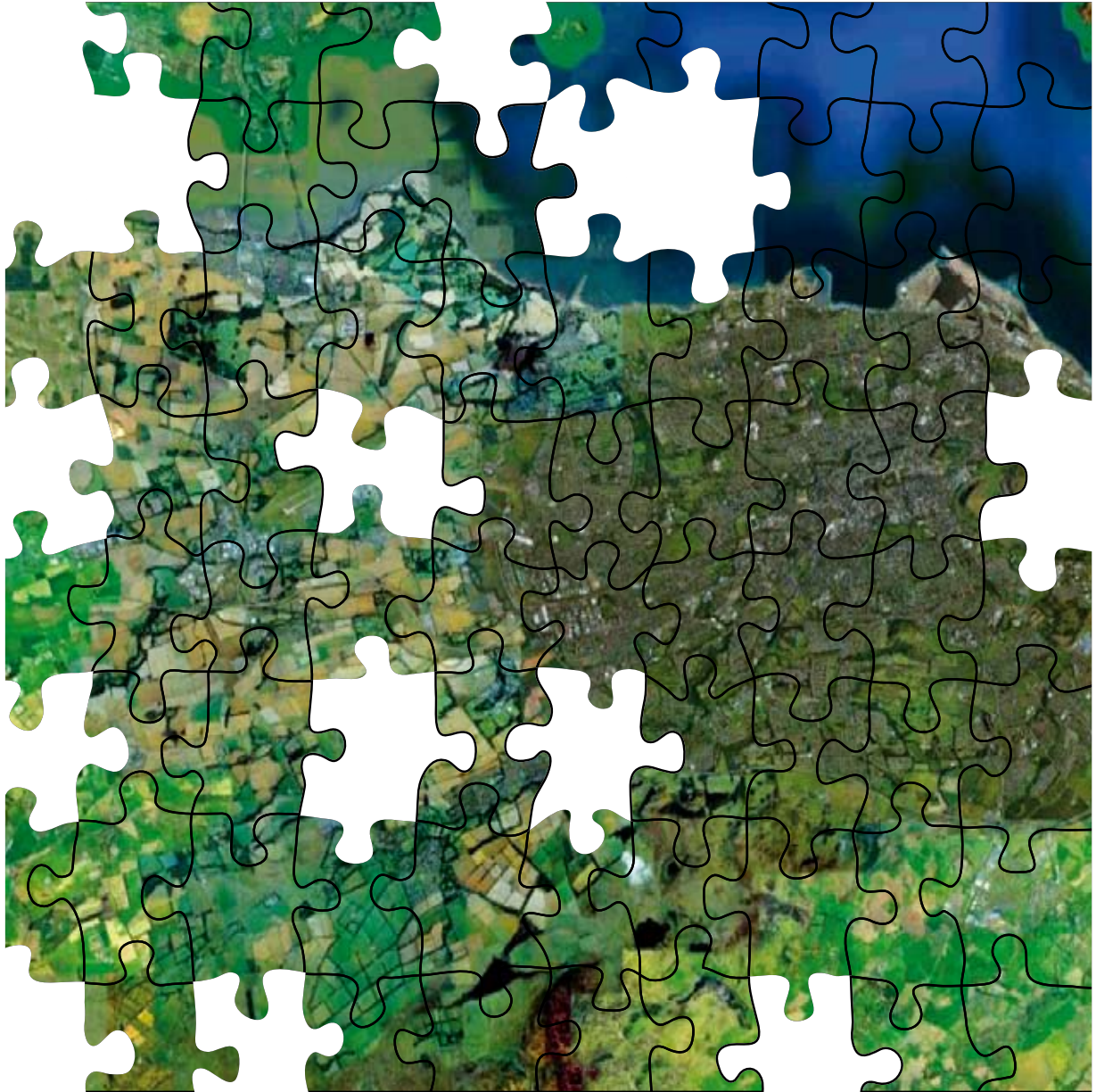
30 Report to the One Nottingham Executive Board, *Neighbourhood Management Framework*, 20 November 2007.

31 See Smith, Lepine and Taylor (Eds) (2007) *Disadvantaged by Where You Live?*; Sullivan (2009) *Neighbourhoods as Sites, Spaces and Spheres of Governance*.

32 J. Hilder (2006) *How Local Government Devolves, and Why. Part Two: Developing local strategies*, London: LGA, Young Foundation, IDeA, p. 13.

and the tailoring of mainstream service delivery, but quite another to devolve control over services to neighbourhoods. Such a further pursuit of the logic of neighbourhood governance, as our research demonstrates, raises a set of policy challenges, questioning ultimately how far neighbourhood working dovetails with a strategic focus upon the politics of place and place-shaping. It is to these policy challenges which emerged from our survey of local authorities that we now turn.





## 3. Understanding the dynamics of place and the neighbourhood

In our review of the challenges of neighbourhood governance, we identified emerging concerns over how far devolution to neighbourhoods might hamper the capacity of local authorities to exercise strategic leadership across a locality.<sup>33</sup> Our current research has highlighted a number of conditions which might ease the potential tensions between what we term the macro-dynamics of place and the micro-dynamics of neighbourhoods. Indeed, we have witnessed how in some authorities the marrying of the strategic and the neighbourhood are addressed by the construction of neighbourhood committees as mini-partnerships directly tied to the achievement of LAA targets. Other authorities have pointed to the importance of ensuring that the governance of neighbourhoods remains firmly in the hands of local councillors. Whilst we should not forget the strategic importance attributed by some to the uniform application of neighbourhood working to all parts of the city as well as the matching of neighbourhood boundaries with other public agencies such as the police and health. In this part of the report, we investigate further the linkage between the politics of place and the neighbourhood by pointing to key challenges for elected members, officers, partners and communities engaged in neighbourhood governance.

### 3.1 Clarifying understandings and rationales

Firstly, our research confirms not only local variation in neighbourhood governance, but also what we understand as ‘messiness’<sup>34</sup>: the existence within authorities of different interpretations of the same neighbourhood governance structures and processes. What constitutes ‘neighbourhood’ takes on dramatically different meanings across local authorities, with the supporters of different interpretations and understandings often engaged in a competition to influence (or not) institutional designs and rationales for neighbourhood governance.

In fact, a recent study of neighbourhood working in Manchester undertaken by Catherine Durose and Vivien Lowndes supports such claims, asserting how different actors at different levels (national government, city-wide or neighbourhood) employ different rationales for neighbourhood working.<sup>35</sup> They demonstrate how neighbourhood actors and central government articulate civic rationale for neighbourhood working concerned with enhancing citizen participation and active communities. However, city-wide actors voice an economic rationale which directs neighbourhood governance towards efficiency gains and increased effectiveness. Indeed, Durose and Lowndes thus conclude that the challenge for policy and practice is to grasp the multiplicity of competing perspectives and the contingency of prevailing power relationships and institutional settlements across neighbourhoods.

Such a conclusion captures the ‘messiness’ to which we allude. We would suggest that such ‘mess’ is not a temporary aberration. It is the very condition of politics. But, what does it mean for policy and practice in relation to neighbourhood governance? On the one hand, it suggests that building such ‘mess’ into understandings of neighbourhood governance will ensure broad coalitions of support; in other words, ‘messy’ solutions are to be welcomed and just might be a strength of institutional design.<sup>36</sup> Yet, the danger for policy is that of ‘false consensus’ whereby local stakeholders voice demands for what they believe to be common forms of neighbourhood working, but continue in effect to ‘talk past one another’, with each stakeholder articulating a different interpretation of the problems addressed, and solutions achieved, by neighbourhoods. ‘Mess’

33 See our first report, Bramah, Griggs and Smith (2008) *Governance, Neighbourhoods and Service Delivery*.

34 J. Law (2004) *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*, London: Routledge.

35 C. Durose and V. Lowndes (2009) *Why take a neighbourhood approach in local governance? Exploring contrasting rationales*, paper to conference on Network Governance, De Montfort University, Leicester, 27 March 2009.

36 M. Verweij, M. Douglas, R. Ellis, C. Engel, F. Hendriks, S. Lohmann, S. Ney and M. Thompson (2006) ‘The Case for Clumsiness’, in M. Verweij and M. Thompson (eds.) *Clumsy Solutions for a Complex World*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

in such instances might well be necessary to garner temporary political support but it also has to be negotiated over time and that relies on the capacity of political leaders to produce and constantly re-produce a common vision or settlement that 'holds' such 'mess' together. In short, political leadership and what we have termed 'institutional software' matters. Take for example Nottingham where the moves towards neighbourhood working were tied to the capacity and the political leadership of the ruling Labour group to create 'a new identity' for the city and to do it by actively transforming the identities of individual neighbourhoods. Indeed, the drive behind the initiative aimed at 'Transforming Nottingham's Neighbourhoods' can only be fully understood against the background of the enduring strength of one political grouping within the city and the construction of a wider commitment across the city towards change.

### 3.2 Saturation of local policy environments

Secondly, our research suggests that neighbourhood governance might well 'saturate' local policy environments – establish multiple points of access, generate competing perceptions of lines of accountability and responsibility for service delivery, and create institutional veto points. Sub-local working introduces new tiers of governance into the local policy space, whether it is at the level of the 'area' or the 'neighbourhood'. In many instances, their introduction leads to the *layering* of institutions into already crowded local policy environments, potentially replicating responsibilities and functions. In other instances, it introduces new institutional logics which develop 'outside' of the local authority, creating new 'spaces' within which to voice new grievances and demands. Now, on the one hand, we do not dispute that this raises opportunities for community engagement (if at the appropriate level). However, in terms of trade-offs between citizen engagement and strategic place-shaping, our research begins to question whether across authorities we are witnessing the building-in to local policy-making of further tensions between the strategic apex and the operational core. Indeed, our research suggests that the institutional spaces that are neighbourhoods potentially embed into decision-making the logic of negotiation/bargaining or turf-wars between different tiers of the authority- neighbourhood versus area versus cabinet. This places increased pressure on elected members both as advocates for their ward and as policy brokers across the city, redistributing what is increasingly termed the metagovernance<sup>37</sup> or policy steering responsibilities across executive and ward councillors. More importantly, we might question how far we are condensing at the level of the neighbourhood a range of strategic policy challenges that can only be addressed by the wider local authority – a claim that we discuss further below. Indeed, such questions cannot be divorced from the appropriateness of mini-LSPs at the level of the neighbourhood. Suffice it to say here that despite claims that neighbourhoods can 'unclog' service delivery and decision-making, there is ample evidence to suggest the opposite.'

#### Edinburgh and the layering of institutions

The introduction of neighbourhood partnerships took place within a policy environment in which there were many horizontal, as well as vertical, interconnections to be reconstructed. The partnerships had to coordinate with the existing boundaries and institutional dynamics of community councils. They demanded a new planning protocol to provide the means for 'front end engagement' in the planning process as required by new legislation, as well as the creation of rules of engagement with the Local Co-ordinating Groups recently set up by the Children and Families Department, with the services provided by the Edinburgh voluntary sector. The complexity of such institutional arrangements led to local policy debates over,

as one officer advised us, 'how best to simplify the local partnership landscape to avoid duplication without losing the good practice and community involvement of the then current arrangements.' For example, in the case of the integration of Housing Area Boards into neighbourhood partnerships there was 'considerable debate' over several months regarding the future role of the Housing Area Boards. As reflected in one review, tenant representatives were 'supportive of an integrated approach to governance arrangements but ha[d] concerns about losing their identity and fragmentation should the Housing Area Boards be reconfigured to become a subset of neighbourhood partnership arrangements...'<sup>38</sup>

37 B. Jessop (2003) 'Governance and Metagovernance: On Reflexivity, Requisite Variety, and Requisite Irony', in H. Bang (Ed) Governance, as Social and Political Communication, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

38 Edinburgh City Council report, *Council Review 2007:- Establishing Neighbourhood Partnerships*, 08 March 2007.

## Birmingham and Going Local

Through the Going Local programme in 2004, Birmingham City Council devolved down management of a range of operational services to its then eleven constituency committees (reduced to 10 in 2006 following national boundary changes). Each constituency committee prepared an annual constituency service plan to the Cabinet for approval and negotiated service level agreements. Birmingham's way of balancing local priorities identified in the plan was to ensure that such service plans fitted within the strategic framework set by the Council.

And there were also measures in the Constitution for when this was not the case. This put in place the potential role for ward committees effectively to lobby for their own neighbourhoods against others and against the corporate centre (identifying needs and maximising community influence), with the Constitution emphasising their role to 'encourage and facilitate dialogue between the Council and local people'. Recent reforms have sought to minimise any possibility of such outcomes.

### 3.3. Identification of support for boundary-spanners

Thirdly, as we have already suggested, our research questions the extent to which neighbourhood governance puts increasing pressure on individuals to act as boundary-spanners who can bring together networks of councillors, officers and community stakeholders across different tiers of governance, steer them in the right direction, and hold them to it over time. This boundary-spanning has both horizontal and vertical dimensions, horizontally across individual neighbourhood and vertically between the neighbourhood and the strategic apex of the authority. Such roles require different skill sets; the skills for the building coalitions and identifying needs across a neighbourhood are not those required for influencing and coordinating mainstream services. Indeed, one neighbourhood manager described his role as a 'hussler' brokering deals and bringing groups together.

Of course, this boundary spanning function is not the sole domain of neighbourhood officers or workers, but relies in part upon the tandem of ward councillors and neighbourhood managers: 'where they work well together, they strengthen each others work'. As a senior manager argued, the boundary spanning skills of individual officers and elected members underpin the development of neighbourhood working as a 'change of culture' for the organisation as a whole. Neighbourhood managers, the officer continued, must be able to 'hold their own in a political environment' and drive the project, but also be 'anonymous', whilst elected members can use their 'links and knowledge base right down to the grassroots' and are already connected into many of the neighbourhoods in their wards. The authority can come to rely upon this boundary spanning tandem and its network resources in managing the moves towards neighbourhood governance.

This tandem is not without its tensions, noticeably between how the split between the officer and member sides of 'governance structures' are negotiated and what this means at the various levels of operation. Even with expressed intentions that neighbourhood governance should be politically led and that 'governance' should be principally interpreted in terms of representative democracy, one officer commented that some members are 'not totally comfortable' with how their neighbourhood meetings work because they do not conform to 'the rules of the game' as they recognise them from established committee structures. The competing logics of representative and participatory democracy are surfaced within such tensions.

In fact, we suggest that the introduction of new tiers of neighbourhood governance puts particularly intense pressures on 'middle managers', whether officers or elected members, who span the boundaries between councils' strategic and neighbourhood roles. Whilst neighbourhood managers might have primarily horizontal roles across neighbourhoods, who or what ensures the vertical integration between the strategic and the neighbourhood? How these networks are then integrated into the wider strategic arenas of the local authority becomes central to the dynamics of neighbourhood governance, as does the support given by local authorities to facilitate such boundary spanning. This challenge is potentially amplified by an additional layer of complex-

ity when neighbourhood structures report to local strategic partnerships. In our case studies, this function ‘nests’ within area committees and constituency partnerships – the role of officers and frontline councillors is thus key to effective coordination as are effective channels from frontline councillors to cabinet members.

### The challenges facing neighbourhood workers

The complexity of such a role is epitomised in the multiple tasks facing neighbourhood managers: customer advocate; community facilitator; local broker; area champion; innovator and change agent; and community catalyst.<sup>39</sup> Our research confirmed this multiplicity of identities for neighbourhood managers with policy challenges differing across neighbourhoods (priority and non-priority areas). Indeed, neighbourhood managers can for example be responsible for developing neighbourhood actions plan

by bringing community groups, political representatives and local managers of public services together. This task, said one local officer ‘relies on local knowledge and the application of specific negotiating skills in the absence of any significant sums of money at stake and in the teeth of resistance from some elected members who wish to retain their ‘control over their ward’. In one authority, neighbourhood managers also had established targets for making funding applications for ‘their’ neighbourhoods.

### 3.4 Frontline councillors, representative democracy and politics

Fourthly, our research suggests that moves towards neighbourhood governance can exacerbate tensions in the democratic representative role of frontline councillors. We have already emphasised the importance of elected members as boundary spanners across neighbourhoods and between neighbourhoods and the strategic apex of the local authority. Recent white papers and policy documents have also tended on the whole to assert the role of the frontline councillor at the interface between community engagement and community empowerment.<sup>40</sup> The 2005 principles of neighbourhood working thus assert the legitimacy of the representative role of elected members within the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood working has been widely associated with the improved capacity of frontline councillors to influence service priorities and partnership working and to act as community advocates. Although it has brought with it some concerns over whether all frontline councillors possess the necessary skills, for example, to manage large meetings, and undertake budgeting or performance management.<sup>41</sup>

However, our research equally supports two broader potential tensions between neighbourhood working and the representative role of frontline councillors. Firstly, we endorse claims that neighbourhood working risks ‘crowding out’<sup>42</sup> the elected representative role of frontline councillors in local neighbourhood partnerships which can be dominated by officers and other stakeholders. Secondly, neighbourhood working also introduces rival claims to be ‘representative’, particularly through appeals to ‘live in the community.’ These two challenges threaten formal systems of representative democracy and accountability; they do not necessarily reinforce such processes as is often suggested. Finally, our research suggests that the service orientation of neighbourhood institutions raises concerns for the legitimacy process of politics in neighbourhood spaces. Neighbourhood governance will also be political as stakeholders compete over the allocation of services and the general thrust of policy. However, the broad service orientation imposed upon neighbourhood working may well serve to dismiss politics and indeed party politics as sniping or ‘point scoring’.<sup>43</sup> As such, neighbourhoods might well depoliticise significant local policy and party political debates – turning them into technocratic issues of service delivery. .

39 SQW (2008) *Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders: Final Evaluation*, pp. 83-84.

40 LGIU (2009) *Role of the Frontline Councillor in Neighbourhoods*, London: LGIU, pp. 20-23.

41 LGIU (2009) *Role of the Frontline Councillor in Neighbourhoods*.

42 LGIU (2009) *Role of the Frontline Councillor in Neighbourhoods*, p.13.

43 This observation emerged from our discussions with Professor Steve Leach and Dr. Catherine Durose at De Monfort University who together with Dr. Mark Roberts have undertaken recent evaluations of neighbourhood working across local authorities.

### 3.5 The limits of the micro-politics of the neighbourhood

Finally, our research questions the privileging of the 'particular' or sectional interests that informs the logic of neighbourhood governance. In many ways, politics is about the voicing of competing sectional demands and grievances and their articulation into collective demands across communities, or not as the case may be. Neighbourhood governance, we have concluded, is imbued with the logic of the particular, in that it responds primarily to the sectional demands of individuals and groups within the community. It thereby risks relegating or downgrading the pursuit of collective or universal demands by local authorities, effectively reducing collective demands to little more than the aggregation of the particular demands of different neighbourhoods.

This pursuit of the particular within neighbourhoods thus stands in opposition to the universal or collective logic of both place-shaping and local government. For in this place-shaping agenda, it is local government that can transcend the particularities of contending forces across neighbourhoods, and make more universal policy judgments about the validity of demands across the wider locality.<sup>44</sup> And this begs the question of whether in terms of the agenda of neighbourhood working, we further need to re-emphasise the strategic leadership role of local government – reflecting, some would argue, the recent shift in government policy. It is only through effective strategic leadership that local government can overcome the narrow particular demands of groups and deliver the broad-scale approaches that are required in the current global context. Against this background, neighbourhoods are potentially one of the wider challenges to the strategic role of local authorities. Indeed, where they 'sit' organisationally becomes of primary concern. As one interviewee claimed, neighbourhoods in some authorities are best interpreted as the 'delivery arm of the LSP, of the LAA.' How does this fit with the capacity of local authorities to exercise strategic leadership?

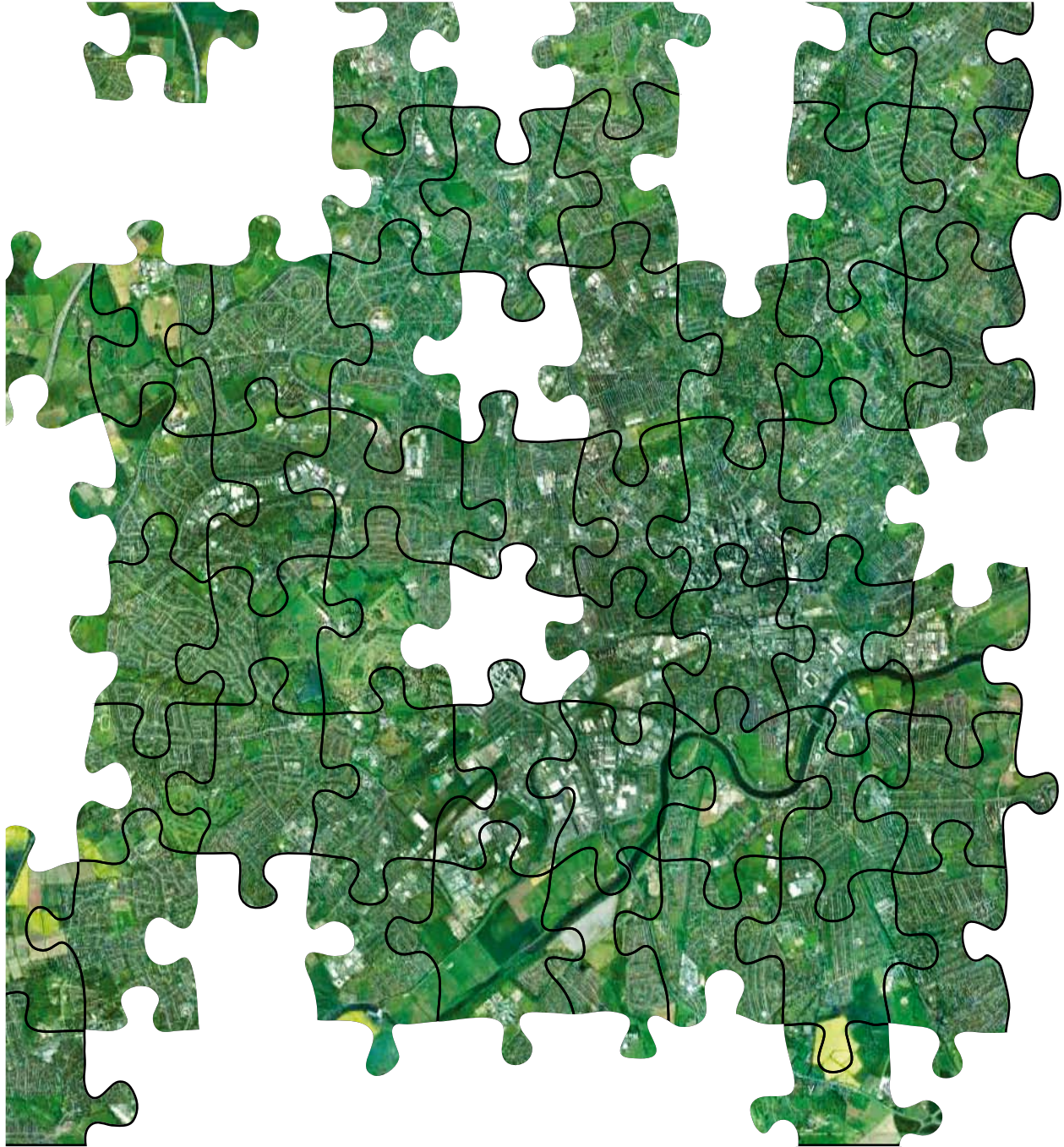
In practice, this recognition of the role of local government means that we might begin to disarticulate the community leadership role away from the mechanisms of sub-local working and in particular neighbourhood governance. Rather, as Griggs and Howarth suggest, we must start to recognise that 'in certain circumstances, and with respect to certain issues, [local] government can and ought to be an active *agent*, who can bring about social and political change.'<sup>45</sup> It is for example for local government to persuade and inform the public, to lead and transform preferences and perceptions of interests, and to forge alliances and compromises between forces between social groups, and so on. Indeed, an important function of government is to fix partial and temporary social, economic and political settlements from a range of pressures, grievances and claims, and then seek to persuade the public of the merits of its case. In short, it is to governments to construct particular collective balances between multiple demands and objectives, be it economic growth, environmental protection or levels of taxation.<sup>46</sup> Devolving such tasks to the neighbourhood might well hamper the capacity of local governments to do so or worse abscond them from the responsibility to do so.

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44 Griggs and Howarth (2008) *Negotiating Democratic Disaffection*.

45 Griggs and Howarth (2008) *Negotiating Democratic Disaffection*, p.18.

46 Griggs and Howarth (2008) *Negotiating Democratic Disaffection*, p.2.



## 4. Conclusion: the future of neighbourhoods

In this concluding section, we return to the question of the future of neighbourhood working and consider how our findings contribute to the wider policy debates surrounding the politics of place, the strategic role of local government and the shaping of 'a good political life' at the neighbourhood level.<sup>47</sup>

Writing as we are in the midst of a global economic downturn and moves to reduce public spending, any such discussion cannot ignore how local government is facing, and will continue to face over the next few years, increasing pressures to deliver further and further rounds of efficiency savings. For the short- to medium-term, the future of neighbourhood working thus may well depend upon its capacity to address the demands of what is increasingly referred to in political short-hand as the 'politics of austerity'. Indeed, the Bichard operational efficiency programme identifies resource prioritisation and targeting, joined up services, and integrated functions and management structures as central concerns in the area of what is termed local incentives and empowerment.

### 4.1 Neighbourhoods: what works?

With this changing policy environment in mind, let us briefly return to the work of Mintzberg and the 'ideal' organisational types which we brought to the fore when we began to problematize patterns of neighbourhood governance: the centralised machine authority, the decentralized professional authority, and the decentralized divisional authority.<sup>48</sup> These remain, as we said earlier, ideal types, entwined in practice with 'messy' designs, variable practices and degrees of decentralisation across service areas. Indeed, what we deem to be the 'organisation' might well extend beyond the traditional organisational boundaries of a local authority in the context of emerging governance networks and performance regimes. However, with these provisos in place, how might Mintzberg's organisational forms characterise the emerging practices of neighbourhood working captured in our research? And, more importantly, how might they surface potential policy tensions within neighbourhood working?

#### Mintzberg and Structures in Fives<sup>49</sup>

The *strategic apex*, at the head of the organisation, is composed of its executives, directors and elected leaders. It develops strategic goals and vision, determining how the organisation serves its mission and meets the changing demands of external funders or regulators. The *middle-line hierarchy* is the chain of middle-line managers or business. These individuals manage and delegate work to the operating core according to the direction set by the directors within the strategic apex. The *operating core* sits at the base of the organisation. It includes all those employees who work directly to

produce goods and services. Parallel to the middle-line hierarchy sit the *technostructure* and the *support staff*. The *technostructure* consists of the organisations' analysts and specialists notably policy and performance departments who work to standardise and improve practices across organisations. *Support staff* provide discrete sets of services that sustain the work of the organisation in the achievement of its core purpose(s) for example employees involved in such activities as transport, public relations, accounting or human resources.

The policy and practice of neighbourhood working, we concluded in the earlier parts of this report, remain on the whole, focussed upon service shaping and delivery strategies, with neighbourhoods becoming the primary **site for policy coordination and**

47 Here once again we echo the call made by Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) 'How Low Can You Go?.'

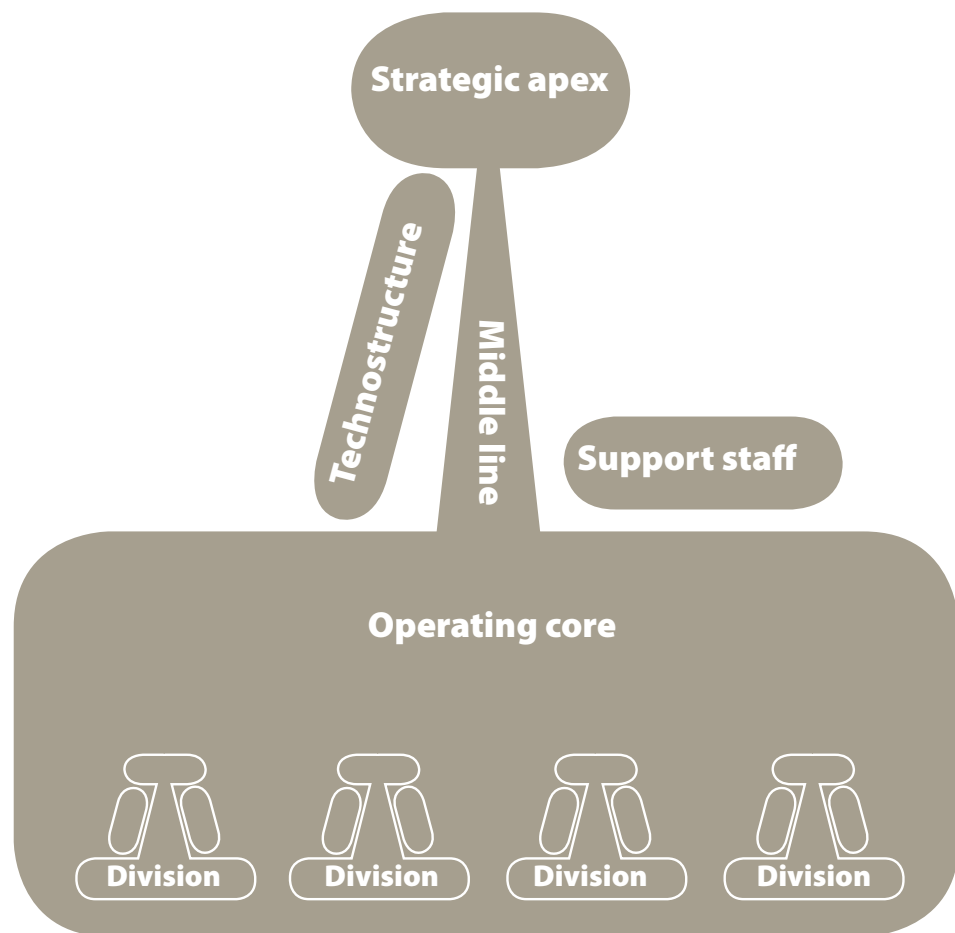
48 Mintzberg (1983), *Structures in Fives: Designing Effective Organizations*.

49 Mintzberg (1983), *Structures in Fives: Designing Effective Organization*; Mintzberg (1979) *The Structure of Organizations*; Schmidt (2006) *A Review of Structure in Fives: Designing Effective Organisations*.

**partnership working**<sup>50</sup>, notably for the delivery of community safety and environmental services. As such, neighbourhoods are increasingly understood across authorities as the ‘delivery-arm’ of the LSP or the LAA, as mini-partnerships working within a wider partnership strategy of place-shaping.<sup>51</sup>

Such conclusions lead us to argue that the practices of neighbourhood working are currently best understood, in terms of the organisational forms offered by Mintzberg, as moving local authorities more or less towards the logics of decentralised divisional authorities. The **decentralised divisional authority** operates forms of constrained decentralisation where semi-autonomous divisions which are brought together under a central administration are given control over service delivery across neighbourhoods. These divisions can be understood within the context of neighbourhood or area committees or even neighbourhood teams within community or neighbourhood services. Unlike the decentralised professional authority, control is not decentralised down to individuals in the operating core; rather, there is limited delegation from managers in the central administration to the managers of each division with each division itself potentially operating in highly centralised ways. Individual divisions formulate the strategies for the neighbourhoods within which they work, but ‘headquarters’ retains control over the strategic portfolio, overall financial resources, designs the performance control system and provides certain support services common to all divisions.

### The Decentralised Divisional Authority



50 See Smith, Lepine and Taylor (Eds) (2007) *Disadvantaged by Where You Live?*; Sullivan (2009) *Neighbourhoods as Sites, Spaces and Spheres of Governance*.

51 Durose and Lowndes (2009) *Why take a neighbourhood approach in local governance? Exploring contrasting rationales*.

In fact, we found broad support for this form of divisional neighbourhood working. It offers, as we suggest, the capacity of improved service delivery through more efficient joined-up working by partners as well as the better identification of needs and improved capacity for flexible responses. As one officer in a unitary authority in the south of England argued, such a way of working enables practitioners to ‘unclog’ service delivery across patches through the integration of partners in neighbourhood teams, helping councillors and citizens to clarify responsibilities and improving information. Another officer in a unitary authority in the Midlands argued that such neighbourhood working avoids duplication and ‘gets rid of silos.’ In short, and in support of the earlier findings discussed above, neighbourhoods thus remain focused on a rationale of service improvement; it is not about creating ‘mini-town halls’, but about bending the delivery of mainstream services.

Divisional neighbourhood working, and its focus on constrained decentralised, thus still potentially enshrines neighbourhoods as a privileged arena in the production of public value.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the site of the neighbourhood offers itself up as the focal point for the cycle of public value production in local authorities: a site for authorisation and measurement, for the constant process of determining, responding and verifying the collective preferences of citizens. And there is support on the ground that neighbourhoods can deliver against such parameters. We might question whether government’s changing policy towards neighbourhoods sits more realistically with developments across local authorities.

## 4.2 Neighbourhoods: emerging lessons

In the earlier parts of the report, we also identified what we saw as potential challenges if authorities were to pursue further the logic of neighbourhood governance. We pointed to the potential ‘messiness’ of neighbourhood working; the danger of layering additional administrative tiers into local policy environments; the pressure on key individuals to act as network managers, co-ordinating the production of public value across neighbourhoods and upwards to local authorities and partners; the necessity of clarifying the role of elected members; and the implicit logic of neighbourhoods away from the strategic towards the micro-politics of sub-localities. Here we re-examine these challenges within the context of the moves towards divisional neighbourhood working and Mintzberg’s understandings of organisational forms. In so doing, we set out a series of strategic policy questions for practitioners and elected members.

### Minimising opportunity costs

In defining divisional neighbourhood working as a privileged site in the production of public value, public managers, both within divisions and line-management positions, will face the challenges of network management or the building and maintenance of networks of provision. They will seek to build or maintain service delivery coalitions of public, private and non-profit organisations. They will also look to facilitate the definition of the particular value attached to public service outcomes across localities, but within the strategic direction set by the wider local authority. These challenges are faced by all officers and elected members in a context of network governance, but the site of the neighbourhood might well amplify this type of opportunity costs that paradoxically it is designed to minimise. Authorities might therefore do well to audit the opportunity costs of such activities, the pressures they place upon the likes of ‘divisional managers’ and how these costs are visible in limits to the strategic decision-making capacity of authorities.

### The risk of creating political fiefdoms

We discussed earlier how moves towards neighbourhood governance can privilege new forms of legitimacy based upon community which can challenge the democratic legitimacy of elected members. However, divisional neighbourhood working also

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52 L. Horner, R. Lehki and R. Blaug (2006) *Deliberative democracy and the role of public managers*, London: The Work Foundation; R. Blaug, L. Horner, R. Lehki (2006) *Public value, politics and public management*, London: The Work Foundation; R. Blaug, L. Horner, A. Kenyon and R. Lekhi (2006) *Public value and local communities. A literature review*, London: The Work Foundation.

raises the risk of creating political fiefdoms across authorities. Of course, embedding the non-executive member within a decentralised divisional structure has a number of merits, bringing councillors closer to service delivery across their wards and supporting the accountability of representative democracy. However, it also has the potential to deflect elected members, particularly non-executive members, further away from the strategic considerations of place-shaping. Are we running the risk of associating councillors too firmly with the micro-politics of the neighbourhood? Will their legitimacy and role become over-defined in terms of the 'pork barrel politics' of ensuring outputs and services for 'their neighbourhood'?

### **The disaggregation of the strategic apex of the local authority**

The divisional neighbourhood structure is not without its challenges for our understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the strategic apex. Whilst neighbourhoods as defined within divisional structures pose some challenges to the strategic apex of local authorities – see above. Often our research demonstrated the fragmentation of the local strategic apex across the local authority and its partners. Indeed, at times, the strategic apex of the neighbourhood was not within the local authority, but within the LSP – part of the 'hollowing out' of local government, which we have witnessed in recent years. More importantly, the outsourcing of local services arguably further removes from the neighbourhood the direct capacity of officers and politicians to actually shape services in response to the needs and demands of local communities.<sup>53</sup> How far are the necessary policy levers for local authorities still in place at the neighbourhood level? Are we not hampering, through such complexities, the very capacity of neighbourhood managers to respond to local needs? Is neighbourhood within this wider policy context of outsourcing fit for purpose?

### **The compatibility of civic rationale with divisional neighbourhoods**

The rationale of divisional neighbourhood working lies more firmly within a service improvement rationale. However, our research demonstrates that the most commonly cited role and responsibility of neighbourhood working is the civic rationale of community engagement, capacity building and empowerment. This logic of community collective voice is increasingly challenged by more individualist logics of choice and empowerment (see the 2008 White Paper). There have been a number of critiques of the practices of neighbourhood engagement, not least concerns over cooptation, poor attendance and the privileging of 'expert citizens'.<sup>54</sup> Others have called for communities to invest less in community-based partnerships and more in forms of community mobilisation within civil society that hold authorities to account.<sup>55</sup> What these critiques raise is the question of how we determine the appropriate mechanisms and levels of community engagement for neighbourhood working. How far does divisional neighbourhood working if it is to operate effectively demand the institution of the likes of local area forums or community councils? Are there different ways of building capacity and identifying needs within such a context?

### **The challenge of economic well-being**

Within the current economic and political climate, there is little doubt that neighbourhood working will come under scrutiny in terms of its impact on economic, social and environmental well-being. Neighbourhoods can offer effective outcomes in terms of improvements to public space, fear of crime and local environment. However, much of the recent criticisms launched at neighbourhoods have been targeted at the inability

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53 See M.Bramah, S. Griggs, N. McInroy, M. Jackson, V. Bradford (2007) *Towards a Future for Public Employment*, London: Unison.

54 See for example M. Barnes, J. Newman and H. Sullivan (2007) *Power, Participation and Political Renewal*, Bristol: Policy Press; Bang (2005) 'Among everyday makers and expert citizens'; M. Taylor (2007) 'Community participation in the real world: opportunities and pitfalls in new governance spaces'; *Urban Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 2; V. Lowndes and H. Sullivan (2004) 'Like a horse and carriage or a fish on a bicycle: how well do local partnerships and public participation go together?' *Local Government Studies* Vol. 30 No. 1; B. van Stokkom (2005) 'Deliberative group dynamics; power, status and affect in interactive policy-making'; *Policy and Politics*, Vol.33, No. (3).

55 See for example J. Davies (2007) 'The limits of partnership: an exit-action strategy for local democratic inclusion'; *Political Studies*, Vol. 55, no. 4.

of neighbourhood programmes to tackle unemployment.<sup>56</sup> How are authorities to balance these impacts on social and environmental well-being with economic demands which may well go against neighbourhood working? Evidence for the actual costs and benefits of neighbourhood working is hard to quantify and almost always ambiguous; it comes down to a political choice over strategic priorities. However, authorities should take care not to necessarily privilege economic over social and environmental well-being, even in times of economic crisis.

### 4.3 A return to local government: towards an ensuring authority

This question of political choice brings us to the 'elephant in the room', which is the wider question of the relationship between local and central government. How do neighbourhoods sit within the broader multi-level governance framework of European, national, city region and local government? How do wider moves towards an 'enabling' local authority within wider shifts towards network governance connect to neighbourhoods? We have pointed above to the potential risks associated with the disaggregation of what we have termed the strategic apex of local authorities and the incompatibility of other policy initiatives such as outsourcing with the particular dynamics of neighbourhood governance. Yet, it is not within the capacity of our research findings to address fully these broader questions. However, this said, throughout this study, we have questioned to what extent neighbourhood governance drives a micro-political logic, in that it responds primarily to the sectional demands of individuals and groups within the community. This pursuit of particularistic interests masks tensions with the universal or collective logic of both place-shaping and local government. In this sense, we argue that it is local government that can, and should, exercise more universal policy judgments across the wider locality.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, we have asserted that it is an important task of government to crystallise 'partial equilibria' from a whole range of pressures, grievances and claims, and then seek to persuade the public of the merits of its case.<sup>58</sup>

Against this critique of neighbourhood governance, we thus end this report with an argument 'to bring local government back in.' In his recent book on the politics of climate change, Lord Anthony Giddens argues that to address the complexities of global warming, government needs to tread a fine line between a return to a top-down command-and-control state which has the potential to stifle bottom-up initiatives and the further recourse to an enabling state which 'isn't strong enough to capture the state's role, which also has to be to deliver outcomes.' Rather he calls for moves towards the creation of what he terms should be an 'ensuring state.' This, he continues, 'is a stronger notion. It means that the state is responsible for monitoring public goals and of trying to make sure they are realized in a visible and acceptable fashion.'<sup>59</sup> Central to this ensuring state, amongst other commitments, are the functions of political and economic convergence. Political convergence refers to the responsibility to ensure policy coordination across all areas of policy and practices – what we might term strategic place-shaping. Economic convergence refers to the responsibility to ensure that economic initiatives which maintain economic competitiveness do 'join up' with what we might term the social and economic well-being of communities.<sup>60</sup>

What might such an 'ensuring state' imply for the future of neighbourhoods and local politics? Such an 'ensuring state' with its primary functions of political and economic convergence speak to our concern to recognise that local government is best placed to establish social, economic and political settlements, which although temporary and partial, crystallise 'partial equilibria' from a whole range of pressures, grievances and demands. Given their partial nature such settlements must be grounded in democratic

56 Durose, Lowndes and Reese (2009) *Neighbourhoods in Transition: Where Now for 'neighbourhood' in UK policy?*

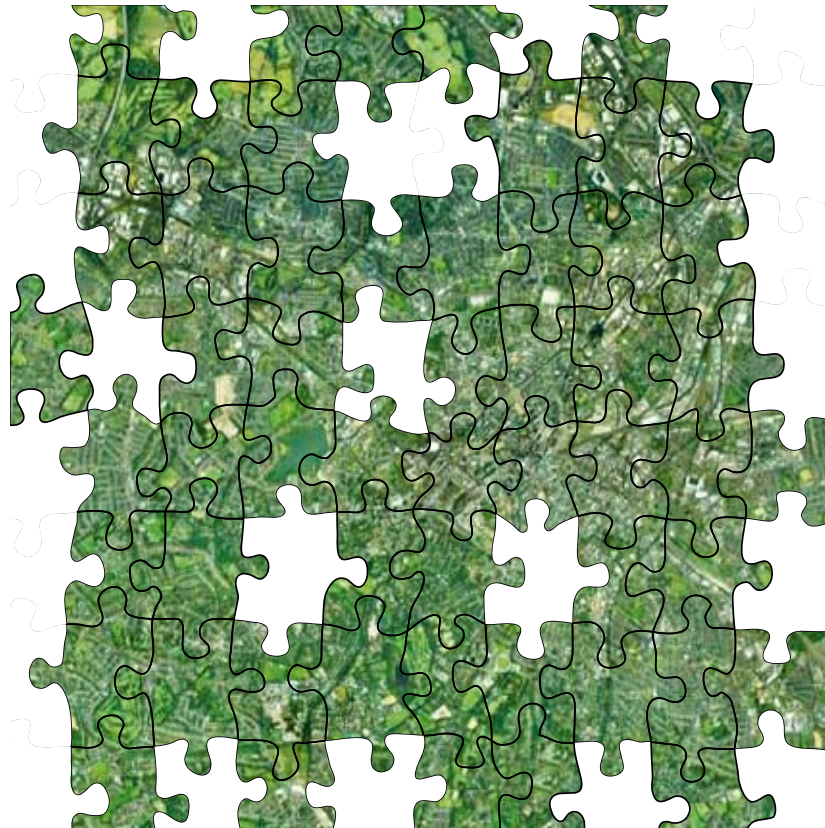
57 Griggs and Howarth (2008) *Negotiating Democratic Disaffection*.

58 Griggs and Howarth (2008) *Negotiating Democratic Disaffection*, p.18

59 Giddens (2009) *The Politics of Climate Change*, p. 69.

60 Giddens (2009) *The Politics of Climate Change*, pp. 91-94.

processes of representation and accountability. We thus call for the development of a conceptualisation of local government which rests upon authorities maintaining their core capacity to **determine and ensure** the delivery of strategic outcomes across their localities. All policy initiatives, we suggest, should thus be evaluated in terms of how they contribute to or maintain the capacity of the 'ensuring state' to ensure political and economic convergence and lead the policy agenda. Within such a framework, public employment, as we have argued elsewhere, may well have a pivotal contribution to make to the strategic capacity of authorities to act as an 'ensuring state'. Indeed, it is our view that the current economic and political context demands that we question existing policy frames and debate how best to deliver an **ensuring local government that meets the changing political and economic challenges we now face**. And here in this report as a contribution to this debate, we hope to have triggered discussions as to how far further moves towards neighbourhood working will advance the construction of an 'ensuring' local council.



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