

**META-EVALUATION OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT
MODERNISATION AGENDA - WHITE PAPER POLICY PAPER**

**INNOVATION IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
AND CO-PRODUCTION OF SERVICES**

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INNOVATION IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CO-PRODUCTION OF SERVICES

Introduction

The most basic long-standing method of citizen engagement in public sector decision making is the opportunity to vote at elections although at local level this sometimes only occurs once every four years. However, this mechanism is not enough either for citizens to communicate their wishes to the local authority or to hold the local authority to account. In the last two decades, many other mechanisms have emerged to allow citizens to engage with public sector organisations (Leach *et al.*, 2005).

This policy paper explores the innovative methods used by some local authorities for engaging and communicating with their local electorate and stakeholders. It focuses in particular on efforts to move beyond engagement and participation to more intensive processes – including those labelled ‘co-production’ - for giving the public a direct influence over policy and service delivery. It provides a theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding the importance of this shift in the relationship between the public and the public sector.

The paper draws upon three types of evidence; research conducted by the various CLG-funded evaluations of policies associated with the 1998 and 2001 Local Government White Papers; primary research by the meta-evaluation team and a wide range of literature on public engagement and co-production. It complements the recent meta-evaluation reports on the ‘State of Governance of Places’ (Sullivan, 2008) and the ‘State of Local Democracy’ (Ashworth and Skelcher, 2008).

This policy paper therefore:

- Explores the need for innovation by local authorities and local partners in engaging and communicating with local citizens.
- Provides a theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding of the role of co-production in public services
- Identifies some negative and unintended impacts of increased involvement of users and other citizens.
- Highlights the scope for more innovative methods based upon current experience.
- Considers the learning opportunities from co-production (drawing upon national and international practice).
- Highlights some illustrative examples of good practice which can be disseminated across local government and local strategic partnerships.
- Draws out the lessons for policy makers.

Defining terms – engagement of individual citizens, not organised stakeholders

First, we need to specify whose engagement is being studied. In this policy paper, we look explicitly at attempts to engage members of the public, as individuals rather than as members of organised stakeholders, e.g. associations in civil society. This does not mean that these members of the public do not belong to other stakeholder groups (such as residents' associations, volunteer-based organisations, business firms, etc.), only that we will consider here how people engage with local authorities in their capacity as individual citizens. .

Even as individuals, members of the public may at times engage with local authorities in a range of different roles – e.g. as citizens, electors, local taxpayers, service users, volunteers, etc. It is important to distinguish which types of engagement and communication may be most appropriate for each of these roles separately.

Policy context

From 1997 onwards, the Labour administration has continually expressed the view that improving the level of local engagement is a key part of local government modernization. The 1998 White Paper stated that: *'The Government wishes to see consultation and participation embedded into the culture of all councils, including parishes, and undertaken across a wide range of each council's responsibilities'* (DETR, 1998a: 30). The 1999 Local Government Act included a requirement for all authorities to consult with local taxpayers and statutory guidance emphasized the need to consult widely while undertaking Best Value reviews.

The theme of increasing involvement with the public was continued with the 2001 White Paper which stated that: *'We will support councils in their efforts to lead their communities and meet people's needs. In particular we will support greater levels of community engagement and involvement in council business'* (DTLR, 2001:7). The Office of Public Services Reform suggested that: *'Public services will have to be rebuilt round the needs of their customers'* (OPSR, 2002:8). However, the Audit Commission found that *'[while] involving service users is a critical factor for local authorities aiming to achieve the principles of best value and their statutory duties on equal opportunities, ... councils have a long way to go if they are to meet these requirements'* (2002b). Moreover, evidence from the Audit Commission's first round of Comprehensive Performance Assessments suggested that, although user focus and citizen engagement were key drivers for improvement, more than a third of councils had poor systems of consultation or systems that were in need of review (Audit Commission, 2005).

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM now CLG), through its development of a national strategy for local government, and the Home Office, through its Active Citizenship programme, took forward the commitment to more effective engagement: *'Government departments have adopted a common framework for building community*

capacity and agreed a shared objective: to increase voluntary and community engagement, especially amongst those at risk of social exclusion, and increasing the voluntary and community sector's contribution to delivering public services' (ODPM, 2005b: 9, footnote 19).

The 2006 White Paper on *Strong and Prosperous Communities* reiterates that 'there needs to be dynamic, genuine consultation and involvement of local communities, voluntary organisations and businesses in the setting of priorities and planning of delivery'. However, it recognizes the problems: 'Currently, the regulatory framework for local consultation and engagement can be complex, overlapping and confusing' (DCLG, 2006: 107). The White Paper makes clear the government's commitment that the local authority and its partners should 'have the flexibility to draw up a much more comprehensive engagement strategy which captures the planned community engagement requirements of the individual partners and, where possible, combines activity', both to enable more meaningful consultation with local residents and organisations on all fronts but also to reduce the risk of consultation overload and fatigue. However, it proposes to make no further legislative provisions to ensure this – indeed, it even proposes to repeal one minor burden, the requirement for an independent examination of the LDF's Statement of Community Involvement.

The recent Green Paper on 'The Governance of Britain' stressed the importance of re-energizing democracy, so that local people are better able to hold service providers to account, e.g. through service charters and use of real-time local data on service effectiveness and provider performance, and it reinforced the shift in government policy, with increasing emphasis on finding 'new ways to enable people to become active citizens, empowered and fully engaged in local decision-making' (HM Government 2007: 49). It is interesting though that the role of local government in this document does not seem to be centre-stage.

Changing levels of supply and demand for engagement opportunities

There is evidence that the extent and diversity of engagement with the public has increased (DETR, 1998b; ODPM, 2002) but there are still significant questions about the quality of this engagement (Leach et al. 2005; Sullivan, 2008). Even more worryingly, the government has recognized that, '*To date there has been little assessment of the extent to which participation and consultation exercises actually influence decision-making processes*' (Aspden & Birch, 2004). Indeed, research has shown that two-thirds of authorities did not report clear links between participation and decision-making (Lowndes, 2002) and nearly three-quarters of authorities in an Audit Commission study (admittedly in 1999) thought that a failure to link the results of consultation with decision-making processes prevented the results from being used effectively.

Meanwhile, it appears that the demand for public engagement has not been properly satisfied. Research suggests that the public would like to be more heavily involved in decision-making. In one survey, 24% 'would like to have more say in what the council

does and the services it provides' (ODPM, 2000). Another survey reported that 55% of people would definitely be interested in being involved in the decisions their council makes (DETR, 1998b) and more specifically, 59% of the public would be interested to some extent in taking part in important decisions about their council budget (DETR, 2000). More recently, a survey found that a quarter of people would like to be involved in decisions the council makes that affect their local area (DCLG, 2007a). Of course, these findings all relate to citizen engagement in different stages of the service planning-management-delivery cycle, emphasising that each of these phases of service provision offer differing opportunities for citizens to play active roles.

There is also a belief in government about the latent potential for people to engage and become more empowered. Nick Raynsford suggests that:

'While participation in traditional political structures has been declining, it is not true that people have no interest in political issues. Membership of single-issue groups, participation in local policing forums, and involvement in local campaigns such as road safety, tells us that there are masses of people who want to get involved when they care about the subject and feel they can make a difference' (Municipal Journal, 16 March 2006).

There are now important examples of services where citizens have the opportunity to have more of a say over service delivery through choice mechanisms. The choice-based letting system whereby housing tenants can make a bid for where they want to live rather than the decision over housing being dictated to them is a frequently cited example and one which the government seems keen to expand. Individual budgets for those receiving social care is another example where citizens can feel empowered by designing a service which is most convenient to them, rather than the service provider. The concept of individual budgets was explored during 2007 in a number of pilots for other services, as well, such as [Disabled Facilities Grant](#), [Independent Living Funds](#), [Access to Work](#) and community equipment services. However, questions remain as to how this latent desire for and interest in 'choice' can most successfully be tapped and channelled into those areas of 'choice' which are considered most important by citizens themselves. Further, it is important to emphasise that, while choice usually requires co-production, given that users need to make some efforts to inform themselves about the choices available and their consequences, choice is only one approach to engagement, and some citizens may see it as of little value.

Conceptual issues: the pros and cons of public engagement

The advantages of public engagement

There is a clear assumption by many authors that public engagement is a good thing in itself. Indeed, Burton suggests that not only is community involvement a key principle of urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal, it is also recognised as being a fundamental civil right (2004:193).

However, engagement is more often seen as having instrumental value. The Audit Commission suggest that, '*Consulting and involving service users, and finding out what the general public want from their local services, should not be seen as an extra chore for service providers, but as a means of carrying out their work more efficiently and effectively*' (Audit Commission, 2002a:3).

More narrowly, the most frequent arguments advanced in favour of consultation and participation are couched in terms of service improvement (Audit Commission, 1999; Seargeant & Steele, 1998; Law, 2004; Future Services Network, 2007). And, indeed, responses by officers in our national survey of local authorities in 2006 show they believed that stakeholder engagement in their authority/service had led to:

- Services that are more responsive to the needs of users (89% of respondents agreed)
- More informed decisions (86%)
- More accessible services (81%)
- Higher quality services (79%)
- More 'joined-up' services (76%)
- Better value of money for council tax payers (59%)

In addition to these service-related benefits, there are also arguments that public engagement and involvement also have wider governance impacts – e.g. they can have an educative effect and can impact positively on the health and legitimacy of democratic political processes (Chanan, 2003). The Future Services Network suggest that 'engaging people, listening and giving them an active part in public services creates fulfilled, satisfied consumers' (2007: 3) while Stoker has even suggested that increasing public participation will rekindle enthusiasm for traditional democracy (House of Commons Select Committee on Public Administration, 2001). Recent evidence, however, would seem to suggest that the impact on electoral turnout from increased consultation and participation may have been overestimated - turnouts in national and local elections have continued to decline. Of course, this does not mean that consultation has not impacted on public perceptions of the legitimacy of local political institutions and confidence in their efficacy – simply that such an argument has to be unpacked more carefully, looking at the intermediate links connecting one to the other. This 'institution-building' role of public engagement is likely to be longer-term and more complex in its development – and research into it must therefore be sensitive to the complexities involved.

The difficulties of public engagement

In recent years, some of the limitations of public engagement have become clearer. Cooke and Kothari (2001) identify three 'tyrannies' of participation:

- the *tyranny of decision making and control*, whereby participatory facilitators over-ride existing legitimate decision-making processes

- the *tyranny of the group*, in which group dynamics lead to participatory decisions that reinforce the interests of the already powerful
- the *tyranny of method*, whereby participatory methods drive out other methods with advantages which participation cannot match.

The different perspectives at work in participation are illustrated by one of the case studies, where one officer explained that the council had carried out an extensive and successful consultation on the council tax, but another officer provided more detail which suggested that one of the events had involved seventeen officers and only one member of the public. This example reminds us that there are different perspectives on how to define ‘success’ – for some it may merely mean ‘ticking the box’ that ‘consultation’ has been undertaken, for others it may mean manipulating the process so as not to get a negative public response on council tax levels, while for others ‘successful’ consultation may need to be ‘real’, i.e. to engage residents intensively and with an open agenda.

Of course, these arguments are not actually against the concept of participation as such, but rather against its use in inappropriate circumstances. There are indeed some situations in which it can be argued, on either conceptual or practical grounds, that public consultation/engagement would be inappropriate. It is important to surface these limitations on appropriateness, as otherwise they can remain unexpressed but can sour attitudes of some stakeholders towards extensions of public engagement.

At a conceptual level, there is a need to explore ‘who knows what’, admitting that the public, interest groups, professionals in government, managers in government and politicians (at both national and local level) all have different knowledge bases and kinds of experience. These different types of expertise need to be considered before deciding the parameters of any consultation/engagement exercise. One example of this kind of analysis is given by Kieron Walsh (1991) – see Table 1. This analysis highlights that it is indeed sometimes entirely appropriate for local decisions, e.g. on issues of service quality, to be made without reference to or in the face of local public opinion. Moreover, this is understood by local people, as was vividly exemplified by one of our citizens’ focus group in Gateshead, where participants gave the example of the *Angel of the North*, which was ridiculed by some sections of the press and by many local people before it was erected, but which quickly became an almost universally welcomed symbol of the regeneration of the area. However, Table 1 also illustrates that there are situations where service users know more about the quality of a service than any professional or politician – and here we would expect their views to play an important role in decision-making.

Table 1: Who knows about quality?

	<i>Quality is privately experienced</i>	<i>Quality is socially experienced</i>
<i>Quality is simple to specify</i>	Users know about quality	Politicians know about quality (together with voluntary organisations)
<i>Quality is complex to specify</i>	Professionals know about quality (together with users)	No one group knows about quality - politicians must decide

Source: Adapted from Walsh (1991)

At a practical level, the need for speed may make consultation at best a two-edged sword, slowing down decision-making in urgent issues. In our 2006 meta-evaluation survey, 39% of officers agreed that engagement in their authority/service had led to slower decision-making (an increase from 31% in 2004). Moreover, there have been circumstances where the introduction of a central government policy has necessarily had a negative effect on levels of public engagement. One example is highlighted in the evaluation of LPSAs, which found that there were a number of authorities which had no time to consult because of problems in negotiating the targets (ODPM, 2005). Here, the need to act speedily may have properly overridden the desire to consult with appropriate parties (although it is also possible to argue that the negotiation would have been better informed if public consultation had taken place simultaneously).

The government is aiming to give users more rights over services (e.g. the power to choose and a duty for local authorities to consult), but it needs to be a two-way process, as these rights also place extra responsibility on the public (Cabinet Office, 2007). A significant concern is that the public may not be interested in taking advantage of such opportunities and may prefer to shirk such responsibilities.

We reported above that a quarter of people would like to be involved in decisions the council makes that affect their local area. Research experience of over-reporting in surveys would suggest that the proportion of people actually willing to make such a commitment is likely to be lower than one in four. While there is little dispute that community engagement needs to be built from the bottom up, there is a significant debate about the size and nature of the supply of people to do it. When Hazel Blears states: “Far from being apathetic about social change, people will leap at the chance to get involved when given the right opportunity” (in DCLG, 2007b), she is identifying an important aspect of community engagement but the proportion of the population to which her statement refers still remains to be determined more clearly.

Barriers to engagement

Smith suggests that, ‘rhetoric is not enough – although the enhancement of participation is a political priority, public authorities lack the will, resources and freedom to embrace democratic innovations’ (2005: 113). The government in the UK has allowed individual local authorities to determine the best way of engaging with the public, but this has meant that there is a great deal of variety across local government with a range of outcomes (Leach *et al.*, 2005). As there has been ‘little in the way of advice which relates directly to empowering users of services’ (Dibben and Bartlett, 2001), it might be argued that this area might have suffered from the lack of prescription. The Audit Commission, however, disagree and suggest that: ‘The impetus to prioritise service user and public involvement needs to be part of the organisation’s or partnership’s approach and culture... Consultation that arises from a statutory requirement or management directive alone will often fail to deliver the goods (Audit Commission, 2002a: 34)

Smith (2005) has identified a large number of factors which may damage the efficacy of innovations designed to encourage democratic participation. These factors include:

- conflicting policy imperatives for public authorities;
- poorly executed participation programmes;
- lack of dedicated resources for participation;
- a lack of clarity about the aims of participation at a national and local level;
- a lack of creativity and imagination in designing engagement strategies;
- organisational and professional resistance to participation;
- a tendency towards ‘incorporation’ of citizens into official and bureaucratic ways of working;
- a failure to respond to the outcomes of participation;
- lack of cultural change in public authorities;
- a tendency to engage ‘natural joiners’;
- often no incentive for citizens to participate;
- lack of awareness of opportunities to participate;
- lack of trust in authorities or scepticism that participation will make no difference.

Clearly all these factors need to be tackled in designing tools to engage the public and to get individuals to become more intensively involved in co-production. Indeed, with the exception of the first factor (conflicting policy imperatives), all of these factors are picked up in various parts of this paper as important for the success of engaging individual citizens and service users in co-production. This emphasizes that co-production is not simply a service improvement issue – if it is successful, it is likely to underpin and reinforce democratic decision-making processes, by raising awareness of their role and increasing the numbers of citizens who play a direct role within them.

One theme linking a number of the elements in Smith’s list of potential damaging factors is that the likelihood of success of any public engagement innovation is dependent upon the culture, values and history of the area. What works in one setting may not necessarily work in another. Since methods of engagement cannot be imposed from above, they must

develop from below and be given time to flourish. Gaventa concludes that, 'New attitudes, new forms of trust and collaboration, new skills and capacities, new models of leadership and power sharing - all take time to develop and to grow' (2004: 30). It is important, therefore, to try to find ways of achieving sufficient visible and acknowledged results in the short run to buy time for producing long-term improvements in local services and, more generally, in local quality of life.

Sharpening the existing tools for public engagement

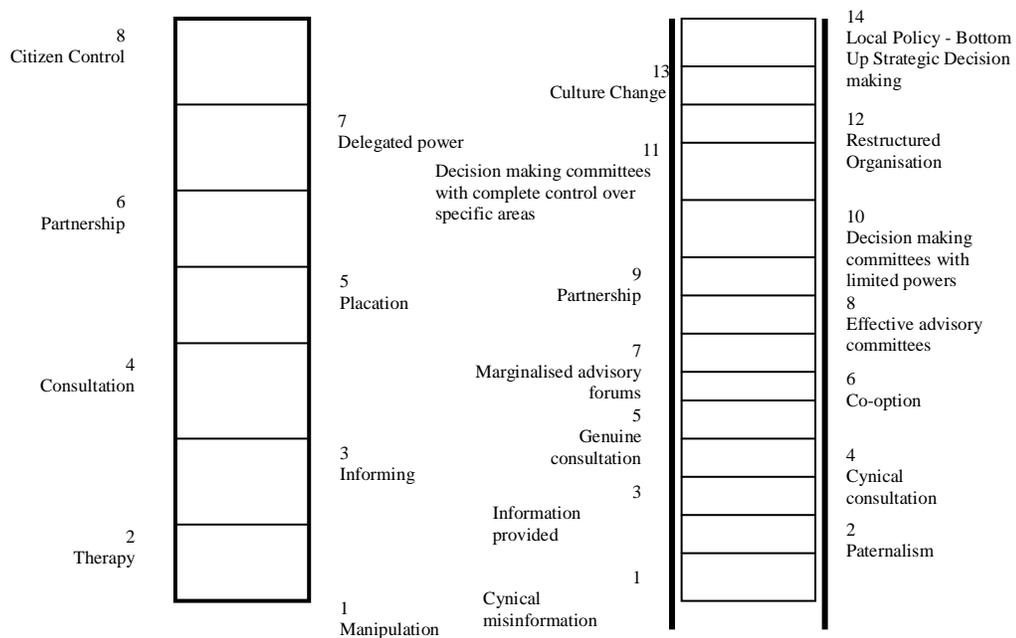
Finding the right 'voice' for interacting with the public

The most famous characterisation of the various stages in citizen engagement and participation is the 'ladder of participation' by Sherry Arnstein (1969) which was later extended by Burns et al. (1994) (Figure 1), in a rather more cynical interpretation of the motives behind public sector engagement with the public. The process becomes more two-way and engagement more intensive as we move up these ladders. However, it is also clear that most consultation and participation exercises aim at the lower rungs on Arnstein's ladder.

Part of the problem in getting the public involved is the design of the interaction processes which are used. It is generally suggested that stakeholder engagement methods need to match the purpose of engagement and a combination of several methods is more likely to lead to success. Moreover, efforts to engage the public have to be meaningful - there needs to be a consideration of how users may benefit from the process, rather than consultation being carried out for its own sake, and the timing of consultation should demonstrate that the views expressed are likely to influence decisions taken, which has led to an emphasis in recent years of engaging with the public at early stages of the decision making process. However, communication issues can also be critically important - it has become increasingly recognised that proper feedback has to be given, if the public is to believe that their engagement has been worthwhile and would be justified on further occasions in the future. In the focus groups carried out for the meta-evaluation case studies, there were many examples of citizens strongly criticising local public agencies - but particularly local authorities, since they were the main topic of the sessions - for feedback which was inadequate or, indeed, entirely absent. The local authorities concerned were often surprised and even indignant at these accusations, believing that they had indeed given feedback through 'the usual channels'. This illustrates the major gap between the perceptions of a local authority on what it means to give feedback and the perceptions of local people as to whether they have actually received appropriate feedback. Bridging this chasm is a critical issue for the future of citizen and user engagement in public services and with public agencies.

Figure 1: Ladders of participation

The ‘Sherry Arnstein’ Model A New Ladder of Participation



Over time, the methods available for channelling the interactions between a local authority and its citizens have become much more varied and complex. Many tool kits and codes of practice have been drafted to help local authorities to improve engagement with the public (www.idea.knowledge.co.uk and www.togetherwecan.direct.gov.uk). The recent ‘Getting Closer to Communities’ theme within the Beacon Scheme (2005/6) has produced seven councils (Blyth Valley, Croydon, Haringey, Tower Hamlets, South Somerset, Tameside and Wiltshire) with identified good practice in this area. The award winners shared a number of common features which included creative interactions with the voluntary and community sector. In Blyth Valley, for example, as a result of a strategic approach to community development, the number of community organisations and volunteers has doubled. However, fewer references were made to working directly with the public, rather than through third sector organisations. A number of Beacons had

instituted area committee structures where resources (£50,000 in each of seven assembly areas in Haringey) could be spent on locally determined projects – some of these projects involved ‘non-joiners’ and the selection process included members of the general public, as well as organised groups, but again the initiative was centred partnerships with the third sector. The Beacons recommended close working with all key local stakeholders within the LSP, close co-ordination with different agencies and capacity building within the community as key ‘top tips’ for other councils (IDeA, 2005). This latter point must include capacity building for greater involvement of ‘non-joiners’, as well as within the organised third sector.

Generally, it is clear that quite different methods have to be used depending on whether the agency is dealing with individuals, or small groups, or a mass public. In each of these cases, genuinely interactive working is usually much more difficult and costly than one-way communication from one side or the other.

In designing the communications approaches related to different types of interactions between councils and their citizens, the methods have to differ markedly, depending on the content of the message. Communications are easiest where citizens personally receive benefits from the services involved, both because the member of the public has a real interest in the communication and also because the target group of the message is easy to pinpoint and reach.

Communications about wider issues, which bring benefits beyond the individual to whom the message is relayed, are much more difficult. While there has been an enormous growth over recent years in the field of ‘social marketing’, which promotes the social or environmental benefits of particular forms of action (e.g. giving up smoking or not throwing litter on the streets), this tends to be much harder than marketing direct benefits experienced by individuals, particularly when trying to engage citizens in an interactive dialogue or mobilising them to take collective action in relation to social or environmental issues.

Communications about political benefits which might arise in relation to certain initiatives are particularly sensitive. Of course, local authority communications must avoid appearing to favour any ‘party political’ platform. Consequently, communications about political benefits cannot relate to the benefits which political parties are promising in their election manifestos, but rather the benefits to citizens which might flow from reinforcement of the democratic process as a way of making decisions in the local area. Obvious examples in recent years in the UK relate to the benefits from using one’s vote, from a move to unitary rather than two-tier councils, from setting up neighbourhood or area forums and, more recently, from participatory budgeting. (Nor is this a problem solely in the context of local government – many mutual societies have similarly found it difficult to promote the advantages of their democratic constitutions, so that many have been demutualised in the past two decades). Given the rather abstract and generalised nature of these benefits, such communications are especially likely to be ineffective in getting through to the public. As Newman and Pearlove (2004: 35) argue: ‘Campaigns, it is generally believed, do not hypodermically change attitudes so much as link up with

voters' predispositions and concerns in subtle ways, bringing certain issues to the surface, distilling others, crystallising beliefs and affects, and pushing some voters to align their attitudes in different ways than they had earlier'. This problem of communicating to the public some inherently abstract benefits can, of course, seriously undermine the perceived legitimacy of decision making on these issues.

In Table 2, we exemplify the kinds of processes that are typically used to interact with the public, depending on which type of 'public' is involved (individuals, small groups of individuals, or the mass of the public), whether the interaction is meant to be two-way or one-way, and what the content of the message is intended to be.

Table 2: Examples of methods available to deliver different types of benefits through different types of interaction with the public

<i>Kind of interaction with individual users and citizens</i>	<i>Kind of benefits to be delivered</i>			
	<i>Private benefits (- going to service users only)</i>	<i>Social benefits (- going to multiple groups)</i>	<i>Environmental benefits (- protection of the environment)</i>	<i>Political benefits (- reinforcement of democratic processes)</i>
<i>One way (agency – individual)</i>	Direct mail – service information Personal assessment (e.g. care needs assessment)	Social marketing Personal assessment (e.g. parenting order)	Environmental marketing Personal assessment (e.g. environmental footprint through on-line tools)	Party political manifestos Election canvassing
<i>One way (individual – agency)</i>	Survey Complaint On-line service feedback	Survey Lobbying	Survey Lobbying	Survey Letter to politician
<i>Individual – agency interactive</i>	Meeting	(Meeting)	(Meeting)	Attendance at politician's surgery
<i>Small-scale (agency – group)</i>		Citizens jury	Citizens jury	Politicians nominated to liaise with or represent particular groups of citizen
<i>Small-scale (group – agency)</i>	Focus groups (e-)Petitions	Focus group (e-)Petitions	Focus groups (e-)Petitions	Focus groups (e-)Petitions
<i>Small-scale interactive</i>	User consultative groups	Neighbourhood forums Lobbying	Neighbourhood forums Lobbying	Lobbying
<i>Large-scale (agency – public)</i>	Service info - mass promotion	Social marketing – mass promotion	Environmental marketing – mass promotion	Open council meetings Mass promotion of new political management (e.g. unitary authorities, elected mayors)

<i>Large-scale (public – agency)</i>	(e-)Petitions Planning for real	(e-)Petitions Planning for real	(e-)Petitions Planning for real	Referenda
<i>Large-scale interactive</i>	Open space events	Open space events	Open space events	Political meetings

The central message from Table 2 is that interaction methods have to be targeted, in the light of their intended audience and message – few methods of interaction are sufficiently flexible to be effective when used to achieve multiple purposes with multiple stakeholders.

Who to consult?

Skocpol (2003) suggests from US experience that public engagement has become the domain of ‘professionalized associations’. This view is supported by some of those we interviewed in our case studies – for example, an elected member in our national survey suggested that, ‘*Much of the stakeholder engagement still seems to circumvent the public – it has involved professionals more than residents*’. However, this rather overstates the degree of the problem – we also found plenty of examples where consultation exercises had reached quite a wide range of individual citizens. Moreover, professionals and the ‘usual suspects’ in consultation initiatives are themselves entirely legitimate participants in such exercises.

One of the paradoxes of *participatory democracy* is that it need not be entirely representative, since we already have *representative democracy* for that purpose. However, the issues of just how representative should aim to be and which groups should be given most weight are clearly critical (Barnes et al., 2003; Gaventa, 2004; Andrews et al., 2006). Sub-issues of particular importance are how to engage with ‘hard to reach groups’ and how to ensure that the views of those who do not welcome (and successfully avoid) engagement with the public sector are understood within the decision-making system.

Representativeness of engagement initiatives. It is highly likely that the participants in any engagement initiative with the ‘public’ are not fully representative of the community involved. Given that most of the community do not want to engage on any specific issue, those who do engage are by definition a small, self-selected sample and there is no reason to believe that they have typical views. Indeed, it can be argued that a central purpose of deliberative democracy is to identify and work with those people who are so untypical of the general public that they know and care about the issue in question. Those who ‘know and care’ can be seen as the core constituency for intensive public engagement initiatives, as both their level of knowledge and their preparedness to take action can be seen as invaluable resources to the public sector in redesigning services and service delivery mechanisms.

Of course, public engagement also involves many people who do not belong to this ‘know and care’ group (see Table 3). Many members of the public who care about an issue are not very knowledgeable about it. Indeed, Coleman and Gotze (2007: 16) argue that ‘Research findings overwhelmingly suggest that members of the public are uninformed, often about the most elementary aspects of civic and political knowledge’ (citing Dimock and Popkin, 1997). They go on to extrapolate from this: ‘Politicians may well fear that an ill-informed – or misinformed – public would not be up to the task of policy deliberation. They are right about this. But currently it is just such influence that uninformed citizens have, via opinion polls, referenda and other snapshot measurements of non-deliberative opinions. Deliberative exercises depend upon a willingness by participants to become exposed to new and balanced information. If citizens are to inform their representatives, then they in turn must provide informed input’.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that these citizens, who ‘care but don’t know’, are an important target group for public engagement – at the very least they form a potential volunteer force for community action. Moreover, with appropriate experience and training, many members of this group may transfer into the ‘know and care’ group, which is a major bonus for the public sector. However, there is clearly one major *caveat* in relation to engagement with this group – it would normally be inappropriate to undertake the actions which this group would favour, given that the group is not well informed about the issues. One of the principles proposed to the Canadian Commission on the Future of Health Care, and frequently cited since, was that ‘the consultee must have sufficient and adequate information to make informed decisions’ (Pivik, 2002). It is the knowledge that such a group exists (and may even be quite large for some issues) which leads some local politicians, managers and professional staff to be reluctant to engage with the public, in case it leads to decisions to take actions which appear likely to have unfortunate consequences. Being clear about the limits of engagement is important from the start of any initiative, so that the expectations of the public are not raised unrealistically about the extent to which their views will determine decisions.

Table 3: How much does a group know and care about an issue?

	How much does the group care about the issue?		
How much does the group know about an issue?		<i>A great deal</i>	<i>Little</i>
	<i>A great deal</i>	Know and care	Know but don’t care
	<i>Little</i>	Care but don’t know	Don’t know, don’t care

Those who don’t know and don’t care – the voice of the ‘apathetic majority’? The final box in Table 3 represents the (typically large number of) people who don’t know much about an issue and don’t care about it. A very high proportion of these are likely not to get involved in any engagement exercise - this is why the views of those who do get involved are, almost by definition, unrepresentative – by becoming involved they essentially betray a level of interest/knowledge/commitment which suggests that their views are probably not ‘typical’ even of the group to which they apparently belong.

However, this does not mean that the views of the ‘silent’ citizens cannot be fed into the decision-making process at all. In recent years, a variety of ‘low impact’ opinion polling approaches have become standard, which can reveal at least the outline views of such citizens, of which their political representatives can be aware when taking decisions on their behalf. Some authorities have tried to provide innovative mechanisms to engage such people. In Cardiff, for example, the council has conducted a voter registration campaign targeting students and young people through beer mats, mouse mats, mobile phone holders and student newspapers. However, in general, it is this group which is most likely to feel ‘consultation fatigue’ and to be uninterested in giving their views often, so that it is especially problematic to tempt them to have at least minimal contact with the consultation process of the local authority. Research (Burns and Taylor, 1999; Birch, 2002) suggests that at least a core of these groups will avoid any such formal processes if they possibly can, which raises questions about how well represented they can be in the political system.

The perceived ‘representativeness deficit’ may therefore be partly an illusion. The ‘usual suspects’, who are often felt to dominate unduly in public engagement exercises, are simply those that have the time, resources and interest to get involved, i.e. a very small minority of people (who might better be called ‘the unusual suspects’ or ‘hard to avoid’!). Clearly, they form a major resource to the public service system. However, many more people do get involved occasionally, on issues about which they care, and even more express the wish to become involved in the future – but only the issues which they choose and on which they have an interest.

Finally, given the likelihood of disagreements and even conflict between groups engaged in participative and deliberative initiatives (Wilson, 1998), there is a fundamental need for the representative democratic system to be able to transcend the limitations of participatory democracy.

Reaching ‘hard to reach’ groups. There is extensive evidence that some groups are systematically under-represented in public engagement exercises (Taylor, 2003), even where they do know and care about the issues concerned. At the same time, recent research also indicates that public engagement exercises can play a valuable role in giving greater voice to these groups (Dockery, 1996; Barnes *et al.*, 2007). Reaching beyond the ‘usual suspects’ to involve these ‘hard to reach’ groups needs to be done by a wide range of methods, since the groups themselves vary greatly and so do their chosen modes of communication with formal organisations. Methods can involve surveys conducted by members of the community concerned, arranging focus groups held at appropriate times (during school, after school, after work hours, etc.), an interactive website, random interviewing at doctor’s surgeries, etc. In our case studies, especially interesting examples of reaching out to ‘hard to reach’ groups included one case study which has a very large minority ethnic population but was described as a city at ease with itself and proud of its diversity. One interviewee described the council as ‘celebrating the diversity of the different communities but making sure that they work together’. Many people credited the city council for the work it has done in this area. They recognised it as

an issue and instituted processes, such as setting up a group on race which meets at the offices of the local newspaper and aims to improve relations between all communities.

Some innovative approaches to engaging with hard-to-reach groups rely on intermediaries who are closer to and more trusted by those groups – such as faith leaders, local teachers from the same community etc. For young people, the network of Youth Parliaments has managed to improve engagement with the ‘authorities’ in their area and in some areas, such as Calderdale, they have a role in appointing staff involved in youth work in their area (Governance International, 2005). There are other innovative examples of engaging with young people. In Rochdale, young people and the council operate a ‘28 day accountability clause’, whereby the council must respond to the work produced by the youth forum within four weeks (Andrews *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, new technologies have proved useful in linking some types of local people to their local authorities – e.g. the use of text messaging to young people in some local authorities, internet discussion groups for some consultation exercises, etc.

International research indicates that much more can be done to involve ‘hard-to-reach’ groups than is typically done at present – best practice case studies from around the UK, Europe and the rest of the world indicate this quite graphically (see, for example, [Baruch et al, 2006](#); Coleman and Gotze, 2001; Brackertz, 2007; Brackertz et al., 2005; HSE, 2004). Indeed, internationally some ‘hard to reach groups’ have mobilised and achieved some degree of political power – for example, dalits in parts of India and the rural poor *Zapatistas* in parts of Mexico. There must therefore be some questions asked as to why reaching ‘hard to reach groups’ continues to be a ‘problematic’ area. Some of the international research indicates that the will is lacking more than the means. For example, in some cases it is not so much that the groups are hard to reach, rather the public sector is hard to reach for those groups. In other cases, the public sector simply doesn’t try very hard to reach those groups.

In their reluctance to become engaged in civic affairs, the majority of members of ‘hard to reach’ groups may, in any case, be no different from the rest of the population. However, the issues in which they may wish to become involved may be very much ‘minority’ issues in their areas, which means that the public sector does not consider these issues a priority and therefore offers fewer opportunities for engagement – e.g. issues of low skilled employment opportunities in fast-growing city regions, own-language respite care for carers of the elderly from minority ethnic groups, musical and arts provision for members of minority ethnic groups, opportunities for social interaction between people with mobility disadvantages, etc.

This suggests that the low levels of engagement with ‘hard to reach’ groups may often actually be a symptom of a more fundamental problem – the poor targeting of consultation exercises, either because the targeting is not undertaken or because it is not taken seriously in the implementation phase. Support for this hypothesis comes from the fact that there are many examples of ‘hard to reach’ groups becoming very visible to public agencies, at least for short periods, without any obvious attempt by those authorities to use the opportunity to recruit those people as participants in other, related

consultation exercises. This applies, for example, when local authorities propose to close schools, libraries or swimming pools, when the NHS proposes to close local hospitals or when police or fire authorities propose to close local police or fire stations. In all of these instances, there tends to be significant public engagement, with most sections of the population well represented but the public sector does not attempt to interest the members of the 'hard to reach' groups in becoming more active on other civic issues - indeed, the attitude often evinced is one of trying to see the back of these 'troublemakers' as quickly and painlessly as possible.

What to do if the 'wrong people' are involved in our engagement initiatives? There is continued disquiet that the 'wrong people' are involved in current local government engagement initiatives. As Skidmore et al. (2005) put it: '...those already well connected tend to get better connected.... Community participation tends to be dominated by a small group of insiders who are disproportionately involved in a large number of governance activities'.

What can be done about this? There are several potential strategies: one is, of course, to ignore or even cover up the problem – and there is evidence that this approach is quite widespread (see the example of the 'public consultation on the budget' in one of our case studies, mentioned above). Slightly less devious is an attempt to rationalise after the event that the groups actually involved are important consultees, although they were not the original target groups. More positive strategies emerging from our research in both the meta-evaluation and other studies include:

- trying *more experimental methods of locating* the groups concerned;
- *externalising the consultation task* to another agency (e.g. Gateshead MBC use the CVS to manage consultation on its Sustainable Community Strategy);
- getting representatives of the groups concerned to act as *recruitment agents* (e.g. faith leaders or community group leaders);
- encouraging existing participants from the 'right' background to recruit more people like themselves (the '*snowballing*' approach);
- *improving the incentives* to those groups to get involved, which can be done a range of ways, for example
 - by raising the promise of what level of service change is potentially on offer in the consultation exercise (e.g. by offering to negotiate service charters or neighbourhood charters with them);
 - by personalising the service to meet their specific needs (and then getting this information spread through their community)
 - by user and community co-production with existing contacts from the community, so that further community members are tempted to make contact in order to have similar experiences.

The next section focuses upon this latter possibility - what Smith (2005) would categorise as a co-governance innovation and what other authors suggest is a version of 'empowered deliberative democracy' (Fung and Wright, 2001) – the user and community co-production of services.

Beyond public engagement: the move to user and community co-production

Having considered the range of communication methods for public engagement, we now turn our attention toward a more direct method of enhancing participation, which does not rely on communication through third parties, because citizens are personally involved in setting the agenda and the decision-making process in the services concerned. Various authors have suggested that the relationship between the public and local government is changing (Andrews et al., 2006; Fung and Wright, 2001) as citizens move from being ‘clients’ in traditional public administration, to ‘customers’ in New Public Management and now ‘co-producers’ in the more recent networked governance model (Hartley, 2005; Bovaird, 2007). This interest in greater user-centred services stems partly from the positive experience of the private sector in improving their levels of user satisfaction through ‘customer relations management’ (Levitt, 2005). However, it also derives directly from the government’s emerging agenda, described in the first of the half of this paper, to engage users and other citizens more directly in civic and service issues.

Co-production can be defined as *‘the provision of services through regular, long-term relationships between professionalized service providers (in any sector) and service users or other members of the community, where all parties make substantial resource contributions’* (Bovaird, 2007). Here, the theory is that, *‘those who are most dependent on the services are those who value them most highly, it follows that they should have the greatest say in how those services are run’* (Somerville, 2005:122).

There is now a growing interest in user and community co-production, a concept which originally came into prominence in the late 1970s in the private sector (Zeleny, 1978; Lovelock and Young; 1979) and in the early 1980s in the public sector (Ostrom et al, 1983; Percy, 1984). Given that customers and citizens, just like staff, ‘may not know what they know’, purely analytical approaches to customer/citizen opinion research may neglect the tacit knowledge which citizens and services users have about what works and what does not work, what needs are being met and which are not being met (O’Dell and Grayson, 1998). In such situations, citizen and user collaboration in the various stages of the service cycle may be more powerful than opinion research in unlocking this knowledge and feeding it into the processes of public policy making and public services management (Bouckaert, Loeffler and Pollitt, 2006). These stages of the service cycle (Figure 2) can be broken down into pre-production, production and post-production phases.

Figure 2: Elements of the service cycle

Pre-production phase of service cycle:

- co-planning
- co-design
- co-commissioning
- co-prioritising

- co-budgeting
- co-selection of providers

Production phase of service cycle:

- co-management
- co-delivery
- co-monitoring

Post-production phase of service cycle:

- co-evaluation
- co-review and co-improvement planning.

There are several different strands to the argument behind this approach. First, there is the argument that some services only work if the user is heavily involved in their co-production. Education provides one such example – usually people ‘being educated’ will only be ‘successful’, e.g. in achieving their desired level of exam results, if they pay attention in class, interact with the ‘teacher’ and do the necessary homework. A similar relationship is also true in services such as health care as a person with a serious heart condition is much more likely to have a successful outcome from surgery if they work with the surgeon, by preparing for the operation (keeping to a careful diet, not drinking alcohol, not smoking, etc) and committing to a rigorous rehabilitation process. This example suggests that ‘the condition of our health as individuals is as much a product of our own behaviour as it is a reflection of the health care services we “consume”’ (Quirk 2005: 623) and this applies to most other quality of life outcomes as well.

Secondly, in recent years it has been increasingly recognized that the service systems in which local authority activities are embedded can only be successful if the communities to which they are delivered are well organised and prepared to make use of them. (This is also true of some central or regional government activities, but typically to a lesser extent). In this case it is not only users but other members of the community who are typically ‘co-producers’ of services, so that the success of the local authority depends on characteristics of the community itself. A clear example of community co-production is public safety, which is only really possible if a community is prepared to keep a careful watch on threatening behaviour within the neighbourhood, exercise social control over those responsible, and report to the police any information which might help in the identification and appropriate dealing with offenders (Governance International, 2008). Another important example is street cleaning – clean streets cannot be assured by good street cleaning services, only by widely held and strongly expressed social conventions, e.g. about the unacceptability of dropping litter and allowing dogs to foul pavements. The main challenge here is for politicians, who must learn that it is not ‘their’ organisations and ‘their’ policies which are central to the achievement of quality of life improvements in local areas – it is only through convincing individual citizens, often requiring partnership working with the associations of civil society, that really effective changes in quality of life will be possible in the long-term.

Finally, some services are actually mainly delivered by members of the community, with public agencies playing only complementary and supportive roles. This is particularly true of social care of the elderly (mainly delivered by the children, neighbours, friends or volunteers of the elderly) and of young people with disabilities (mainly delivered by their parents).

In the realm of co-production, the challenge for the public sector is twofold.

- First, public agencies have to become more expert in getting the current key players to pay attention to what the public sector can offer (particularly its knowledge base and its advice on ‘what works, where and when’) so that co-production genuinely makes best use of available public sector resources – this is essentially a *public sector marketing* task.
- Second, public agencies have to be prepared to play what is essentially an *enabling* role, sharing more of the ‘interesting work’ with those people in civil society (and sometimes in the private sector) who are able to deal with them, but currently lack the resources (or sometimes the legal right) to handle these cases. For example, the small proportion of social care in the UK which is paid for by the public sector (perhaps covering around 5% of all cared-for people) is largely devoted to helping people in highest need – e.g. people with advanced dementia, the worst mental health problems and the most severe disabilities. These clients are ‘interesting’ to the social care profession and there is little dispute that professionals often do a good job with these highest-need cases. However, this means that little attention is paid by the public sector to ensuring that the carers of the other 95% of cared-for people get the proper help they need on how to undertake the care. It also means that there has been an underdevelopment of mechanisms (now available in many other countries in Western Europe) by means of which these ‘highest-need cases’ can remain in the community, helped by family, neighbours and by each other, with support from public sector professionals.

Vigoda and Gilboa (2002) note that research has shown that collaboration has been successfully utilized in recent years in many local governance fields, such as homelessness, pollution control, ecology, and environmental protection ventures, and there is potential for greater advances. Moreover, there is a great deal of potential for further co-production. Quirk suggests that we can move beyond ‘simply involving service users more closely in service design and delivery (at its extreme, the greater use of internet channels for information services can lead to a form of self-service amongst some service users’) (2005: 623).

Of course, there must be concern about the limitations of co-production, where citizens or users are not the appropriate judges of need and where their involvement may not be sustainable. Amado (2002) warns that citizen-consumers may not have the knowledge, skills or perspectives that public servants have, and that they are likely to demonstrate poor understanding of the full range of choices and technologies to solve social problems.

Consequently, they may unintentionally push for services that are not beneficial for them and waste organizational resources, with frustrating effects upon public servants who can no longer manage consumers' needs effectively. Furthermore, co-production might turn users whose expectations have been raised and then dashed into cynical and distrustful citizens. The challenge is to ensure an ethical balance in which citizen-consumers can negotiate properly on their own behalf in co-producing public services, while politicians and public servants ensure that proper technical advice is available to all parties.

Co-governance innovations

In Table 4 we demonstrate that there are a number of different scenarios in which providers and users can interact in the service cycle – we focus here on the pre-production and production phases (as set out in Figure 2). While traditional professional service provision involves no external parties (top left cell), the other variants involve a significant degree of co-working, either with users or other members of the community, or both. The key point which emerges is that co-production is already common but in a number of different modes.

Table 4: Range of co-production relationships

	<i>Public sector as sole service 'pre-production' agent</i>	<i>Service user and/or community as co-agent in 'pre-production'</i>	<i>No professional input into service 'pre-production'</i>
<i>Professionals as sole service production agent</i>	1. Traditional professionally-led public services	2. Shared commissioning of traditionally provided professional services <i>(e.g. participatory budgeting in statutory services)</i>	3. (Not applicable)
<i>Professionals and users/communities as co-production agents of a service</i>	4. User co-delivery of professionally-commissioned services <i>(e.g. Sure Start)</i>	5. Full user/professional co-production <i>(e.g. many rural Leisure Trusts and Community Trusts)</i>	6. User/community co-delivery of services with professionals, largely planned or designed by community <i>(e.g. community resource centres, local sports leagues, local music groups)</i>
<i>Users/communities as sole service production agents</i>	7. User/community delivery of professionally-commissioned services <i>(e.g. 'Smart Houses' or community credit unions)</i>	8. User/community delivery of co-commissioned services <i>(e.g. community-run village halls, UK)</i>	9. Traditional self-organised community services

This typology gives us two scenarios where there is conceptually no co-production (where all commissioning and provision is undertaken by the public sector (cell number 1) and where all is undertaken in the community (cell number 9)). In the other seven scenarios, there is potentially scope for co-production but cell number 3 in Table 4 is empty – we have found no services where professionals have a providing role but no planning or commissioning role. In the rest of this section, we illustrate the remaining seven types of co-production. To show the range of possibilities, the table separates out the ‘pre-production’ phase from the production phase, illustrating the ways in which different types of co-production occur across these phases. In the sub-sections which follow, the enormous range of co-production initiatives within each of the cells of Table 4 is illustrated.

Shared commissioning of traditionally provided professional services

Here services are produced by professionals but some parts of the planning/design/commissioning stage closely involve users and community members. Examples include:

- Planning for real exercises in which communities are involved in interactive simulations of major changes to services and can suggest priorities (Taylor, 1995).
- User consultation committees in which users give feedback on a service and can influence proposals for change in the service over time (Birchall and Simmons, 2004).
- Parent governors of schools with power over strategy (Birchall and Simmons, 2004).
- Participatory budgeting, in which citizens and service users have a voice in budget allocations between services (PB Unit 2007; Governance International, 2006).
- Distributed commissioning – a particular form of participatory budgeting in which a public sector purchaser enables many smaller commissioning bodies, e.g. at neighbourhood level, to choose the public services to be provided (from the purchaser’s budget) according to their own priorities. This has long been a feature of ‘community chest’ schemes in UK rural governance. In the 1990s it spread to the neighbourhood renewal areas of cities with high concentrations of deprivation, reinforced by the funding arrangements for Community Empowerment Networks (NRU, 2003) and by EU funding schemes such as URBAN (Bache, 2001). This kind of ‘community kitty’ scheme was highlighted by Hazel Blears at the LGA Annual Conference in July 2005 as especially interesting for future experimentation. There are ten new participatory budgeting pilots in England (supplementing the existing 12 pilots) and CLG will be consulting on a strategy on this in 2008 with the aim of it being offered everywhere by 2012). Along similar but rather more ambitious lines, a group of the most innovative UK local authorities (designated ‘excellent’ by the Audit Commission) proposed setting up Local Public Service Boards, which would operate along ‘distributed commissioning’ lines (Innovation Forum, 2004). Also, a recent UK government

- document (ODPM, 2005) suggests Neighbourhood Improvement Districts, which could act as commissioning bodies.
- Neighbourhood Action Planning in Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council, based on the concept of Participatory Appraisal, which has been used extensively in developing countries as a mechanism for empowerment (INVOLVE, 2005). Neighbourhood Renewal Funding enabled the Local Strategic Partnership to offer neighbourhoods, communities and front-line workers small amounts of money to address their priorities for their area, and tackle it in a way that fitted with them. Each community can receive up to £25,000: £5,000 to help devise their plan and a further £20,000 to begin to put it into action. They can use their funding to buy expertise from public service staff who help to draw up or implement their plan. By January 2005, there were 66 neighbourhood action plans in operation across Bradford. The support team held a series of action learning events at which groups learned how to produce their action plans. Eight experienced community development workers were contracted and a further ten from disadvantaged areas were trained. A further phase extended the neighbourhood renewal process to areas beyond those eligible for NRF resources.

User co-delivery of professionally-commissioned services

Here professionals are solely responsible for the planning/design/commissioning of services but users and community members play some role in the production stages. Examples include:

- *Expert patients*, who are current or ex-users of the service (Mayo and Moore, 2002).
- *'Health-Promoting Hospitals'*, which attempt to empower the community for health-promoting management of lifestyle development and chronic illness (Pelikan, 2003).
- *Volunteers (including families, neighbours and friends)* in care services, who supplement the resources of professional staff (Forrest and Kearns, 1999).
- *Direct payments to users* in care services, who can then purchase the support of professional staff.
- *'Sure Start'*, in which existing mothers provide support for new mothers, with training and professional guidance.

Full user/professional co-production

Here there are shared roles in both the pre-production and production phases. Examples include:

- *Community trusts*, which work with professional service organizations in planning and designing relevant local services and take responsibility for delivering some of the services through volunteers (and often for mobilizing extra resources for the services through fundraising) (Taylor, 2003).
- *Community-based housing associations, tenant-run co-operatives and arms-length housing companies*, which plan and manage social housing in highly deprived areas, in collaboration with other public services.

- *Faith-based social services* (particularly common among religious communities which feel separated from the other communities in which they find themselves embedded), usually employing professionals but managed by community representatives, often using volunteers (Joshi and Moore, 2003).
- *Rural Action environmental improvement schemes*, funded by a national matched-funding scheme and delivered by local volunteers and community groups, but with technical support and professional expertise from national and local environmental agencies.
- *Neighbourhood watch schemes*, where local residents share both the responsibility for vigilance against crime and dealing with anti-social behaviour, in close co-operation with the police and local authority anti-social behaviour units.

User/community co-delivery of services with professionals, largely planned or designed by community

Here, users and community groups take responsibility for undertaking activities but call upon professional service expertise when needed. Examples include:

- Community resource centres, which provide a range of activities for local residents but call in professional staff for expertise not available locally (Thake, 1995).
- Local associations which specialize in leisure activities, such as music, sports, culture trips, etc. and which only call on professional help when organizing special events.

User/community delivery of professionally-commissioned services

Here, users and other community members take responsibility for delivering services planned, designed and commissioned by professionals. Examples include:

- ‘Smart houses’, where technological aids allow residents to carry out many functions for themselves, for which they would otherwise needed skilled support or home care.
- ‘Samaritans’, who are volunteers trained to deliver professionally-designed counselling services on an anonymous basis to people feeling stress or despair, including potential suicides.
- ‘*Villa Family*’ projects (Eastern France), in which host families look after a number of elderly people (often with disabilities) in purpose-built housing, having been trained to deliver standard home-care services.
- Community-based recycling programmes, e.g. in Denver (USA) where appointing ‘block leaders’ in neighbourhoods doubled recycling of waste (Kelly et al., 2002).
- Community credit unions, staffed by volunteers but operating according to the standard practices laid out in national codes of practice (Jones, 1999).
- Youth sports leagues, run by volunteers, according to nationally formulated codes.

User/community delivery of co-commissioned services

Here jointly planned, designed or commissioned services are produced solely by users or community members:

- *Rural multi-function service points or 'shops'*, staffed by community volunteers.
- *'Time Dollar' youth courts*, in which first offenders come before a jury of other young people and get sentences to work in the community, with the jurors also getting 'time dollars' for the work they put in (Walker, 2002) – part of a movement in both USA and UK (Cahn and Rowe, 1992) to allow 'time banking' on a reciprocal basis in the community).
- *Contract services*, undertaken by local community groups under contract to public agencies (e.g. maintenance of housing estates or cleaning of community centres).
- *Asset-based community development (ABCD)* – which in the UK include recent initiatives such as:
 - *Community take-over of community infrastructure*, such as village halls, leisure centres, recreation grounds, etc
 - *Community Assets Programme*, partly funded through a £30m Community Assets Fund (covered in the Quirk Review, 2007).

The major differences in the roles of professionals, users and communities as between the traditional model of public sector-led services and co-production models are highlighted in Table 5. The two key points which emerge are that very different configurations of the roles of politician, manager, professional, users and communities are involved when we move to co-production type models but that there are also major differences in co-production roles even between the different stages of the service cycle.

Table 5: Roles of professionals, users and communities in traditional and co-produced public services

TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SECTOR-LED SERVICES	<i>Politicians</i>	<i>Managers</i>	<i>Professionals</i>	<i>Users</i>	<i>Communities</i>
<i>Pre-production phase of service cycle</i>					
Planning	√	√			
Designing		√	√		
Commissioning	√	√	?		
Prioritising	√	√			
Budgeting	√	√	?		
Choosing the producer(s)	√	√			
<i>Production phase of service cycle</i>					
Managing		√	√		
Delivering			√		?
Monitoring	√	√	√		?
<i>Post-production phase of service cycle</i>					
Evaluating	?	√	?	√	?
Review and service improvement planning		√	√		

CO-PRODUCED PUBLIC SERVICES	<i>Politicians</i>	<i>Managers</i>	<i>Professionals</i>	<i>Users</i>	<i>Communities</i>
<i>Pre-production phase of service cycle</i>					
Planning	√	√	√	√	√
Designing		√	√	√	√
Commissioning	√	√	√	√	√
Prioritising	√			√	√
Budgeting	√			√	√
Choosing the producer(s)	√	√		√	√
<i>Production phase of service cycle</i>					
Managing		√	√	√	√
Delivering			√	√	√
Monitoring	√	√		√	√
<i>Post-production phase of service cycle</i>					
Evaluating	√	√	√	√	√
Review and service improvement planning	√	√	√	√	√

Benefits and limitations to co-production

There are a number of obvious benefits from user and community co-production. By widening practical choices available to users, co-production offers a way of passing some power from providers to users. Moreover, co-production may motivate effective mobilization of community resources not otherwise available to deal with public policy issues, e.g. word-of-mouth pressure to participate in immunization campaigns (Moore, 1995) and peer pressure to co-operate and comply with regulatory services (Alford, 2002). Mayo and Moore (2002: 6) suggest that in this way co-production allows social capital to be more thoroughly exploited.

Co-production means that both service users and professionals must develop mutual relationships in which both parties take risks – the service user has to trust the advice and support of the professional, but the professional also has to be prepared to trust the decisions and behaviours of service users, and the communities in which they live, rather than dictate to them. For example, education is redefined to give students a more central role in their own learning processes; patients are allowed to make key decisions about the lifestyles which they wish to adopt and the medical regimes appropriate to these (Hyde and Davies, 2004); and carers are prepared more carefully to provide support in ways which improve the quality of life of both service users and carers (Prestoff, 2004). This new division of risk brings benefits for both parties, but it also involves a willingness to surface the real risks involved in service provision, which can be politically inconvenient.

Co-production is not a panacea. Problems which can arise include differences in the values of co-producers, leading to conflicts (Taylor, 2003), unclear divisions of roles and incompatible incentives to different co-producers (Binswanger and Aiyar, 2003), free-riders (Mayo and Moore, 2002), ‘burn-out’ of exhausted users and community members (Birchall and Simmons, 2004), and undermining the capacity of a complicit ‘third sector’ to lobby for change (Ilcan and Basok, 2004). While mechanisms exist to deal with most of these problems, their potential to undermine benefits of co-production is clear.

However, the strongest concern about co-production arises in relation to its potential dilution of public accountability, with blurring of the boundaries between the roles of public, private and voluntary sectors. As Joshi and Moore (2003: 15) suggest:

‘Where co-production occurs, power, authority and control of resources are likely to be divided (not necessarily equally) between the state and groups of citizens in an interdependent and ambiguous fashion. ... [Although] sharp, clear boundaries between public and private spheres are indicators and components of effective, accountable polities ... some blurring of those boundaries may in some circumstances be the price of service delivery arrangements that actually work’.

Yet there is a paradox here, since it is often argued that the very act of participation in governance can clarify lines of accountability and responsibility (Mayo and Moore, 2002), although there is little empirical research to substantiate this claim. Moreover, as co-production almost always means redistribution of power between stakeholders, the very process of moving to greater co-production is necessarily highly political and calls into question the balance of representative democracy, participative democracy and professional expertise. Milton suggests however, that ‘community empowerment and participative democracy are an essential complement to direct representative democracy, not an alternative’ (in CLG 2007b: 4).

A second major concern, which we discussed earlier in relation to general consultation, is who participates in co-production and why should they have to do so? There is much evidence which suggests that command over community resources and social capital is disproportionately in the hands of better-off members of the community (Taylor, 2003). Nevertheless, a major survey in the UK by Birchall and Simmons (2004: 2) suggests that

‘in contrast to more general civic participation, ... public service participation engages the less well off in society’. Goetz and Gaventa (2001) also conclude that socially excluded groups can be effective as long as they use the media or other public forums, combine protest with constructive engagement and have broad membership. The participatory budgeting initiative in Porto Alegre case study (Bovaird, 2007) provides an example of where the less well off have been effectively engaged.

Should citizens have to become co-producers? Mulgan (1991: 45) remarks: ‘It is hardly progressive to distribute responsibilities to the powerless’ and Taylor (2003: 165) points out: ‘Excluded communities should not have to ‘participate’ in order to have the same claim on service quality and provision as other members of society have’. Goetz and Gaventa (2001) point out that communities do not always want to run their own services and Alford (1998) highlights ‘clients’ (e.g. prisoners and taxpayers) whose compliance with regulatory bodies is essential to their functioning but who largely think they receive ‘bads’ rather than ‘goods’ in return. This emphasises the need to explore the costs as well as the benefits of co-production for clients and communities. Nevertheless, Joshi and Moore (2003) insist that co-production may offer the only realistic hope of improved quality of life in many poor communities around the world.

There is some concern in the UK that there is not the demand from the public for engaging in co-production initiatives. Recent research conducted by the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society (2006) has found that only a third of people agree that ‘when people like me get involved in politics, they really change the way the country is run’ and the number of people feeling this way has been declining in recent years (from 37% in 2003). If the public feel that involvement does not lead to change, it is not surprising to find that only 13% of people would be willing to take part in a governmental or Parliamentary consultation (Hansard Society, 2006: 28) (although this is many more than those are currently involved in such activities). (The survey did not ask the public about potential involvement at the local level but it is possible that even fewer people would be willing to get involved here, as the experience of frustrated local councillors and officers shows – or it may be that citizens see local issues as more amenable to successful intervention). The research concludes that ‘most people have limited enthusiasm for energy-intensive political action, preferring ‘passive action’ if they prefer any action at all’ (2006: 28) but co-production demands action. As responses to political engagement vary according to social class, ethnicity and age, there needs to be some thought given to the type of mechanism used – and, clearly, the wishes of those who want to remain passive should be respected, as long as they are informed about the likely consequences.

Finally, there is evidence of initial professional resistance to co-production as it does not represent conventional ways of working. Many professional groups assume that gains in status by clients as ‘co-producers’ might be at their expense (Crawford et al., 2004) and their resistance can be exacerbated by low skills in working with users and communities (Schachter and Aliaga, 2003). ‘Provider-centric’ behaviour often persists, even alongside a rhetoric of ‘user orientation’. Interestingly, however, professional groups are often eventually prepared to work in partnership with other professions, other sectors and with

local communities - both organised groups and with individuals (e.g. in helping them with direct payments, personal and individual budgets) - accepting that their expertise is only one input into decision-making (Bovaird, 2007) – although this may be due to a competitive environment, in which alternative sources of expertise might otherwise have been sought. It is also necessary to recognise that some professionals resist co-production because they recognise its limitations and inappropriateness in certain cases, as indicated above.

Conclusion: pointers to the way forward in public engagement and co-production

The analysis in this paper suggests a number of factors which need to be taken into account at different levels of government, if public engagement and co-production are to contribute more effectively to the improvement of local governance in the future:

- Since central government must continue to play a role through ‘solving problems that local units cannot address by themselves’ (Fung and Wright, 2001:22), it must identify and promote appropriate mechanisms for public engagement and co-production, not simply devolve these processes to local public organisations. This is not, however, an excuse for imposing co-production mechanisms on interactions which are mainly local in nature.
- The government (and a whole range of other public organisations) can provide examples of innovation which councils could apply in their area. There are many ways in which this learning can be transferred but the experience of the Beacon Scheme is that knowledge (especially tacit knowledge) is more effectively transferred when people are able to see the initiative first-hand rather than rely upon a presentation or document to take away and read – ‘seeing is believing’.
- Old institutions need to be transformed into ‘permanently mobilized deliberative-democratic forms’ (Fung and Wright, 2001, 23) so that participants don’t need to ‘fight the power’ but can exercise some of the power granted to them, putting their effort into collaborative thinking and implementation, rather than conflict.
- Practitioners need to consider more seriously whether they have greatly underestimated the role which users and citizens can play in decision-making. Where this is the case, a new compact between the professions and their service users needs to be fashioned.
- It is important to ‘work both sides of the equation’ simultaneously, focusing both on community empowerment and supporting the capacity of local officials and civil servants to understand, and respond to that empowerment (Gaventa 2004: 2). Both service users and providers need to develop new skills to make co-production work.

- Care needs to be taken that public expectations are not raised to levels which cannot be met by a local authority and its partners.
- There needs to be a reconfiguration of the role of elected members in contexts where the public are more empowered. Their role as democratic representatives needs to be enhanced but they must also show how they are taking into account the wishes of citizens, as expressed in direct and deliberative democratic mechanisms, and that they are managing the expectations of service users, professionals and managers to allow more effective approaches to co-production to evolve.
- There needs to be a level playing field for organizations (such as companies limited by guarantee, public limited companies, trusts and charities) competing to provide local services. In the charity sector, for example, Beresford suggests that, ‘All the evidence highlights that these user-controlled organisations are insecure, under-resourced and grossly under-funded’ (*Guardian* 15/2/6). The diversity of organizations in the voluntary sector needs to be recognized as small service user organizations cannot compete to deliver public services with charities which are long-established and well-resourced. Around 20,000 charities have an annual income of more than £100,000 and 372 have an income more than £10m (Tennant, 2004). These better-resourced organizations should be expected to demonstrate at least an equal, if not greater, degree of user and community influence over their decisions.
- Money matters. Citizens are more likely to get involved in various participative mechanisms if there is an incentive and they can see a benefit to themselves from their contribution. This incentive may sometimes consist of a personal payment e.g. paying a fee to someone to attend or paying traveling expenses. As participation takes time and resources to be involved, some personal recompense can help to remove a barrier of participation. Secondly, and probably more importantly, citizens are more likely to get involved if their participation can make a difference and additional resources can help to make this happen. There also needs to be a clear understanding that participative mechanisms may be costly and someone needs to pay for them – and whether this is the government (central or local) or the participants themselves, it is the public which ultimately must judge that the spend provides value for money. Part of the calculation must be a realization that the resources which the public contribute in the co-production process also have real (and often major) value. Therefore, the ‘costs’ to the public purse arising from participation must be offset appropriately by the value of the user and community resources mobilized in the exercise.

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