

# Briefing: Citizen engagement and public services consultation

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This briefing sheet is a summary of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's consultation document *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*, published on 31 January 2005 as part of the Urban Summit.

## 1. COMMENTARY

*Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*<sup>1</sup> proposes a number of policies that were advocated in two Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE)/Urban Design Alliance (UDAL)-led reports, *Designing Streets for People*<sup>2</sup> and *Returning Roads to Residents*.<sup>3</sup>

The reports pointed to the decline in local involvement, yet stressed that the street was the basic building block of democracy. Recommendations included:

- (a) empowerment of citizens in their local environment,
- (b) street partnerships,
- (c) street agreements and quality street contracts, and
- (d) funding arrangements that would enable people to invest in the improvement of their local environment.

The proposals advanced in this paper mirror those proposals at the neighbourhood level, with representative bodies.

A variation of the model was trialled in partnership with BBC London and the volunteering charity TimeBank in a London-wide campaign called 'Changing streets' in 2001.<sup>4</sup> It used a simplified version of the UDAL Placecheck Model.

There should be no illusion that neighbourhood-level democracy is challenging. Overcoming apathy, cynicism or shyness is never easy, and there can be major problems at neighbourhood level: the most commonly cited are dogs, children, competition for parking spaces, boundary disputes and neighbours themselves. There is a growing body of people, however, who believe that neighbourhoods are key to true sustainability and wellbeing. For engineers and other professionals involved in the built environment, it is an agenda that they must master.

## 2. BACKGROUND POLICY

See *Developing a 10 year vision for local government*,<sup>5</sup> published July 2004, and the UK Government's 15–20 year national strategy for neighbourhood renewal.<sup>6</sup>

## 3. CHAPTER 1

The first chapter argues the case for neighbourhood involvement.

The report describes two central challenges.

- (a) To secure sustainable improvements in our public services.
- (b) To re-engage citizens with the institutions of government.

More than half of people (55%) say that they would be interested in being more involved in the decisions made by their local council, however only 2% are actively involved. Turnouts at local elections have been falling and now stand at around 35%, compared with 60% at the 2001 general election.

Respondents to surveys have said that the services in which they would most like to be more involved are tackling crime (41%), education (33%) and traffic (31%). The paper states that there are intrinsic benefits from greater participation. Voluntary activity in the community is associated with better health, lower crime, improved educational performance and greater life satisfaction

In particular people are interested in specific, often local, and very practical issues—they feel strongly about the places where they live, work and play. They are especially interested in things that are close to home, for example, how safe their streets are, how clean the environment is, whether they can physically access local services, how good local schools are, and what opportunities there are for young people.

## 4. CHAPTER 2

The UK Government intends to establish a national framework for neighbourhood arrangements, setting out principles and powers. The intention is to create a 'neighbourhood charter' that would state what local people should expect in their neighbourhood from government, local government and other service providers. The consultation provides a possible example of a charter (see Fig. 1).

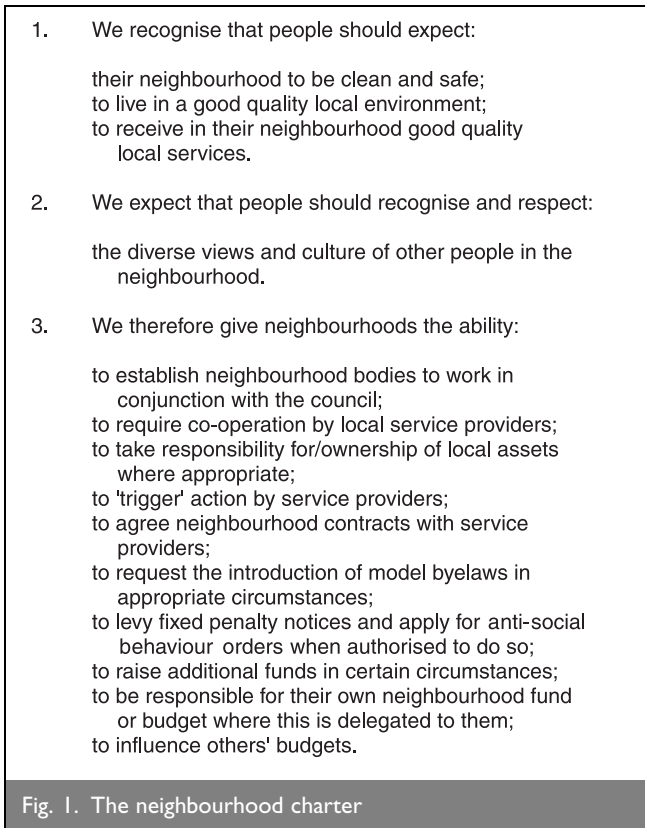


Fig. 1. The neighbourhood charter

**4.1. Five key principles for neighbourhood arrangements (paras 31–59)**

There are five guiding principles which must be worked towards when establishing arrangements for neighbourhood engagement (see also Fig. 2).

- (a) *Responsive to neighbourhood needs.* All councils, in partnership with other service providers, should provide opportunities and support for neighbourhood engagement through appropriate arrangements so that they can respond to the needs and priorities of neighbourhood communities.
- (b) *Purposeful.* Neighbourhood arrangements must be capable of making a real difference to the everyday lives of citizens.
- (c) *Tailored.* The nature of neighbourhood arrangements must be appropriate to local circumstances, be flexible to changing circumstances over time and be responsive to

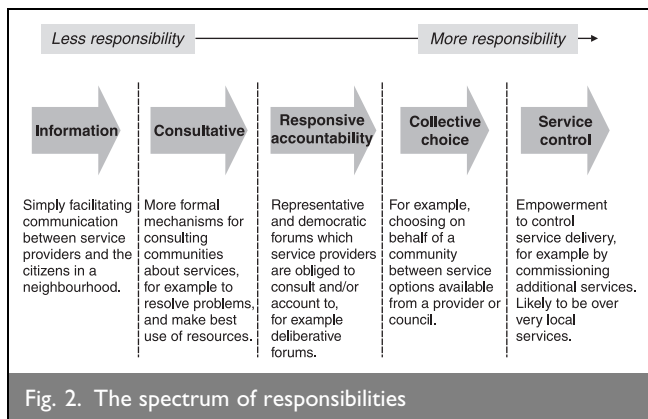


Fig. 2. The spectrum of responsibilities

the needs and diversity of the community and its organisations.

- (d) *Democratic.* Neighbourhood arrangements must be consistent with local representative democracy, which gives legitimacy to governmental institutions and places elected councillors as the leading advocates for their communities, and with the requirements of local democratic accountability.
- (e) *Efficient and proportionate.* Neighbourhood arrangements must be balanced with the demands of efficiency and proportionality.

**4.2. Form of neighbourhood bodies**

These could range from informal assemblies to formally constituted, accountable bodies responsible for the delivery of some services.

**4.3. Definition of a neighbourhood**

Neighbourhoods will be self-defined by the people who live in them; often a ward, but could also be a street or a village, or several wards.

**4.4. Neighbourhood contract (para. 82)**

These would be contracts between the neighbourhood body and the local authority or service provider to agree minimum standards of service provision across a wide range of services to reflect local priorities.

**4.5. Model byelaws (para. 85)**

A model set of byelaws might be an effective way of indicating to a community expected standards of behaviour. For example, in such a model, it could be established that parking on verges or skateboarding on the street were not acceptable types of behaviour in a particular neighbourhood.

**4.6. Fixed penalty notices and anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) (paras 87–91)**

Some neighbourhood bodies could to be empowered and authorised to levy fixed penalty notices and apply for ASBOs (subject to checks and safeguards).

**4.7. Extending neighbourhood management (para. 92)**

Government would like to extend the neighbourhood manager system that offers single points of contact for residents, agencies and businesses.

**5. CHAPTER 3: WHEN AND HOW PEOPLE IN NEIGHBOURHOODS CAN ACT**

Issues that will need to be resolved include:

- (a) establishing neighbourhood arrangements
- (b) standards for neighbourhood bodies
- (c) parishes and neighbourhood arrangements
- (d) accountability of neighbourhood arrangements
- (e) working with voluntary and community organisations
- (f) triggers for neighbourhood action
- (g) formation of neighbourhood contracts

- (h) use of model byelaws
- (i) levying fixed penalty notices and applying for anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs)
- (j) extending neighbourhood management.

## 6. CHAPTER 4: RESOURCES AND CAPACITY FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD ARRANGEMENTS

*Resources:* ensuring resources are available to enable neighbourhood arrangements to achieve the aims for which they have been set up.

*Capacity of people to engage:* this includes the capacity both of people in neighbourhoods and the officials working for local service providers to participate in neighbourhood arrangements and, most importantly, the capacity of the ward councillors to undertake their pivotal role in all neighbourhood action.

### 6.1. Costs of neighbourhood arrangement (paras 93–96)

It will be up to local authorities to fund the arrangements, although Government may support particular neighbourhood arrangements through the new burden procedure agreed with the Local Government Association. The Government has commissioned a review of local government funding by Sir Michael Lyons which will report in 2005.<sup>6</sup>

### 6.2. Resources for the neighbourhood (para. 109)

*Modest:* neighbourhood is consulted by service providers but has no funds.

*Ambitious:* neighbourhood with own funds and resources with own initiatives and spending programme.

6.2.1. *Direct government funding.* For example, disadvantaged areas.

6.2.2. *Delegated budgets.* Local authority establishes fund/budget for each neighbourhood body for it to spend on the neighbourhood as it sees fit.

6.2.3. *Neighbourhood improvement districts (NIDS).* A NID could raise additional revenue through the council tax in a particular area (as with a parish precept). The council would arrange for the local community to vote on a proposal for a NID and its levy. Issues include:

- (a) guaranteeing true additionality and avoiding double taxation
- (b) preventing inequality of treatment of different areas within the authority
- (c) stopping use of funds on inadvisable projects or services.

The Government would be keen to work with councils to pilot the NID concept in order to seek resolution on these issues.

### 6.3. Neighbourhoods without own resources (paras 111–113)

Councils or other service providers may decide to develop more formal response mechanisms to address priorities

being expressed by neighbourhood level arrangements or seek to involve neighbourhoods in procurement decisions. The Government would be keen to encourage participatory budgeting and work with other councils to roll out further pilots.

### 6.4. Neighbourhood ownership (of assets/facilities)

This model might be considered for community facilities—giving responsibility to the people who have most use of the facilities.

A community right to buy scheme could be developed, perhaps drawing on ideas and experience from the Scottish Executive's Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003<sup>7</sup> which provided a community right to buy for rural communities in Scotland.

### 6.5. Capacity of people to engage

People need to have access to the necessary knowledge and information in order to get involved and influence decisions. By March 2006 the Neighbourhoods Statistics Service will provide a range of up-to-date statistics which will allow communities to find out more information about their local area. These statistics will, for example, be on health, crime, education and housing.

Capacity to engage also means ensuring that people have access to the training and practical support that they need to engage effectively.

## 7. CHAPTER 5: NEIGHBOURHOODS—THE FUTURE

This is a summary chapter (see also Fig. 3). Comments are invited particularly on the following.

- (a) A national framework statement.
- (b) The principles for neighbourhood arrangements.
- (c) How and when people in neighbourhoods can act.
- (d) The neighbourhoods charter.
- (e) The menu of options.

#### Neighbourhood engagement

Opinion surveys and customer panels.  
Council meetings with neighbourhoods.  
Parish arrangements.  
Deliberative forums.  
Dialogue with community organisations.

#### Neighbourhood action

Rights to establish neighbourhood bodies.  
Appointment of neighbourhood managers.  
Access to information on the performance of a council/other service provider.  
Rights to make formal complaints about performance.  
Neighbourhood contracts and service guarantees.  
Community service agreement.  
Triggers for action.  
Levying fixed-penalty notices and applying for anti-social behaviour orders.  
Using model byelaws.

#### Funding and resources

Delegated budgets.  
Neighbourhood improvement districts.  
Community ownership.

Fig. 3. All illustrative menu of options for neighbourhood arrangements

## 8. APPENDICES

*Appendix A.* The role of users in public services.

*Appendix B.* Neighbourhood activities today—a gazetteer of neighbourhood initiatives up and down the country.

*Appendix C.* Lessons learnt from past initiatives.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be taking this debate forward through a series of national and regional seminars, workshops and meetings with local government and representatives of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors over the coming months.

More details can be found at [www.odpm.gov.uk/localvision](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/localvision).

## REFERENCES

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