



Empowering communities to influence local  
decision making

**Evidence-based lessons for policy makers and practitioners**





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June 2009

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# 1. Understanding empowerment

## 1.1 Introduction

What lessons can be drawn from real attempts to empower communities? This question is a fundamentally simple but nonetheless elusive one to answer. Despite its current importance to policy makers and practitioners alike, community empowerment is not easy to achieve. We know that there is significant variation between localities in terms of both what citizens want and what public bodies can provide. Localities vary in terms of both the demand for empowerment opportunities among citizens (shaped by the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the locality) and in the supply of empowerment opportunities offered to citizens by local authorities and other agencies (shaped by both the political and organisational characteristics of the area).<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on a systematic review of published evidence, this document is able to provide lessons on empowerment that are not speculative but are founded on detailed analysis of where empowerment has worked. The purpose of this short report is to draw out key lessons from that analysis for policy makers and practitioners. The aim is to enable policy makers and practitioners to develop workable activities for empowerment underpinned by a sound evidence base. The full research report is available on the Communities and Local Government website.<sup>2</sup>

Building on some of the key policies outlined in the *Communities in control: real people, real power* white paper, this report focuses on six key mechanisms that will facilitate empowerment and a sense of being able to influence and shape local decision making.<sup>3</sup>

- *Asset transfer*
- *Citizen governance*
- *Electronic participation*
- *Participatory budgeting*
- *Petitions*
- *Redress*

<sup>1</sup> Lowndes, V., L. Pratchett, et al. (2006c). *Locality matters: Making participation count in local politics*. London, Institute for Public Policy Research.

<sup>2</sup> Pratchett, L., C. Durose, et al. (2009) *Empowering communities to influence local decision making: A systematic review of the evidence*, London: CLG.

<sup>3</sup> Communities and Local Government (2008) *Communities in control: real people, real power*, London: TSO.

## 1.2 Advantages of an evidence based approach

Community empowerment and engagement have been long standing issues of interest to both central and local government and their partners. Extensive evidence on community empowerment has been generated across policy sectors and both within and outside the UK. This document brings that evidence together to realise the following advantages:

- An evidence based approach provides the opportunity to share practice and insights from others seeking to address similar challenges.
- It provides a useful guide when developing practice.
- By undertaking both a comprehensive and systematic review of the evidence it is possible to go beyond 'suggest', 'indicate' and 'appear' to identify critical success factors for empowerment.

## 1.3 Defining empowerment

There are lots of definitions of empowerment not all of which refer to the same concept. However, the *Communities in control: real people, real power* white paper defines empowerment as 'passing more and more political power to more and more people, using every practical means available'.<sup>4</sup> This is a helpful definition that links individuals and communities to decision making processes and seeks to underpin and support representative democracy through the use of participative means.

## 1.4 Defining empowerment success

What does empowerment look like and how do we know when it has been achieved? While this question is not easy to answer, this report identifies three ways of defining empowerment success in relation to the adoption of particular mechanisms.

- **A recognisable impact on participants**

Have participants developed skills linked to empowerment? For example, has their confidence increased, has it enhanced their capacity to engage, has it expanded their social networks, have they developed specialist knowledge about an initiative or policy area? Also, have participants developed a perception that they can influence their local place and services? This type of success can be measured by thinking about how individuals have been influenced by participation in an initiative.

<sup>4</sup> Relates to Local Area Agreements (LAA) National Indicator 4 and PSA21, Indicator 4.

- **A recognisable impact on communities**

Has the impact on those directly participating ‘spilled over’ to the wider community? Does the community feel that they can influence their local place and services? Is there more of a sense of ‘community’, does the community share values, has it developed more social capital, is it more cohesive? This type of success can be measured by thinking about how community attitudes and behaviour have changed in response to the existence of initiatives in their localities.

- **A recognisable impact on decision making**

Can participants and community now have more influence on the process of decision making? Can they shape the agenda? Are different decisions now being made as a result of citizens and communities participating? This type of success can be measured by thinking about how specific initiatives, or combinations of them, have influenced the outcomes of local policies.

## 1.5 The evidence base for understanding empowerment

The discussion of empowerment mechanisms in this report is based upon a systematic review of the published evidence. This review was undertaken in two phases.

In the first phase a major search for published evidence on a wide range of empowerment initiatives was undertaken. This search identified over 3,500 relevant items, ranging from reports produced by government bodies through to research articles in refereed journals, books and other scholarly works. Although there is an inevitable UK bias, especially in relation to Government publications, the search was not confined to the UK but included evidence from all over the world as well as English language publications.

In the second phase, evidence on the six mechanisms identified in section 1.1 above was subject to detailed analysis and comparison. For each mechanism, around 20 of the best cases were selected. These cases were then compared systematically (using a methodology known as Boolean Reduction) to establish the relationship between a range of influencing factors and the ability of the device to contribute to the three distinctive empowerment measures identified in section 1.4:

- Individual level empowerment
- Community level empowerment
- Influence on decision making

Consequently, the analysis is able to examine and compare how a range of design factors (how and by whom it was initiated, the existence of support



mechanisms, and the link to formal decision making) and contextual factors (political and/or official buy-in for the initiative, salience of the issue and so on) combine to have particular empowerment effects in relation to specific mechanisms. The evidence base is both wide-ranging and detailed in its analysis. The detailed findings in relation to specific mechanisms are available in a separate report.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to this detailed review of published materials, a series of workshops with practitioners were held to investigate some of the key challenges facing implementation which are not covered directly by the literature. These included questions of who engages and who benefits from empowerment, how can the cost effectiveness of empowerment be measured or assessed, and what are the risks associated with empowering communities. These workshops provided detail about existing practice and use of the mechanisms and addressed perceived gaps in the evidence base around practical delivery decisions.

This report, therefore, is based upon a detailed and systematic analysis of the evidence on empowerment, backed up by practical experience of the opportunities and challenges facing those who wish to empower their communities, and provides a solid foundation for understanding empowerment.

## 1.6 Four steps to 'doing' empowerment

Community empowerment is a complex and often overlapping world. Different mechanisms have different effects in relation to community empowerment. Moreover, the same mechanism does not always work the same way in every place. The context in which mechanisms are being developed and the way in which they are being combined all affect their ability to have an impact. With this in mind, how can localities make sense of empowerment? Building from the evidence base, we suggest that there are four steps to making sense of empowerment:

- i) **Understanding your community** – to begin with, it is necessary to understand the demographic and socioeconomic profile of your community and how this profile shapes both the capacity of citizens to engage and the demands they may make for particular mechanisms of empowerment. To address this challenge we offer the CLEAR diagnostic tool – a tool developed to help understand the varying dynamics of community engagement in different places.
- ii) **Understanding the available tools** – against an understanding of the community, it is also necessary to understand how the available tools work in different contexts. Drawing upon the systematic review of the evidence base, we are able to offer a detailed account of how

<sup>5</sup> Pratchett, L., C. Durose, et al. (2009) Empowering communities to influence local decision making: A systematic review of the evidence, London: CLG.

each mechanism works and its role in offering different forms of empowerment

- iii) **Understanding the challenges** – even with such an understanding there are still many practical challenges to overcome. Drawing upon our workshops we are able to offer clear examples of how to address these challenges to provide the best opportunity for empowerment.
- iv) **Understanding your offer** – once you understand your community and the tools, the final step is to reflect upon those things which you might do to develop community empowerment. In particular, how can the culture of your organisation be changed to make empowerment a central rather than a marginal goal?

In the remainder of this report we address each of these topics in turn to provide a comprehensive, evidence based understanding of community empowerment.

## 2. Understanding your community

Empowerment is impossible if you do not understand the community that you are trying to empower. Understanding your community, therefore, is the first step to mainstreaming empowerment. One way of achieving this is through the use of a diagnostic tool which enables self-reflection and evaluation of existing strengths and weaknesses.

This section develops and presents a diagnostic tool – the CLEAR model – that both anticipates obstacles to empowerment and links these to policy responses. Based upon case studies of participation practices in contrasting English localities,<sup>6</sup> the model identifies five factors that underpin citizens' uneven response to participation.<sup>7</sup> The CLEAR tool argues that participation is most effective where citizens:

- C an do** – have the resources and knowledge to participate
- L ike to** – have a sense of attachment that reinforces participation
- E nabled to** – are provided with the opportunity for participation
- A sked to** – are mobilised through public agencies and civic channels
- R esponded to** – see evidence that their views have been considered.

The idea of CLEAR is that it is a self-evaluation tool which local authorities, other public bodies, or indeed voluntary and community organisations can use to develop a more nuanced understanding of the context in which participation and empowerment are to be encouraged. Self-evaluation using the CLEAR model allows each locality to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of their own engagement activities. Organisations are able to examine in detail the context and fit of their existing practices, and to reflect upon how these might be changed to improve empowerment. CLEAR does not promote a blueprint or 'ideal type'. It recognises that empowerment activities need to be sensitive to local contexts and dynamic over time.

The CLEAR model prompts a reflective evaluation of current practice. Which of the five factors are being addressed in current initiatives? Which factors have not received sufficient attention? How can the links between the five factors be improved in developing more strategic responses to the challenge of citizen participation? Do changing contexts require municipalities to re-prioritise the attention paid to different factors?

<sup>6</sup> Lowndes, V., L. Pratchett, et al. (2006a). "Local political participation: the impact of rules-in-use." *Public Administration* 84(3): 539–61.

<sup>7</sup> Lowndes, V., L. Pratchett, et al. (2006b). "Diagnosing and remedying the failings of official participation schemes: the CLEAR framework." *Social Policy and Society* 5(2): 281–91.

Figure 2.1 presents the CLEAR model. It summarises the five participation factors and sets out an indicative set of policy responses. The five factors are now considered in more detail.

Table 2.1 – The CLEAR diagnostic tool		
Key factor	How it works	Policy targets
Can do	The individual resources that people have to mobilise and organise  (speaking, writing and technical skills, and the confidence to use them) make a difference	Capacity building, training and support of volunteers, mentoring, leadership development
Like to	To commit to participation requires an identification with the public entity that is the focus of engagement	Civil renewal, citizenship, community development, community cohesion, neighbourhood working, social capital
Enabled to	The civic infrastructure of groups and umbrella organisations makes a difference because it creates or blocks an opportunity structure for participation	Investing in civic infrastructure and community networks, improving channels of communication via compacts
Asked to	Mobilising people into participation by asking for their input can make a big difference	Public participation schemes that are diverse and reflexive
Responded to	When asked people say they will participate if they are listened to (not necessarily agreed with) and able to see a response	A public policy system that shows a capacity to respond – through specific outcomes, ongoing learning and feedback

## C

**‘Can do’** refers largely to arguments about socioeconomic status (SES), which have traditionally dominated explanations for variations in participation rates.<sup>8</sup> The claim is that when people have the appropriate skills and resources they are more able to participate. These skills range from the ability and confidence to speak in public or write letters, to the capacity to organise events and encourage others of similar mind to support initiatives. Access to the resources that facilitate such activities is also important (resources ranging from photocopying facilities through to internet access and so on). These skills and resources are much more commonly found among the better educated and employed sections of the population: those of higher socioeconomic status. However, none of the requisite skills and resources is exclusively the property of high SES. It is possible for public, voluntary or community bodies to intervene to make up for socioeconomic limitations in equipping citizens with the skills and resources for participation. ‘Can do’ can be delivered by capacity building efforts aimed at ensuring that citizens are given the support to develop the skills and resources needed for them to engage. ‘Can do’, therefore, both shapes empowerment opportunities and provides an obvious target for empowerment initiatives.

<sup>8</sup> Verba, S., K. L. Schlozman, et al. (1995). *Voice and equality: civic voluntarism in American politics*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press.

## L

**'Like to'** rests on the idea that people's felt sense of being part of something encourages them to engage. The argument is that if you feel a part of something then you are more willing to engage. If you feel excluded or sense that you are not welcome then you may decide not to participate. If participation is seen as just for old people or for men then others may not feel comfortable or able to join in. A sense of trust, connection and linked networks can, according to the social capital argument, enable people to work together and co-operate more effectively<sup>9</sup>. Sense of community can be a strong motivator for participation. But given the inherent diversity in many communities then, conversely, an absence of identity or a sense of being an outsider can militate against participation. This factor can also be addressed by policy makers and non-governmental practitioners seeking to promote participation<sup>10</sup>. The most important initial step in diagnosis is to gain an understanding of the sense of loyalties and identities held in various communities. It is not easy to manipulate or change these feelings held about the communities in which people live but it is possible to give people the opportunity to believe that they are part of a wider civic identity built around their locality or some sense of equal and shared citizenship. Recognising and promoting a sense of civic citizenship and community cohesion can help develop an environment in which people will like to participate. Empowerment activities, therefore, might not simply address individuals but may also examine ways of encouraging community engagement.

## E

**'Enabled to'**, as a factor in participation, is premised on the research observation that most participation is facilitated through groups or organisations.<sup>11</sup> Political participation in isolation is more difficult and less sustainable (unless an individual is highly motivated) than the mutually reinforcing engagement of contact through groups and networks. Collective participation provides continuous reassurance and feedback that the cause of engagement is relevant and that participation is having some value. Indeed, for some, engagement in this manner is more important than the outcome of such participation. The existence of networks and groups which can support participation and which can provide a route into decision-makers, therefore, is vital to the vibrancy of participation in an area. Research shows the relevance of civic infrastructures to facilitating or inhibiting participation. Where the right range and variety of groups exists to organise participation there tends to be more of it. Umbrella organisations that can support civic, community and voluntary groups can play a particularly important role in providing and sustaining the context for the appropriate types of groups and participation platforms to emerge. They can help groups become established,

<sup>9</sup> Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*. New York, Simon and Shuster.

<sup>10</sup> Lowndes, V. and D. Wilson (2001). "Social capital and local governance: exploring the institutional design variable." *Political Studies* 49(4): 629–647.

<sup>11</sup> Parry, G., G. Moyser, et al. (1992). *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Pattie, C., P. Seyd, et al. (2004). *Citizenship in Britain*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

provide networks of contacts and information, explain how to campaign and engage and ease access to the relevant decision-makers. Supporting or developing such community infrastructure, therefore, could be an essential part of empowerment.

## A

**'Asked to'** builds on the finding of much research that mobilisation matters. People tend to become engaged more often and more regularly when they are asked to engage. Research shows that people's readiness to participate often depends upon whether or not they are approached and how they are approached. Mobilisation can come from a range of sources but the most powerful form is when those responsible for a decision ask others to engage with them in making the decision. Research shows that the degree of openness of political and managerial systems has a significant effect, with participation increasing where there is a variety of invitations and opportunities. The variety of participation options for engagement is important because some people are more comfortable with some forms of engagement, such as a public meeting, while others would prefer, for example, to engage through on-line discussions. Some people want to talk about the experiences of their community or neighbourhood while others want to engage based on their knowledge of a particular service as a user.

The nature of 'the ask' is also important. Participation can be mobilised by the use of incentives, through establishing a sense of obligation (as in the case of jury duty), or by offering bargains/exchanges (where participation is accompanied by investment or an enhanced service package). The focus of the 'ask' is also important. It could be directed at a particular neighbourhood or a larger cross-authority population. The sustainability of participation is relevant: can the 'ask' be sustained and will citizens keep responding? Who is being asked is another issue. There is a dilemma between developing 'expert citizens' and rotating/sampling involvement to get at 'ordinary citizens'. The 'asked to' factor asks municipalities to address the range and the repertoire of their initiatives? How do they appeal to different citizen groups? Having a portfolio of empowerment opportunities which combine different forms of 'ask', therefore, is essential.

## R

**'Responded to'** captures the idea that for people to participate on a sustainable basis they have to believe that their involvement is making a difference, that it is achieving positive benefits. In some respects this factor is the ultimate aim of empowerment. This factor provides simultaneously the most obvious but also the most difficult factor in enhancing political participation. For people to participate they have to believe that they are going to be listened to and, if not always agreed with, at least in a position to see that their views have been taken into account. Meeting

the challenge of the 'responded to' factor means asking public authorities how they weigh messages from various consultation or participation events against other inputs to the decision-making process? How are the different or conflicting views of various participants and stakeholders to be prioritised? Responsiveness is about ensuring feedback, which may not be positive – in the sense of accepting the dominant view from participants. Feedback involves explaining how the decision was made and the role of participation within that. Response is vital for citizen education, and so has a bearing on the 'front end' of the process too. Citizens need to learn to live with disappointment: participation won't always 'deliver' on immediate concerns, but remains important. Citizens' confidence in the participation process cannot be premised upon 'getting their own way'. Indeed, ensuring responsiveness depends upon the quality of elected representatives and democratic leadership. Improving deliberation and accountability mechanisms within 'mainstream democracy' is a precondition for effective empowerment activities.

The CLEAR diagnostic tool enables policy-makers to look at citizens and ask questions about their capacities, their sense of community and their civic organisations. It also asks them to examine their own organisational and decision-making structures and assess whether they have the qualities that allow them to listen to, and take account of, messages from citizen participation. It provides the first step towards mainstreaming empowerment.

## 3. Understanding the available tools

Building on some of the key policies outlined in the empowerment white paper (*Communities in control: real people, real power*), this report focuses on six key mechanisms that will facilitate empowerment and a sense of being able to influence and shape local decision making.

- **Asset transfer** as a mechanism for community management and/or ownership of assets and social enterprise
- **Citizen governance**, covering the role of citizen or community representatives on partnerships, boards and forums charged with decision-making about public services and public policy
- **Electronic participation** for example, e-forums and petitions as a means of offering qualitatively different opportunities for participation
- **Participatory budgeting** as a form of deliberative participation in communities, facilitating decision making on devolved budgets
- **Petitions** as a mechanism for citizens and groups to raise issues of concern
- **Redress** as a mechanism for citizens to register complaints, have them investigated and receive feedback and response

Our research examined each of these mechanisms against each of the three impact measures identified earlier:

- A recognisable impact on participants
- A recognisable impact upon communities
- A recognisable impact upon decision-making

It is these six mechanisms which form the focus of this section.

The overall conclusions from these cases show that it is important that community empowerment be understood in relation to a range of different outcomes. Each mechanism for empowerment identified is able to empower to some extent.

Overall, the mechanisms selected showed the potential to empower those directly participating and to both influence and shape decision making. However, it was generally found to be more difficult to empower the community through the use of such mechanisms. Greater consideration of how the reach of empowerment can be furthered is required.



## 3. 1 Asset transfer

### ***What is it?***

Asset transfer is a mechanism for achieving community ownership or management of public resources.

### ***What the evidence says:***

- Asset transfer offers a genuine means for achieving popular control over decision making.
- Asset transfer can lead to increased financial investment in an under-used or derelict asset.
- The development of such an asset can be the spur for further activities on the part of the community anchor organisation and provide a resource for other community, social or private enterprises to develop their activities.
- Asset transfer empowers citizens and communities by enabling them to positively influence the development of resources and services in their area.

### ***What practitioners say:***

- It is important that the transfer is of an 'asset' and not a 'liability' so that groups are not 'set up to fail'.
- Local authorities need to trust citizens and community groups and learn to 'let go'.
- It is important to manage the process of transition and offer ongoing support, capacity building and relevant training in order to assist and develop community groups interested in managing assets.
- It is important that consideration is given to the extent to which the initial transfer and subsequent activities are of benefit to, and are representative of, the community as a whole.
- Whilst asset transfer is a complex and demanding form of empowerment for citizens, extensive resources are now available including good practice developed from successful examples of transfer. The Asset Transfer Unit is a good starting point to access assistance, useful good practice and a range of successful case studies.

### Case study 1 – Regeneration through asset transfer

The Amble Development Trust was established in November 1994. The principle objective of the Trust is to regenerate the former coal mining town of Amble in Northumberland by taking a lead in most aspects of economic, social and community regeneration.

The Trust received £2.8m funding from English Partnerships in 1996 and has subsequently taken over and developed a number of assets in the town. For instance, The Fourways, formerly the Station Hotel, was purchased as a derelict property for £1 from the brewery who owned it in 1996 – it is now worth £400,000. It also houses four tenants, generating £30,000 annual rental income, and provides offices for the Trust itself.

In another example, the Town Square has been transformed from a previously run-down area of derelict buildings into a major focal point in the town for residents and visitors alike. It is now owned by the Trust and provides income generation from local markets with substantial community use.

The benefits which have accrued to the local community as a result of this asset transfer programme include the creation of jobs in the new facilities; enhanced training opportunities; new private sector investment; and community confidence and civic pride in an improved environment.

Source: [http://www.dta.org.uk/our\\_inspirations/ambledtcs.htm](http://www.dta.org.uk/our_inspirations/ambledtcs.htm)  
accessed 18.2.2009

## Useful links

- Development Trusts Association (DTA)  
<http://www.dta.org.uk/>
- Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)  
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=1>
- Asset Transfer Unit  
<http://www.atu.org.uk/>

## Further information

Hart, L. and Bell, D. (2001) *Developing an Asset Base* (London, Development Trusts Association)

Mayo, E. and Moore, H. (2001) *The Mutual State: How Local Communities Can Run Public Services* (London, New Economic Foundation)

Thake, S. (2006) *Community Assets: The Benefits and Costs of Community Management and Ownership* (Whetherby, DCLG Publications)

Quirk, B. (2007) *Making Assets Work: The Quirk Review of Community Management and Ownership of Public Assets* (London, HM Government)

## 3.2 Citizen governance

### **What is it?**

Citizen governance refers to the role of citizens or community representatives on partnerships, boards and forums charged with decision-making about public policy and services.

### **What the evidence says:**

- Citizen governance is a mechanism with potentially wide reaching empowerment effects for participants, the wider community and local decision making.
- Citizen governance is a form of civic activity that is flexible and relevant to a variety of policy settings.
- Citizen governance also involves a significant number of citizens in comparison to other forms of citizen participation.
- Much of the evidence shows that whilst opportunities for citizen governance are nominally open to all, in practice, opportunities come to those with pre-existing contact with such an initiative, with relevant experience or from a specific constituency (e.g. tenant or parent).
- The support given to those directly participating in citizen governance varies. Many practitioners argue that a significant level of support is needed to achieve a meaningful and sustained contribution from citizens.

The analysis underpinning this document identified four different types of citizen governance, each of which has different implications for empowerment:

### **1. Local representation**

Here citizens act as representatives of a wider community, speaking for and accountable to this constituency. The primary goal is more democratic decision-making. This can be considered the 'ideal type' of citizen governance. Specific examples include representation on local strategic partnerships; community led housing associations; faith communities' involvement in regeneration; school governors; and community partnership grant programmes.

This type of citizen governance has numerous critical driving factors, it is: *open to all, supported, linked to decision making, and has political and bureaucratic buy-in.*

This type has wide ranging empowerment impacts leading to the empowerment of representatives themselves and the wider community, and influencing decision making.

Local representation appears to be effective as a form of empowerment both in areas of deprivation and in areas with a higher resource base.

## **2. Local knowledge**

Here citizens provide input to decision-making based on their views and expertise as local residents, members of the community or users of public services. The primary goal is better decision-making. Examples include resident representatives on housing estates and parental involvement in SureStart.

This type of citizen governance has similarly wide ranging empowerment potential leading to the empowerment of individuals and communities, and has an impact on decision-making.

In these cases, there is *no formal link to decision making* (or the link is not relevant in driving empowerment) and *support mechanisms* to facilitate meaningful engagement of citizens vary.

It is notable that the 'local knowledge' form of citizen governance works well in areas with a low resource base.

## **3. Organisational proxy**

This type of citizen governance refers to situations where voluntary or community sector organisations act as a proxy for citizen representation. Examples include some urban and rural regeneration partnerships. Cases of this type are not, obviously, open to all, but they do have support mechanisms for representatives.

Although there is no guarantee of an impact on the wider community, there is clear evidence of impact on the empowerment of those directly participating.

## **4. Semi-professional**

This type of citizen governance refers to cases which are not open to all, there is an absence of support mechanisms, yet there is a *link to formal decision making* and evidence of *political and bureaucratic buy-in*. Non-executive board members provide an example of this type of citizen governance.

Again, there is a lack of spill-over effects in the sense of empowering the community more widely.

**What practitioners say:**

- Opportunities to engage are often open only to those with existing experience or contact.
- Citizens should be supported and facilitated to engage.
- Boards and forums need to be deliberative and mediated to allow a range of community perspectives to be heard.
- It is important to pay attention to the mechanisms for choosing representatives and the means by which they can keep in touch with those they represent – so that they can be kept informed and also held to account.

**Case study 2 – Supporting citizen governance**

An urban area containing council-owned tower blocks and maisonettes was regenerated in the late 1990s in a process facilitated by the local authority and a social housing provider. After widespread consultation, a partnership arrangement was agreed between the major stakeholders in 1998 and all residents in the area became members of the Community Housing Association (CHA). Residents established a steering group and worked with councillors and various professionals to tackle strategic and day-to-day housing and neighbourhood management issues. With citizen governance at the heart of the project they found ways to work together to manage the different estates in the area and complete a range of land, property and planning deals. Training and support for residents who expressed interest in the work of the board led to a sense of empowerment. Residents also retain the largest block of seats on the board, although not an overall majority.

The CHA has invested in the creation of various opportunities for citizen governors all of which emphasise a respect for local knowledge. This project also demonstrates the importance of continuing professional support in building governors' confidence to contribute their own ideas to the future development of the area.

Source: Barnes et al (2008) Designing Citizen Centred Governance York, JRF  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/2205-governance-citizens-engagement.pdf>

## Useful links

- Joseph Rowntree Foundation  
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/designing-citizen-centred-governance>
- DCLG  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/motivationsbarriers>
- Citizen Governance Roles in the Wakefield District:  
<http://www.voxnet.org.uk/showcase/?idno=130>

## Further information

Furbey, R. and M, Macey (2005) Religion and urban regeneration: a place for faith? *Policy and Politics* 33(1), 95–116

Greig, S., N. Parry and B. Rimmington (2004) 'Promoting sustainable regeneration: learning from a case study in participatory HIA' *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* 24, 255–267

Osborne, S. et al (2006) 'The impact of local voluntary and community sector infrastructure on community involvement in rural regeneration partnerships' *Public Money and Management* 26(4), 235–242

Ranson, S. et al (2005) 'The participation of volunteer citizens in school governance' *Educational Review* 57(3) 357–370

### 3.3 E-participation

#### **What is it?**

The term 'electronic participation' (or e-participation) captures a wide range of different devices through which citizens might engage with government. Indeed, most forms of offline political engagement have been replicated online, while new forms of engagement, especially through social networking technologies, have also been pioneered. Here the focus has been on e-forums and e-petitions in particular.

#### **What the evidence says:**

- E-participation is most successful in relation to the empowerment of individual participants. Yet, e-participation is notably less effective in empowering the wider community and e-forums and even e-petitions, have only a very limited impact upon decision makers.
- In terms of e-participation empowering *individuals* two factors are critical. First, *moderation* is important. Moderation can improve the quality of discussion and provide a constructive environment for participation. Second, the presence of a highly *salient* issue is also important. However, the official sponsorship and buy-in of e-participation is not a crucial factor.
- Where there is *community* empowerment, *moderation*, clear *links to decision-making* and the discussion of highly *salient* issues appear to be the most significant combination of success factors required.
- In order for e-participation to have real impact on decisions, mechanisms need to be specifically designed to incorporate a direct link to decision-making.

**What practitioners say:**

- There is concern about the reach of e-participation, there is often limited take-up of most online participation initiatives and there is the ongoing problem of the 'digital divide' in ensuring access.
- There is also concern about the capacity of local authorities to 'keep up' with technological developments and to provide opportunities in a way that interests citizens.

**Case study 3 – Online empowerment in Wolverhampton**

The Wolverhampton Partnership has been running an e-panel since 2005. The project seeks views on Wolverhampton, the council and local services with the aim of improving provision in the borough. The e-panel is made up of local people or visitors to Wolverhampton who are aged 16 or above and currently comprises of about 200 people.

E-panel members mostly take part in online discussions and occasional opinion polls which cover either very general subjects, like, "what's the best and worst thing about Wolverhampton?" or quite specific subjects like "What leisure opportunities should be made available for children and young people in your area?"

The topics are put forward by service providers but the partnership also welcomes ideas for discussions from panel members. Officers from all the agencies which form the Wolverhampton Partnership, including the council, the NHS and other public bodies from across the city, take part on-line and answer queries and respond to citizens' comments. In this way the Partnership has engaged citizens in online discussion of local social problems such as Wolverhampton's high rate of teenage pregnancy, has asked panel members how the city council can improve Wolverhampton's retail markets, and has web-cast council meetings to bring them to a wider audience.

For more information on the Wolverhampton Partnership e-panel:  
<http://www.wton-partnership.org.uk/inovem/inovem.ti/epanel/view?objectId=353776>

## Useful links

- Council of Europe (2008) A set of generic e-democracy tools CAHDE (2008) 5: [http://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/bmeia/media/AOes/e-Democracy/CAHDE\\_2008/annex\\_tool\\_2\\_-\\_A\\_Set\\_of\\_Generic\\_e-Democracy\\_Tools\\_\\_long\\_version\\_-\\_CAHDE\\_2008\\_5.pdf](http://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/bmeia/media/AOes/e-Democracy/CAHDE_2008/annex_tool_2_-_A_Set_of_Generic_e-Democracy_Tools__long_version_-_CAHDE_2008_5.pdf)

## Further information

Livingstone, S. (2007). "The challenge of engaging youth online: contrasting producers' and teenagers' interpretations of websites." *European Journal of Communication* 22(2): 165–84.

Local e-democracy National Project (2005) *'From the top down' An evaluation of e-democracy activities initiated by councils and government*, Bristol City Council

### 3.4 Participatory budgeting

#### **What is it?**

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a mechanism for deliberative citizen engagement in decision making about the use of budgets for public services.

#### **What the evidence says:**

- Participatory budgeting (PB) is a tool for empowerment that can have a significant impact in a range of contexts and settings.
- The adoption of PB techniques does not lead to quick-fix changes in embedded political, citizen and bureaucratic cultures.
- In order for PB to achieve transformational change, it needs to be embedded into a wider strategy to renew decision making.
- The tokenistic use of PB is not going to have an effect of any magnitude.
- Where PB has been able to have an empowerment impact on participants, the wider community and decision making, the key driving factors were: *the openness to all citizens in the design of the scheme, strong political buy-in, issues of high importance at stake, and a framework of national policy support.*

#### **What practitioners say:**

- Participatory budgeting (PB) can be a very effective way to empower citizens by enabling them to make funding decisions that affect their everyday lives.
- However, it is important to be able to describe the process in an accessible way in order to be as inclusive, engaging and non-competitive as possible.
- It is important to manage expectations with regard to the scale of decision making open to the community and the scope for expansion into mainstream budgets.
- It is useful to have a community development strategy that underpins the PB process to make it as inclusive and non-competitive as possible.



#### **Case study 4 – Empowering through participatory budgeting**

In 2006, Together Creating Communities, a broad based community organisation, Help the Aged and the Community Council in a small town in North Wales used part of the town budget in a PB process which was promoted by local political leaders. A leaflet was distributed to all residents in Coedpoeth informing them of the process and inviting them to a public meeting. At the first public meeting participants were asked to suggest project ideas under pre-prepared themes. These project ideas were prioritised and the six most favoured were selected. Project ideas were costed and presented at a second public meeting for approval. A parallel prioritisation process was held with primary school children who fed in their ideas for project proposals.

The projects put forward were: a controlled pedestrian crossing; refurbishing the war memorial; improved seating in a public open space; tree planting; transport for a lunch club; and improved sports facilities. This is the first instance of a community council using some of its precepts to fund a participatory budgeting project. It demonstrates that PB is not only for big cities like Bradford and Newcastle but that local leaders using simple techniques can bring different groups together at a much smaller, rural level.

For more information on PB in Coedpoeth, Salford, Bradford and Newcastle:  
<http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies>

#### Useful links:

- Participatory Budgeting in Europe at Europäische Bürgerhaushalte:  
<http://www.buergerhaushalt-europa.de/>
- SQW Consulting is currently conducting a national evaluation of PB:  
[http://www.sqw.co.uk/file\\_download/101](http://www.sqw.co.uk/file_download/101)

#### Further information:

Wampler, B. (2007) *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil* Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press

## 3.5 Petitions

### ***What is it?***

Petitions enable citizens and community groups to raise concerns with public authorities and give some sense of the support for the proposition amongst the wider population. It is a mechanism that is recognised and understood by elected members, officers and the community alike.

### ***What the evidence says:***

- Petitions have the potential to empower individuals, to generate activity at the community level, and to impact on decision making. The extent to which they are able to realise this potential is largely dependent on the degree to which they are linked to a meaningful response mechanism.
- Where it is clear that the authority has given due weight to the proposition, the potential for empowerment increases: the device exhibits the potential for impact on decisions, thus providing a rationale for increased political efficacy and activity amongst civic organisations.
- Arguably the most effective petitions are those linked to a popular vote: the different types of initiative or popular referendum. Here citizens can see a direct relationship between their actions in creating a petition and a visible outcome.
- Petitions should only be used as a tool where public authorities are willing and able to establish meaningful mechanisms to respond.
- Petitions can potentially be used disproportionately by those groups that already have influence and resources within the community, creating a situation of 'he who shouts loudest wins'. This is potentially problematic and should be addressed in the design and response to petitions.

### ***What practitioners say:***

- Petitions can be a way for local authorities and elected members to develop their community leadership role and partnership working.
- Therefore the scope of petitions should not be restricted to local government's purview.

### Case study 5 – E-Petitions in Scotland

Since February 2004 the e-Petitions system employed by the Scottish Parliament has played a significant role in connecting the public and the Executive. Every Petition goes to a dedicated Committee which assesses its merits by consulting with the Executive, MPs and, if necessary, by taking evidence from the petitioners themselves. Petitions where action is already being taken or where the case is considered to be weak are filtered out. For those which pass through this stage:

- The committee can agree that a more detailed investigation is required and the Petition can be referred to the relevant Subject Committee
- The committee may set up its own inquiry and its findings can be reported in the Parliament, and followed by a debate or Executive response
- Points within the Petition can be included into the scrutiny of relevant legislation

Even when the decision is that no action should be taken, a point of connection is established with citizens and the possibility of ongoing engagement is created between signatories and elected representatives. The Scottish system has been used as a template for the subsequent development of e-petitioning in Kingston and Bristol in England and in the Bundestag in Germany.

Source: <http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/> accessed 18.2.2009

### Useful links:

- Bristol and Kingston e petitions:  
[http://itc.napier.ac.uk/ITC/Documents/eDemocracy\\_from\\_the\\_Top\\_Down\\_ODPM\\_2005.pdf](http://itc.napier.ac.uk/ITC/Documents/eDemocracy_from_the_Top_Down_ODPM_2005.pdf)

### Further information:

Carman, C.J. (2006) *The Assessment of the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions System 1999–2006* Scottish Parliament Paper 654, available at: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/committees/petitions/reports-06/pur06-PPS-assessment-01.htm>

Iacopini, G. (2007) *21st Century Democracy: E-Petitioning and Local Government* (London, New Local Government Network) available at: <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/21st-century-democracy.pdf>

Polhill, D. (2006) *Initiative and Referendum in Colorado*, Initiative and Referendum Institute, University of Southern California, available at: <http://www.iandrinstute.org/REPORT%202006-4%20Colorado.pdf>

## 3.6 Redress

### ***What is it?***

Redress is a mechanism for citizens to register complaints, have them investigated and receive feedback and response.

### ***What the evidence says:***

- Systems of complaint and redress have the *potential* for building customer satisfaction with services and informing service improvement, but making a complaint rarely induces a substantive response as a matter of course. Nor is a complaint generally linked to formal decision making processes.
- In order to develop this potential for empowerment, such systems need to be part of a wider, serious attempt to build trust in public services and in democratic institutions.
- Often in cases around social welfare and policing, the complainants are likely to come from ethnic minority communities and/or be facing social disadvantage and/or be users of services likely to include the most vulnerable in society. Yet these complainants are often not supported sufficiently, for example through mediation or advocacy services and could be further disempowered by the process.
- Systems of complaint and redress need to be more community led, reflexive, responsive to citizens and inclusive and supportive of their contribution.

### ***What practitioners say:***

- There are some clear benefits associated with early intervention before an issue escalates to a formal complaints process.
- It is important to recognise often 'a simple apology' can go a long way.
- Each interaction with the community should be an opportunity to address concerns and provide redress where appropriate with the wider aim of building trust between citizens, communities and the local authority.

### **Case study 6 – Empowering young people through redress**

In 1995, senior officers of public services in County Durham developed a new initiative for providing services to children, young people and their families. As part of this “Investing in Children” strategy, Durham County Council piloted a rapid involvement of advocacy services when a young person wanted to make a complaint.

This has developed into a pro-active approach to advocacy where the young person is immediately contacted by the children’s complaints officer when a complaint was received. They are advised that an advocate will contact them to offer support if they wish. This removes the onus from young people to make the initial contact and then it is the young person’s decision whether to take up the support on offer. The initial contact with the advocacy service is not made if the child or young person objects to this action, thus the young person is still in control.

The strengths of this approach to redress are evident in the support it offers to vulnerable complainants through the process, and the integration of the complaints and advocacy system into a wider strategy for empowerment which includes, for example, projects focused on listening to children, and on engaging young women in sport.

For more information on Durham CC and Investing in Children:

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/ecm/usp.nsf/Lookup/>

[Investing%20in%20Children%20case%20study/\\$file/Investing+in+Children+case+study.pdf](http://www.durham.gov.uk/ecm/usp.nsf/Lookup/Investing%20in%20Children%20case%20study/$file/Investing+in+Children+case+study.pdf)

### Further information:

National Audit Office (2008) ‘Department for Work and Pensions: Handling Customer Complaints’ NAO: HC 995 Session

Pithouse, A. and A. Crowley (2007) ‘Adults rule? Children, Advocacy and Complaints to Social Services’ *Children and Society* 21, 201–213

IDeA/DEMOS (2008) *State of Trust: how to build better relationships between councils and the public* London, DEMOS

## 4. Understanding the challenges

As already shown in this report, local practitioners provide a valuable resource in developing and delivering policy on community empowerment. This section draws on the findings of a series of workshops that were convened in late 2008 with the aim of gathering practical expertise from local government and the community and voluntary sector on three key ongoing concerns and challenges in delivering local initiatives to empower communities:

- Who engages and who benefits?
- How can cost effectiveness be assessed/ measured?
- What are the risks of empowerment?

### 4.1 Who engages, who benefits?

#### ***What practitioners say:***

Those that currently engage tend to be those with the capacity and skills to do so; for example, those with existing involvement or contacts.

There is a strong awareness of the value of engaging with ‘hard to reach’ groups – including black and minority ethnic communities, the socially disadvantaged, disabled people and older people – and new communities – including asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants.

However, many authorities seem to struggle to develop effective strategies to improve the ‘reach’ of local initiatives to empower communities.

#### ***What practitioners recommend:***

It is important to include within a local strategy for empowerment:

- Opportunities that are qualitatively different to what has gone before
- Support and advocacy for citizens, both in a simple sense of using accessible language, but also drawing in learning and techniques from the community and voluntary sectors and from community development.

#### ***Which tools are useful?***

In terms of comparing across mechanisms, the greatest potential ‘reach’ for a mechanism was seen to be influenced by how long standing the mechanism was within the community; how formal it was and the style of engagement that was required. On these terms, the novelty, deliberative nature and scope for decision making that participatory budgeting provides is an attractive prospect for empowering hard to reach communities. It is important to note that participatory budgeting requires facilitation both in terms of community

development work in advance to raise awareness and interest from the community, and to ensure that the deliberation process itself is constructive and consensual rather than competitive.

### **Case study 7 – Engaging young people in Newcastle**

In May 2008, 139 young people attended a participatory budgeting event in Newcastle to cast a 20 per cent vote in the procurement of services for the city's £2.25m Children's Fund. This is the latest in a series of events in the city's Udecide participatory budgeting programme specifically targeted at young people aged 5 to 13 who were most at risk of low self-esteem, poor school attendance and entry into the criminal justice system. In total, 450 'hard to reach' young people in 39 different settings including Pupil Referral Units, Additional Resource Centres, special schools, a young carers group and a number of BME youth groups were given the opportunity to influence the allocation of the city's Children's Fund. Many of these groups and individuals had not participated in Udecide before and the key elements in achieving reach in this example originate from: working with participants on their own "turf", giving preparatory sessions to boost their confidence in their own abilities, transparent decision making (including electronic "Ask the Audience" type voting systems), a strong identity for the project in the city as a whole, and a competitive edge to the outcomes of the process.

For more information on U-Decide:  
<http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/the-childrens-fund-newcastle/>

## 4.2 How can cost effectiveness be measured/assessed?

### ***What practitioners say:***

- In a context of budgetary restraint and limited resources, an assessment of the relative cost effectiveness of delivering different mechanisms of community empowerment is important.
- However, it was considered to be important to think about cost not just in a financial sense, but in terms of the wider benefits that may be accrued.
- Such benefits may include for example: transferable training and skills for staff and communities; increased voluntary activity; and a contribution to tackling anti-social behaviour and building community cohesion.

### ***What practitioners suggest:***

Several useful strategies for minimising cost were suggested, these include early intervention and developing strategies of appropriate response.

### ***Which tools are useful?***

The relative cost effectiveness of mechanisms is a question of the extent of empowerment that a mechanism can bring (at a given cost). The mechanisms

of citizen governance and participatory budgeting, while incurring relatively high start-up costs and inherently long term in their planning and measurable impact, have, according to the evidence base the greatest potential to 'spillover' to the community.

### **Case study 8 – Cost-effectiveness through citizen governance**

As with many empowerment initiatives, one Sure Start initiative built on existing activity. In this instance, there was a local Children and Families' Centre with a successful track record in engaging parents. The centre was invited to lead the Sure Start project. When the programme was launched, its governance was initially the responsibility of an interim advisory board, with the local authority retaining financial accountability. However, great effort was made to change the nature of meetings to ensure participation and facilitate exchanges. Parents grew in confidence, and their input demonstrated the value of local and experiential knowledge in the contributions they made. For example, parents were able to use their knowledge of the importance of the toy library to ensure that ways would be found to keep this open during the summer when the host school was closed.

This example demonstrates the cost effectiveness of citizen governance which builds on an exiting pattern of engagement, incurs some "front end" costs through providing support for participants, but produces value for money over time in terms of the long term commitment of volunteers to unpaid activity, free access to local intelligence and the production of transferable training and skills.

For more information on a number of cost effective citizen governance projects including Sure Start:

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/designing-citizen-centred-governance>

## 4.3 What are the risks of empowering?

### ***What practitioners say:***

- Delivering community empowerment is a difficult task and so risks are clearly apparent.
- However, a risk-averse approach is unlikely to yield success.
- The most apparent risk is failing to meet raised expectations which has the potential to further disempower citizens.
- Other risks include overburdening citizens, reinforcing the position of the 'usual suspects', challenging the position of elected members, a lack of sustainability, and exacerbating community divisions.
- Many of these risks can be pre-empted.

### ***What expert practitioners suggest:***

- Attempts to mitigate risks imply that local authorities should continue to pursue mechanisms they are already confident in delivering, for example citizen governance, redress and petitions.



- However, it is only by drawing on more innovative mechanisms for empowerment that qualitatively different opportunities for citizens and communities develop.
- As such, mechanisms such as asset transfer, e-participation and participatory budgeting may be worth the risk.

### **Case study 9 – Mitigating risks through a community empowerment strategy**

The Local Strategic Partnership in Nottingham has produced a community empowerment strategy which addresses many of the risks associated with the mechanisms of empowerment. For example it has defined community empowerment in terms of the responsibility of public bodies to “reach out to communities” and give them “the confidence, skills and power to shape and influence” how services are delivered to them, and has backed this up with mainstream funding and a strong political commitment from the leadership of the council and local elected members. It has set standards against which to judge empowerment in terms of: working in partnership and co-ordinating efforts; being inclusive and opening up access to services; being clear about what is being asked of communities and why; acting with respect and honesty; and communicating what is being done in terms of specific feedback on issues raised by citizens. The impacts of the strategy are being assessed by way of an annual residents’ survey; by measuring levels of voter turnout in local elections; and by measuring the amounts of voluntary work being done in the city and the number of voluntary groups accessing capacity building help from the council.

For more information on Nottingham CE strategy:  
<http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2646>

### Useful links:

- DCLG  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/promotingeffectivecitizenship> accessed 19.2.2009
- IDeA:  
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=7381994> accessed 19.2.2009

## 5. Understanding your offer

When local government offers empowerment, citizens can be uncertain or even outright suspicious. Local authorities may not even expect citizens to fully trust their local government. A common argument used to justify democratic oversight, after all, is that systems of accountability and checks and balances are there to ensure that those in power take actions in accordance with the wishes of citizens. And a good citizen is one who exercises some vigilance over the actions of his or her government. Moreover the nature of engagement offered to citizens can vary. They could be deciders, veto players, consultees, shapers of options, or setters of the agenda. So when empowerment activities are being developed it is essential that the public body that is going down that road is clear about what it is trying to do and what it is opening up for engagement. In short it is vital that policy makers and practitioners are clear about the nature of their offer. This is important not only in the relationship with citizens but in terms of the internal debate within the authority. It is vital to have responses to not only the doubts of citizens of the veracity of empowerment strategy but also to address directly the concerns and doubts of officials and politicians.

To help policy-makers and practitioners think through these issues, we identify four questions:

- Is empowerment compatible with representative democracy?
- Do citizens really want to be empowered?
- How can the different tools be mixed together in an overall empowerment approach?
- Why does the culture of your organisation need to change to make empowerment a central rather than a marginal goal?

### 5.1 Is empowerment compatible with representative democracy?

Democratic thought has moved on from a time when representative and participative democracy were seen as inherently in conflict with one another. In the 1950s, an elitist understanding of democracy limited people to simply choosing their leaders. Having voted, citizens were supposed to leave the stage and grant legitimacy to their representatives to get on with it. From the 1960s onwards both theorists and practitioners began to question that understanding of democracy and call for more participation by citizens beyond the occasional opportunity to vote.

Concerns about the clash between representative and participative forms did not, however, disappear altogether. First the evidence mounted that citizens were far from sure that they wanted to decide everything themselves. Having

a say does not mean, for most people, having a veto or being the final judge. Citizens are generally cautious about claiming decision taking responsibility. Having a say, means wanting to influence, but it does not *always* mean having to decide.

Nonetheless, there is now a growing degree of consensus that representative democracy needs engagement with participative democracy, and vice versa. Moreover representatives have come to rethink their understanding of their position. In the context of modern governance when trying to tackle anti-social behaviour, improve the environment and encourage economic success, it is clear that representatives need to understand and influence stakeholders in their communities. Representative democracy in these circumstances cannot simply be reduced to the election of representatives. It involves a commitment to a continuous dialogue. To be a representative means then to actively engage in seeking the views of those who you seek to represent.

## 5.2 Do citizens really want to be empowered?

Over most issues, where they have had little time, inclination or opportunity to form a view, most citizens are wisely in the 'don't know' camp. It is important to recognise that for most people, politics is not their first choice of activity. There are trade-offs between time spent on civic life and the joys of private life. We should be cautious about our expectations about the extent and depth of engagement that people want. But given the right offer and the appropriate opportunity many citizens will engage. The mantra that people 'are just not interested' should be tested and not assumed to be true.

Most regular political activity is based on competition between organised minorities. An empowerment strategy should be about reaching out beyond that regular political activity to seek out voices that otherwise might not be heard and to bring in those not currently engaged. And, over different issues, that could be any one of us. It's not about always looking to hard-to-reach groups – defined as ethnic minorities, new communities, young people and so on – although this can be important. It could be that the key to engagement is the working adults that return from work late to the community. In short, it could be any citizen.

Empowerment for citizens should be about providing opportunities to get involved and engaged in influencing issues that matter to them. It is vital to recognise the variety of issues that people think are important. One person's big issue can mean nothing to another. This is so because politics rests on a fundamental truth about human beings. Because we, and only we, can live our different lives, we all see the world through the lens of that experience. Most of us probably carry around in our heads a set of, usually unarticulated, understandings of what range and type of issues matter to us; they will be different to those held by others. We need an approach to empowerment that allows citizens the opportunity to have a say over what is important to them.

### 5.3 How can the different tools be mixed together in an overall empowerment approach?

In devising empowerment activities consideration needs to be given to how to mix the tools to achieve different purposes. Citizens can be empowered as individuals to get involved to sort out a grievance. They can be asked for their views. They can be asked to reflect and learn about a challenging issue before offering their views. They can take responsibility for a collective decision, service or programme. Effective empowerment activities would try to mix those different goals and get the right tools in place to deal with the challenges faced by citizens.

A good approach would offer a mixed range of opportunities to citizens. For citizens there are trade-offs. For citizens the issue can be seen as a cost-benefit calculation. How much effort is expected of me and how much influence is offered to me? Redress scores well on making light demands and immediate individual benefits but offers less in terms of collective engagement. Petitions could provide a relatively easy way to raise a collective issue or concern but an e-deliberation scheme or a PB exercise could get people to think more carefully about choices and the dilemmas of decision-making. Asset transfer or citizen governance can deliver real control for citizens but equally can be very demanding on those engaged. Some will deliver for citizens the prospects of quick wins; others will demand more of them.

The tools for empowerment identified earlier in this document will achieve different types of empowerment. Figure 5.1 below expresses some of the general qualities of the different empowerment tools from the perspective of citizens in a simplified form.

**Figure 5.1: Characteristics of different tools for empowerment from citizens' perspective**

	Demand on citizens time	Decision-making control	Extent of deliberation	Problem solving capacity
<b>Asset transfer</b>	High	Rests with citizen	High	Collective focus
<b>Citizen governance</b>	High	Rests with citizen	High	Collective focus
<b>E-participation</b>	Medium	Shared	High	Individual or collective focus
<b>Participatory budgeting</b>	Medium	Shared	High	Collective focus
<b>Petitions</b>	Low	Rests with the authority	Low	Collective focus
<b>Redress</b>	Low	Rests with the authority	Low	Individual focus

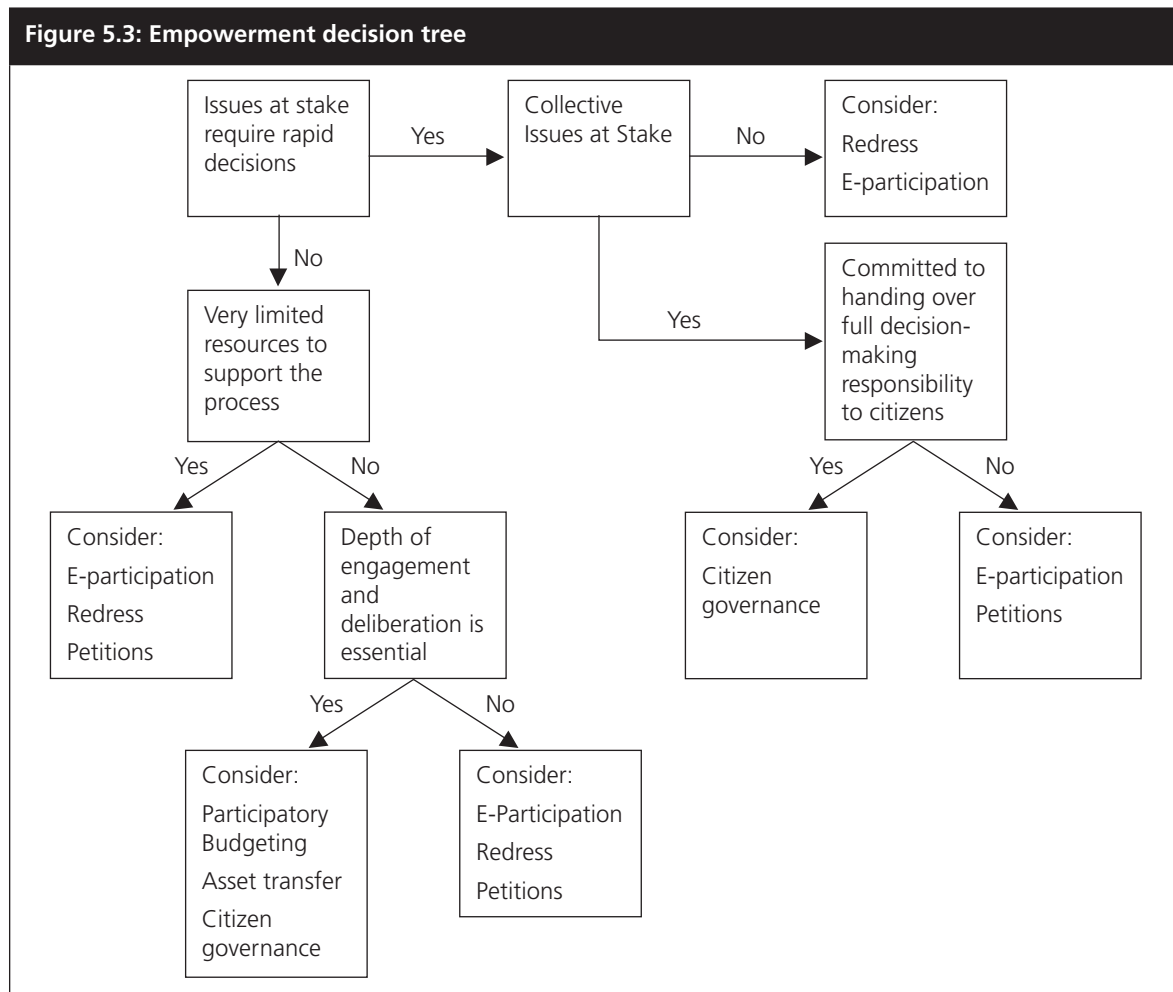
For the public authority there are several crucial questions (see Figure 5.2). The first is how much power do you want to give up? Some tools challenge the decision-making power of the authority more than others. Petitions and redress leave decision-making authority with you. In the case of PB and

e-participation that responsibility for decision-making is shared. In the case of asset transfer and citizen governance in its more advanced forms, control passes from the authority to the citizen. The challenge is to be honest and clear about what it is the citizens can decide. The issue of how much power the local authority wants to give up is closely related to the depth of the engagement that is envisaged. Do you want citizens to deliberate and reflect in depth on an issue or come up with a quick viewpoint? There are also other more pragmatic questions: how much budget is available to support the process and how much time is available before a decision is required?

**Figure 5.2: Characteristics of different tools for empowerment from the perspective of local authority**

	Capacity to devolve power	Depth of decision-making	Resource requirements	Time Horizon
<b>Asset transfer</b>	High	Extensive	High at set up, low when running	Long term
<b>Citizen governance</b>	High	Extensive	Medium level of support	Long term
<b>E-participation</b>	Medium	Medium to Low	Medium	Short-term
<b>Participatory budgeting</b>	Medium	Medium	High	Budget cycle
<b>Petitions</b>	Low	Low	Low	Short term
<b>Redress</b>	Low	Low	Low if built into processes	Short term

By mixing insights from the perspective of the citizen and the authority it is possible to see how a range of options for empowerment might be possible. Another issue is whether there is a particular target audience in mind. Judgements on all of these matters require an understanding of local conditions and circumstances. Figure 5.3 tries to capture the choices you face and how you might respond.



## 5.4 Why does the culture of your organisation need to change to make empowerment a central rather than a marginal goal?

If local government is to take seriously a new “duty to involve”, then empowerment has to become not an add-on but a central feature of the management of the organisation. We think that the concept of ‘public value’ can be helpful here. In an attempt to move on from the rather restrictive and deterministic view of bureaucratic activity underlying New Public Management (NPM) with its focus on efficiency and designing out self-interested behaviour, Mark Moore argued that public managers were involved in the creation of public value requiring dynamism, entrepreneurial and creative activity<sup>12</sup>. Unlike the creation of value in the private sector, public value has no bottom line, so in that world the creation of public value needs to be assessed through the collective democratic processes and dialogue between citizens, politicians and managers about what is provided at what cost.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Moore (1995). *Creating public value* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

The underlying philosophy of public managers (whether politicians or officials) should be to create public value. The issue that needs to be addressed is whether the public intervention which they are directing is achieving positive social and economic outcomes. Providing services is no longer a sufficient justification for state intervention funded by citizens – whether those services are provided directly or commissioned. The question that has to be answered is does the service advance valued social or economic outcomes? Does it deliver public value? And that judgement itself can only be made in the context of political debate and deliberation. To know whether public value is delivered requires a political engagement and an exchange between the relevant stakeholders and government officials at all stages in the policy process.

As local authorities respond to the “duty to involve” it is more important than ever to develop an understanding that empowerment is far from an ideological exercise, or an optional “add-on”: it is a way of making a genuine difference. It can:

- **increase trust in public institutions.** Citizens need to know that public organisations are listening to them, and that their views will be taken into account when decisions are made which make a difference to their lives.
- **improve the quality of services.** Involving people in designing services helps make them “right first time”, more responsive and accountable, and can deliver better value for taxpayers’ money.
- **take and justify difficult decisions.** Involving people in decisions about how local money is spent, through techniques such as participatory budgeting gives communities a better understanding of the difficult prioritisations and trade-offs that have to be made, and a stronger sense of “ownership” over the eventual results.
- **promote good community relations.** As individuals engage with their neighbours, with community groups and local decision makers on how to tackle shared concerns, there is more interaction between people of different backgrounds and more emphasis on shared goals. Greater openness about decision making and greater involvement in those decisions can also remove perceptions of injustice that can challenge cohesion.
- **build resilient community networks.** Third sector organisations and community groups bind communities together, giving people the means to make their voices heard and to make a positive difference.

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