



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Vibrant Local Leadership



In partnership
with local government

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ODPM is currently leading the development of a vision of what local government across England should look like in ten years' time. An introductory document 'The Future of Local Government – Developing a 10 Year Vision' was published in July 2004. The present document forms part of a series of documents which are being published to inform the overall vision and the specific issues to be considered within it.

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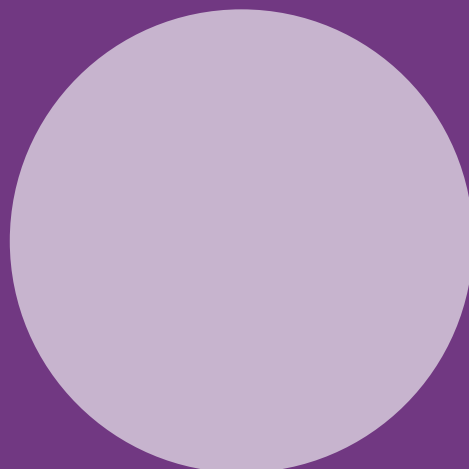
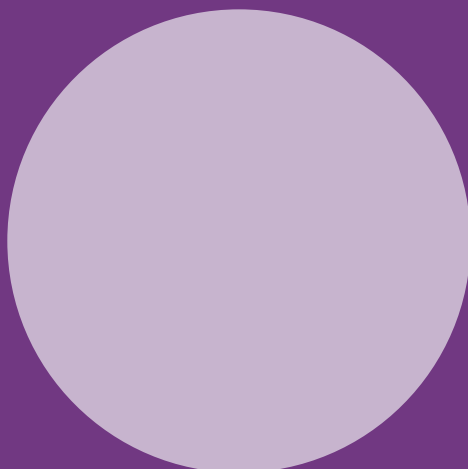
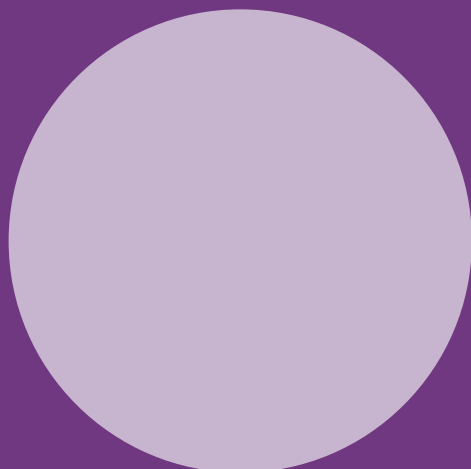
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Foreword

I am delighted to welcome this document on leadership in local communities, which is being published alongside ODPM's 5 year plan, 'People, Places and Prosperity'. It is one of a number of documents being published by ODPM in early 2005 as part of the Local Government Strategy, following the publication of the initial 'local:vision' document in July 2004.

Effective local leadership is at the heart of our vision for sustainable communities. We want to create cleaner, safer and greener places where people want to live, work and relax. Achieving that vision depends on local people working together.

Many more people are now sharing in real decision making in New Deal for Communities areas, Sure Start, tenant participation, Local Strategic Partnerships – these are nurseries for democratic participation. In this publication, we consider the challenges that local leaders are likely to face over the next ten years and beyond. We consider the roles that need to be played, the people who might play them and how they can be recruited, developed and retained.

In particular, we want to encourage strong, self-confident local government which leads communities and enables quality services. Councils have unique potential to bring people together and encourage them to work in partnership. That is why we place such importance upon councillors and officers working with others who have leadership roles in communities.

We welcome views on the issues that this document raises. Our aim, with your help, is for communities to be well led everywhere. We hope that the ideas and initiatives in this document will be an important part of realising that ambition.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Prescott', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon John Prescott MP
Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State

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Chapter 1 – Local leadership: what is it and why does it matter?

1. People want their locality to be one where they have a high quality of life and good life chances. They want a pleasant, safe, clean and green environment with low levels of crime, no litter or graffiti. They want a strong local economy with a wide range of opportunities for employment, fair access to services and equal opportunities for lifelong learning. People want to live in socially cohesive communities where the vulnerable are protected, without discrimination, where all individuals are respected and where people have a sense of pride and care about the place in which they live.

2. The Government's vision of a flourishing, fair society based upon opportunity for everyone depends upon creating sustainable communities¹ of this type. Local councils are central to realising this vision through the local leadership they provide in:

- enabling and empowering local people and acting as their advocate;
- championing the area; leading the formulation of community strategies, setting out the vision for the local community in partnership with other agencies;
- challenging and scrutinising public services; providing a challenge to the performance of all of the delivery agencies in a locality – including the council itself;
- decision making; setting priorities for the area and the council and being accountable for the choices made;
- shaping services around the needs of the citizen; marshalling resources to best meet the needs of individuals and communities by influencing the mix of services that are brought together from a range of delivery partners.

3. Effective local leadership enables a locality to identify its needs and a route map of how to move forward. Continual improvement requires strong and effective leadership. It is about bringing other stakeholders together to help deliver this vision and

agreed outcomes. This will be increasingly critical for the future. The range of issues being addressed – from public health to supporting an ageing population – all demonstrate the need for a cross sector approach. In such a complex environment, it is vital that councils both provide a focal point for the development of a collective vision for the future of an area that responds to local people's priorities and bring together public agencies and key stakeholders to achieve it.

4. Councils have a unique potential to do this, identifying and pioneering ways of meeting the needs of their communities which is rooted less in the services that they provide and more in three essential characteristics:

- a) **democratic accountability.** Local government is the only organisation that represents all the people living in its area. This is not a mandate to ride roughshod over others but it provides legitimacy to be the voice for the area;
- b) **a sense of place.** Local government owes its existence to the geographical area whose interests it represents and for whose well being it is responsible; and hence,
- c) **an ability to bring together the full range of bodies** that contribute to the life of that area to best meet the needs and aspirations of the communities that live and work within it.

5. There are different levels where effective local leadership must make a difference:

- across the whole of a council's area; and,
- more locally, at the level of a smaller, individual community or a small group of communities at the neighbourhood level.

6. Given the critical leadership role of councils, it follows that those charged with providing that leadership – elected councillors and council officers – are absolutely vital to the quality of life enjoyed by our citizens. Some councils are already seen as major players within their areas – and some local politicians are seen as key to the area's improvement and development. Elsewhere, however, councils lack the

¹ Defined in ODPM's five-year plan 2005 'Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity.'

confidence of citizens and the trust of local and national partners, and the role of councillors is not always clear to those who elect them. In moving towards a vision of strong, self confident councils these are challenges that need to be met.

The story so far

7. Over the last seven years the Government has sought to promote the need for effective local leadership. At the heart of that leadership role are councils that are in touch with local people and committed to getting the best for them. The Government has provided an administrative framework that gives councils opportunities to modernise, facilitated through a significant programme of legislative and institutional reform supported by direct investment in improvement.

8. The Government has emphasised the importance of councils as strong and effective community leaders – the democratically accountable bodies with a mandate to harness the contributions of partners and communities themselves to tackle the most challenging problems. This emphasis has been reflected in a number of developments. The introduction of Local Strategic Partnerships has been a step towards providing a vehicle through which councils can exercise that community leadership role – bringing bodies together behind a strategic direction for a locality. The role was highlighted further by the findings of Sir John Egan's review in 2004: 'Skills for Sustainable Communities'.

9. New political structures have been an important part of the modernisation process. They were needed to create a clear and identifiable focus for local leadership and at the same time enable councils to become more responsive to the diverse needs of the increasingly mixed communities that they serve.

10. The introduction of executive decision making and a separate scrutiny function has been helpful in establishing clear and visible leadership, as well as providing a means of holding that leadership more effectively to account. Evidence suggests that these arrangements have worked best where both elements are strong with a clear separation of the two².

11. The reforms have been underpinned by councils establishing new constitutions, setting out how they are governed, and the establishment of a new ethical framework for local politicians. A new ethical framework for local government officers will be introduced in 2005.

12. Institutional arrangements can, however, only achieve so much. People drive any organisation. Those people in positions of leadership can make a particular difference. There is a continuing need to attract, recruit, retain and develop a larger pool of diverse and talented people to lead and represent all sections of the community including minority and excluded groups. Accordingly, the Government has invested in a range of capacity building initiatives across local government. It has been a key sponsor in the establishment of the recently launched Local Government Leadership Centre (LGLC), with the explicit aim of developing world class leadership in local government.

13. In many councils this agenda has been embraced and is working well. The challenge is to enable all councils to provide effective leadership of this kind.

A longer-term vision for the future

14. We have some good foundations to build on. We have a sense of what leadership is and why it is important. We need, however, to do more than this. As part of the development of a strategy for the future of local government, we need to consider what local leadership might look like in ten years' time and consider the implications of that for central government, local government, political parties and others.

15. The Government's starting proposition is that the model by which local public services are controlled and influenced by elected local people, working in partnership with professional managers and other bodies to serve the interests of the whole community, should remain at the heart of our vision of local leadership.

² ODPM 2004 'Operating the new council constitutions in English local authorities: A process evaluation', the Evaluating Local Governance Team at University of Manchester as part of the New Council Constitutions research element of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda evaluation for ODPM.

16. That model needs, however, to be made fit for purpose in a changing world that our future vision of local government seeks to anticipate. It will, therefore, need to face up to many challenges. Whilst we cannot identify them all now, we do know about:

- the difficulty in sustaining a supply of able and representative people willing to put themselves forward as local councillors;
- the importance of having a group of elected representatives whose profile more closely reflects the communities being served;
- the critical importance of the public regarding their local councillor or councillors as people that represent them to the authority and other service providers, rather than as people representing the council to them;
- developing the effectiveness of the community leadership role of councils in relation to the range of local services that contribute to the well being of an area and strengthening the relationships between local partners;
- developing clearer and more visible local leadership that the public can more readily identify and understand;
- ensuring that local government attracts future talent at officer level that can combine service and managerial excellence and the ability to provide clear organisational leadership.

The Government's role

17. In addressing these challenges the strategy needs to be developed and implemented in partnership between Government, local government and others. Government cannot prescribe effective local leadership, nor would it want to. It does, however, have a clear role in establishing a direction of travel and, more specifically, in:

- creating the right statutory framework for effective local leadership;

- helping stimulate the 'supply side' and remove some of the barriers that deter people from becoming local leaders;
- supporting the work that needs to be done to equip the local leaders of the future with the skills and experiences that they require to deliver strong, confident local councils at the heart of building sustainable communities.

Vibrant Local Leadership – this document

18. This document aims to begin that process. Taken together with the Local Government Association's publication: 'Stronger Political Leadership, Better Local Government', (2005) it starts the process of developing that shared strategy. Clearly, there is a close relationship between the issues developed here and in the document on 'Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter', and many of the ideas are reflected in the second part of the ODPM's five year plan: 'Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity.'

Chapter 2 – The Leadership roles of councils and councillors

19. Local government has, historically, been a pioneer of important social change. It has driven major improvements in public health, town planning, housing and education. It has continually adapted and developed services to meet the diverse needs of the places it serves. It has represented and spoken up for different groups. The Government believes that councils need to have similar levels of ambition for the future, as the leader of their localities and a champion of local people.

Councils as leaders of the locality as a whole

20. In the previous chapter we recognised the vital role that councils should play in developing a collective vision for their area and bringing partners together to achieve it. Critically, councils will be pivotal in championing their area, challenging and scrutinising public services and local decision making, as well as shaping services around the needs of citizens and users.

21. Undertaking these roles effectively is likely to require an increasingly strong focus for dealing with cross-cutting issues at local level for which the main vehicle is Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP). LSPs have developed a number of defining characteristics which can be found in a variety of different forms and which have evolved to suit the needs of an area:

- strategic co-ordinating bodies which pull together at a local level the different parts of the public sector with the business, voluntary and community sectors;
- not themselves delivery vehicles and should not become such; although they increasingly oversee delivery of cross cutting objectives by external bodies and delivery partnerships;
- crucial to bringing together the different delivery agencies (councils, police, primary care trust, Jobcentre Plus, and voluntary or community sector) and partnerships (Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Youth Offending Team, New Deal for Communities etc) and their separate delivery plans and targets within the framework of the Community Strategy, and in some cases the Local

Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, as an overarching document which reflects local circumstances and needs;

- encouraged, where possible, to go beyond this and find ways of aligning and pooling budgets, reducing bureaucratic barriers and rationalising partnerships, to secure more effective delivery on the ground;
- expected to promote equal opportunity for local citizens in relation to access to services;
- expected, in doing this, to engage the community as fully as possible to achieve local involvement, ownership and support for the policies being pursued;
- expected to perform a local or horizontal challenge role to all delivery agencies, including the local authority itself, if they do not live up to the commitments they have made in the community strategy or local neighbourhood renewal strategy.

22. The Government sees councils at the heart of more tailored relationships between Government and localities about priorities – local and national – and performance against those priorities, for example children's trusts which are building on and learning from established arrangements.

23. Community Strategies, drawn up by local authorities in consultation with LSPs, are the key strategic document setting out the vision for a local area. The Egan Review of Skills for Sustainable Communities recommended that these strategies should describe how sustainable communities would be created and maintained and should, therefore, explicitly become Sustainable Community Strategies. As such they would need to set out how sustainable communities would be developed. Creating a genuinely sustainable community requires distinct local leadership which provides a long-term view, integrates social, economic and environmental priorities, such as addressing the implications of an ageing population, and links local activities to wider regional or even international needs.

24. We agree that this would be a useful development of Community Strategies and we will consider with our partners, revisions to the existing

guidance about Community Strategies and the development of toolkits and other materials to support local authorities and LSPs when reviewing and preparing their Sustainable Community Strategies.

25. Local Area Agreements (LAAs) can be an important catalyst for this type of leadership role, bringing partners together to identify an increasingly common set of outcomes, and to develop more transparent, accessible and real time performance data that relates to those common, locality wide outcomes. This potentially offers a means of sharper accountability between local partners, between local partners together and national ones, as well as, critically, to users and the public more generally.

26. It also promotes the development of the community planning process as the vehicle for expressing the long term vision for the area and of the LSP as the body which brings the partners together. LAAs will lead to a strengthening of the arrangements for overseeing delivery of the agreement and the greater alignment of performance arrangements between partners, including Government. Over time, LAAs may become central to the development of community leadership. This may stimulate the development of working arrangements between partners (Box A).

Box A: The development of partnership working

LAAs might stimulate the further development of working arrangements between partners within a locality:

- the development of arrangements around local strategic partnerships, picking up on approaches that are already being tested in some areas to make them a more prominent part of local governance and to contribute to a shift in the relationship with Government more widely. Some areas are, for example, experimenting with LSP Executive Boards, or more formalised Local Public Service Boards;
- the development of models e.g. children's trusts, that bring partners into more formalised arrangements for the commissioning, delivery and performance management of services.

27. As work undertaken by the Innovation Forum has identified, this could have significant implications for leadership roles and accountability, in particular if there is stronger collective leadership in the locality to:

- a) run the LAA process to establish and then deliver on a set of localised targets linked to national and local priorities within the wider framework of the local community strategy;
- b) rationalise existing governance arrangements so decision making is streamlined and increasingly visible and accountable to local people;
- c) oversee the totality of public expenditure in the locality, and to manage relevant budget streams through joint planning and resource allocation, for the better achievement of shared priorities and more efficient service procurement;
- d) exercise a leadership and governing role, identifying and articulating the needs and aspirations of local people, reconciling competing interests, steering collective partnership capacity, harnessing community support for an agreed set of goals and monitoring the impact of proposed and existing policies and functions in relation to equality and diversity;
- e) promote the transformational change needed if new forms of public service delivery are to become embedded across many separate workforces, and public attitudes changed towards the value and importance of good government at local level.

28. Work on other aspects of the strategy will take forward these issues which are central to the long term role for councils and have significant implications for the potential development of leadership of the locality as a whole and for accountability; in particular:

- the development of the relationship vertically with Government, increasingly built on a negotiated agreement for the locality, but within a more devolved and flexible framework;

- the strengthening of horizontal relationships between partners who are more closely tied to one another, with a greater collective view of their priorities;
- the development of greater accountability to the public, derived from an enhanced profile, better and more accessible information and increased mutual scrutiny by partners;
- maintaining and enhancing the involvement of the private and voluntary sector, as well as community representatives.

29. The best councils have been highly effective in beginning to develop this type of leadership role and have leaders – political and managerial – able to undertake it and to earn the trust and support of local communities and wider partners. Looking ahead, it means that those councillors and officers who are going to be most directly involved in leading the locality as a whole will need to be of a calibre that commands confidence and respect among partners and diverse sections of the community. They will need to be capable of listening, negotiating, persuading, influencing and brokering every bit as much as they will need to be capable of controlling and directing. They will need to understand how they can promote fairer access to services. They will need to be open to and hungry for ongoing personal development in this role, both individually and collectively, with each other and with other local partners.

Councils enabling councillors to represent and champion a range of communities within their area

30. The accompanying document: 'Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter' discusses the major challenges of securing sustainable improvements in public services and civil renewal, in particular through re-engagement of citizens with the institutions of government. Citizen engagement is critical to confronting both challenges and, in particular, the development of activities at a neighbourhood level, harnessing people's interest in those areas that make a difference to their everyday lives. The Government wishes to see greater opportunity everywhere for people to be able to influence what happens in their area when they need to do so.

31. One of the key principles advanced for greater neighbourhood engagement is that neighbourhood arrangements must be consistent with a local representative democracy that gives legitimacy to governmental institutions and places elected councillors as the leading advocates for their communities.

32. The scale and nature of those communities will vary. People's perception of their neighbourhood will depend upon whether they live in an urban, suburban or rural area. For some issues, a single street or a village may be the right level, or it may be a larger geographical area. The accompanying document makes it clear, however, that for the purposes of many neighbourhood arrangements the ward will be seen as the key unit of area and councillors in that ward will have a pivotal role in relation to neighbourhood arrangements in that area. This is not, however, to define the ward as the neighbourhood. In some cases a ward might be the neighbourhood, in others the neighbourhood could be either part of a ward or an area consisting of several wards such as a parish.

33. There are many examples of outstanding elected individuals who have become clearly identified and recognised as leaders in their local community, respected for their ability to advance local causes and make a difference for the communities that make up their ward or electoral division. It is also the case, however, that this individual community leadership role of councillors in their localities has often been undervalued.

34. Some have argued that the Government has not given sufficient weight to the role of representative councillors in the running of public services in their patch. Equally, however, it is widely acknowledged that traditional council structures have tended to encourage councillors to see their role as facing in to the council rather than facing out to the community and that induction and support networks for councillors do not focus sufficiently upon their community role.

35. The Local Government Act 2000 was, in part, an attempt to give greater emphasis to the community role of councillors, particularly those not serving as part of the executive decision making body. The evidence, however, is that this explicit community advocacy role among councillors remains relatively under-developed³.

³ See footnote 2.

36. Whatever the causes, the Government believes that the failure to maximise the potential of locally elected representatives to act in a leadership role as advocates and champions of local communities is a major obstacle to our ambitions for civil renewal and improved public services.

37. Research suggests that the public want their councillors to play this role – listening to local concerns and acting as their community advocates, with the council, with other public service providers and with others. Despite that, many people, however unfairly, currently think that councillors are ‘out of touch’ and put party politics before the needs of citizens⁴. Some minority groups, in particular, feel that they are neither consulted nor listened to. Reversing that trend and really increasing the level of engagement with local communities is a vital task for councillors. That is a challenge for individuals, for those selecting them as candidates where relevant, for councils in the way that they support them and for Government in terms of creating an overall framework that allows councillors to be seen to be playing a clear leadership role in local communities.

38. This role is not the only one that local councillors of this type will play – they will also be scrutineers, contributors to policy and making regulatory and quasi-judicial decisions. For example, local councillors through their work on planning committees which overlook the development control and plan making process should play the role of promoting the sustainable development of their communities. The Government believes, however, that this leadership role within individual areas should be central to what every non-executive councillor does. Giving councillors a clear stake in what happens in the area that elects them and emphasising their personal role in making things happen there has the potential to benefit both that area and more formal political processes, such as voting. The evidence suggests that people are more likely to vote in local elections where they both feel a strong attachment to the neighbourhood and they know the name of their ward or county councillor, or both⁵.

Conclusion

39. This chapter has sought to clarify the leadership role of councils as we look to a longer-term vision for local government. This is the foundation for what follows. For if this is what local leadership is for, then it informs our view about what will be required of those that will be exercising those leadership roles – politically and managerially. That also informs our view about what, collectively, we need to do to build the supply, capability and overall effectiveness of future local leadership to meet that requirement.

⁴ Electoral Commission 2004 ‘An audit of political engagement’.

⁵ Railings, Thrasher and Jeffreys 2003, ‘Local Electoral Participation: The Importance of Context’.

Chapter 3 – Local political leadership of the locality as a whole

40. The previous Chapter identified the need for leaders of a calibre that can command confidence and respect among partners, who exhibit a range of skills and a willingness to continue to develop them. There is, of course, a number of individuals who already fit that bill, but not enough to offer confidence that the major challenge of community leadership will be delivered to high standards everywhere. Addressing that is, in part, about attracting good and representative people to serve and helping them to develop (see Chapter Five). In part, however, it is about the broader framework in which councillors are asked to operate – the combination of roles they play, how they are supported and how that is reinforced in the leadership structures of a council.

Clear and visible local leadership

41. Ongoing research following the changes introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 suggests that there is a widespread view that leadership and decision making by council executives is seen as an area where the changes have largely been effective⁶. Researchers have concluded that strong executive leadership and strong scrutiny, with a high degree of independence between the two, has been the model most closely identified with effective performance. Leaders, officers and councillors more generally believe that decision making has become more efficient and transparent.

42. These are important benefits in the context of broader, locality wide community leadership. The ability to be clearly visible in a leadership role to partners and the public is obviously important, as is the confidence that those stakeholders will have in more efficient and transparent decision making.

Directly Elected Mayors

43. Directly elected mayors provide one means of fulfilling those requirements. The option of local people being able to decide to have a directly elected mayor was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000

(this excludes the Greater London Authority which was covered by separate legislation). There have been thirty local referendums on this topic to date. Up to now, eleven have led to the establishment of directly elected mayors.

44. Mayors can provide:

- clear public accountability and visibility. Evidence suggests a relatively high level of public recognition of mayors⁷;
- a focus for public engagement and bringing partners together. The fact that mayors have the unique mandate of being a single individual elected by citizens from across the locality as a whole reinforces their legitimacy and can enhance their ability to act as a leader of the entire community, to bring partners together and to shape services and outcomes well beyond the immediate responsibilities of the council;
- stability. There is a clear, personal mandate for a four-year term to implement policies upon which an individual has campaigned. Even in councils with elections every four years, there is a less direct, personal association with individuals leading the council and there is always the prospect of them being changed annually via internal party group elections.

45. A petition of five per cent of registered electors in a locality can trigger a referendum on introducing this system – such petitions are currently being pursued in a small number of council areas. This means of triggering an opportunity for the public to choose may be an unnecessarily cumbersome one. The Government is interested in views on whether there are more effective means of giving people the opportunity to express a view about whether they would like to have a directly elected mayor system of local leadership for their locality.

46. The opportunity for areas to have directly elected mayors has not been taken up widely. But where local people have chosen to elect a mayor, there is evidence that they have achieved a relatively high level

⁶ The Evaluating Local Governance Team at University of Manchester as part of the New Council Constitution research element of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda evaluation for ODPM.

⁷ Randle, A 2004. 'Mayors Mid Term: Lessons from the eighteen months of directly elected mayors' London, New Local Government Network and John, Peter 2005. 'Political leadership under new management structures' ODPM.

of public recognition. In some cases mayors have become a strong focus and force for change for things that matter most to local people, such as crime and anti-social behaviour, but they suggest that more could be done if they had more powers.

47. The challenge to deliver the outcomes people want and the effective, integrated public services that are needed is greatest in our larger cities. A strong local leader, working together with other public bodies, is well placed to meet the challenge, with additional powers. This model would work well with a strengthened role for ward councillors at neighbourhood level, as set out in the local:vision document, 'Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhood Matter'. The Government will be consulting on proposals to develop, in partnership with local authorities, a new approach to create more mayors with more powers to transform our major cities.

The Cycle of Local Elections

48. Part of the argument for mayors is the degree to which they offer a model of leadership that the public more readily understand. Clearer public understanding about the basis upon which councils are led is, potentially, important in terms of reinforcing the ambition of clearer, more visible local political leadership. Potentially, another such issue is the cycle of local elections.

49. The current cycle of local elections in England means that councils are elected through a number of different cycles. More than half of all councils hold whole council elections every four years, but others hold elections in two or three years out of four for proportions of the council's seats. This situation is felt by many to be confusing for the public and the Electoral Commission has responded to the Government's invitation to look at this issue by recommending that whole elections are held every four years for all councils, together with a recommendation on how this might be implemented⁸.

50. The Government has carefully considered the Electoral Commission's recommendations and is minded to agree with the principal recommendation to move to whole elections for all English councils, although not necessarily on the same day. Whilst the Government acknowledges the arguments for local

choice in these matters, there are tangible benefits that the Commission has identified that could accrue from such a move. Box B sets out what the Government believes whole elections could promote (Annex A sets out further details).

Box B: The potential benefits of whole elections

The Government sees a number of benefits accruing from such a move:

- a higher level of public understanding about the system that would, in itself, be an aid to supporting the clarity and visibility of local leadership;
- equity between electors. Some electors within the same authority area can, at present, have fewer opportunities to vote and influence the overall composition of their council than do their neighbours in a different ward. In areas with partial elections, but no uniform pattern of members per ward, electors may become disaffected when control of the council changes in elections where they have no opportunity to participate;
- stability. As discussed previously when dealing with the mayoral model, whole elections every four years provide an inherent stability that allows policies to be developed and implemented over a reasonable period that the local electorate can form a judgement on;
- participation and turnout. The Government accepts that less frequent elections do reduce the number of separate opportunities for people to stand as local representatives or become involved in the local political process. Equally, more frequent elections may tend to dilute public interest in the council. This is particularly the case as election by thirds is often unlikely to offer a clear opportunity for a locality wide judgement on the overall performance of a council and the prospect of a clear shift in control where local people felt that was merited.

⁸ The Electoral Commission published its report 'The cycle of local government elections in England' on the 30th January 2004.

51. There are several, detailed arguments about how such a system of whole council elections could be introduced. There are, for example, arguments about whether these should be spread over one, two or more separate election days during a four yearly period and whether these would be differentiated by types of authority, or more randomly. The Government plans to hold further discussions with the Electoral Commission and representatives of local government about the desirability and feasibility of any such changes.

52. The Government would welcome the views of others on the response set out here to the Electoral Commission's report. In particular, the Government would welcome views on its attraction to moving to whole elections every four years for all councils in England and the importance of adopting a consistent pattern in order to aid public understanding, together with views on how this might be brought about.

Accountability

53. There is evidence that new governance arrangements are at their most powerful where strong executives are matched by strong scrutiny, with a clear separation and independence between the two. Effective scrutiny consists of a range of activities identified in Box C. Scrutiny provides an opportunity for influence, considered debate and the development of policy around issues of importance to councils and their communities. Scrutiny can, where ambition and resources permit, deliver real changes and improvements in the way that councils and other local partners deliver services. Currently, these roles are frequently not given the profile that they deserve and councillors do not always recognise their potential both to complement their representative function and to be one of the most powerful elements in a local democratic system.

Box C: Scrutiny

Scrutiny may be seen as covering:

Overview – holding the Executive to account. There are mixed views about how effective this has been overall⁹. There are wide differences in approach, with some councils operating tight controls on the use of 'call in' provisions.

External Review – holding a range of other agencies, including local partners, to account for the way that services are being secured for the locality. This role has been most formally prescribed in the area of health.

Policy Development – digging down beneath the surface of an issue to challenge assumptions and suggest improvements in the way it gets dealt with. Where councillors have committed themselves to this activity it has been a powerful and creative tool. There is no doubt, however, that it is time consuming and this has been a barrier for some to combine this with their wider roles.

Performance Review – considering the performance of the council against targets and assessing the extent to which it is meeting its best value requirements.

54. As with leadership, scrutiny can be seen to operate within the whole of a locality and within a smaller geographic area or neighbourhood. At the locality level scrutiny involves holding to account the council and its partners for the decisions, services and policies that are developed which affect the whole area. However, much of the influence and accountability across the wider locality comes from the knowledge and experience councillors have from their own communities without which scrutiny cannot be effective. The relationship between these two levels can be enhanced, strengthening the roles and the effectiveness of the function in holding executives and service providers to account.

55. At the neighbourhood level, a stronger community advocacy role for councillors should sharpen the impact of scrutiny within communities.

⁹ see footnote 2.

It provides an opportunity for councillors to ensure that decisions taken which affect communities in their ward or electoral division are right for them. It offers the potential to develop policy which takes account of the needs of different communities. Neighbourhood arrangements provide a clear opportunity for scrutiny to be effective within communities. The sharpest focus is, perhaps, within performance review where neighbourhoods working with local councillors may be able to trigger action to address failing services within their community. These issues are discussed further in the next chapter.

56. At the level of the locality as a whole, the Government wishes to see strong and visible executives held effectively to account by strong and independent scrutiny, performing overview and external review effectively. Evidence suggests a wide variation in how these functions have so far developed¹⁰. In some councils overview has developed as a game of ‘opposition politics’ with high levels of challenge to executive decisions. In others there is much less intervention. Similarly, some councils have effectively engaged a range of partners in external review and held them to account for their decisions and policy that affect local people.

57. Where overview and external review works well it can be a powerful tool for effective decision making across a range of issues within and outside of traditional council business. In moving forward to a better understanding of effective behaviours and approaches, it is important to facilitate the development of scrutiny in all councils. In the Government’s view, making scrutiny effective has implications for the current governance arrangements of both the locality and neighbourhoods (the latter is discussed more fully in the next chapter) which need to be considered by Government, local government and the political parties. In particular whether:

- there should be a more formal requirement for executives to act on scrutiny findings;
- the scrutiny function can oversee the effective implementation of triggers for improvement to services at neighbourhood level;

- ‘call-in’ provides effective accountability or is misused, misunderstood and lacking in teeth;
- there is a case for extension of the formal scrutiny remit (as currently in relation to health) to reinforce further some important aspects of the community leadership role;
- political parties need to look at how, formally or informally, party discipline impacts upon the effectiveness of scrutiny on behalf of local people.

Conclusion

58. This chapter has considered what the implications are of the role of councils as leaders across localities. In particular, it has focused on means of strengthening the clarity, visibility and public understanding of council leadership structures and the importance of locality leadership being held to account by effective scrutiny.

¹⁰ see footnote 2 and ‘Political Leadership under the new political management structures’ by the Evaluating Local Governance Team at University of Manchester as part of the New Council Constitutions research element of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda evaluation for ODPM.

Chapter 4 – Political leadership of local communities and neighbourhoods

59. The leadership role of the locally elected councillor as a community advocate is a critical one that needs greater emphasis, reinforcement and support, in particular by:

- defining the leadership role of local councillors more clearly;
- considering the relationship with, and performance of, the scrutiny function;
- encouraging the development of appropriate support for the leadership role of local councillors;
- considering whether the number of councillors playing this role within a defined geographical area is consistent with the nature of the ambition the Government has for leaders of local communities and neighbourhoods.

Defining the leader of the local community role more clearly

60. 'Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter', published in parallel with this document, sets out a number of ideas about when and how people in neighbourhoods can be given opportunities to act and establish arrangements that help to deliver better public services in their locality. It discusses the wide scope of neighbourhood arrangements that might exist, ranging from informal forums or ad-hoc meetings to formal bodies that have devolved responsibility for the delivery of certain services.

61. These new opportunities for neighbourhood arrangements must be complementary to the democratic legitimacy of councils and councillors. Ward and county councillors are democratically accountable to all the communities in the ward and electoral divisions that they represent, giving them a unique role. Effective representation involves acting both as advocates and as leaders for wards and

neighbourhoods. As **advocate** in speaking up on behalf of individuals and groups in the community to other bodies (including the council and other public agencies) or to other groups in the community. Local councillors can play a key role as advocates by encouraging communities, through Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs), to participate positively in plan making and planning decisions. This will help to deliver the community's vision for the area. As **leader**, councillors encourage and enable sections of the community to organise and speak up for themselves; and in offering vision and direction, building support for that vision and brokering agreements where necessary to achieve it.

62. Councillors should be at the heart of neighbourhood arrangements, stimulating the local voice, listening to it, and representing it at local level. They are vital in maintaining the link between the users and the providers of local public services. Neighbourhood leadership must be a central element of every local councillor's role, which should include being an effective partner in relevant neighbourhood arrangements. It is important that all sections of the public more readily recognise councillors playing this role on their behalf in individual communities, rather than holding a perception about them being 'out of touch' or being primarily motivated by party political interests.

63. In these roles the local councillor will need both to work with and through the various neighbourhood arrangements in place, and at times inspire and lead the development on new arrangements. The parallel publication, 'Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter', offers a range of options on the resources for neighbourhood arrangements, including the possibility of councils devolving spending power to local councillors over a small pot of money for their area, as some are doing already. The Government believes that delegated budgets to councillors can make a real difference in neighbourhoods, particularly in tackling liveability issues.

64. In a number of areas, effective parish or town councils already operate, serving a range of purposes and, in some cases, delivering delegated functions. Such councils clearly have a role and democratic mandate to represent their communities. Councillors from principal authorities will need to work with and through parish and town councils.

65. There are also other ‘community advocates’, whether they be representatives of local service providers, or community groups, who have a role to play in ensuring effective representation of people’s concerns. They all have a role in communicating local concerns to councillors, the council, and to other service providers, such as the police. Councillors have a role to play in encouraging these ‘advocates’ to speak up and make their contribution. There is scope to increase the involvement of a number of ‘community advocates’ in ways complementary to the leadership role of councillors. If councillors lose sight of this, others will seek to work round them rather than with them. Equally, in being strong advocates for their communities, councillors must not lose sight of the strategic context for the council area as a whole.

66. In essence, the challenge for councillors seeking to lead in their area is similar to the challenge for councils in terms of leading the entire locality. There is a unique legitimacy conferred by democratic election, but it has to be realised by the way that leadership is shared and provided. If partners, within a neighbourhood or a locality, lose confidence in councillor or council then there is little that Government can do that will, in practice, change the dynamics on the ground.

67. The Government would welcome views on the advocacy and leadership role of councillors representing communities and neighbourhoods in their patch and what further steps could be taken to reinforce this role.

Relationship with, and performance of, the scrutiny function

68. Local councillors are also central to championing the interests of both their own areas, and the locality, through their participation in scrutiny functions. As discussed in the previous chapter, research suggests that the effectiveness of the scrutiny roles introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 has so far been highly variable¹¹.

69. The previous chapter also discussed the potential to develop scrutiny activity across the whole of a locality. There are, however, important facets of scrutiny which can be led and developed by councillors in their local areas. For example,

particularly in relation to performance review, neighbourhoods working with local councillors may be able to trigger action to address failing services within their community. But local councillors should be acting on their own volition in scrutinising the delivery of all services in their area and making representations to other service providers where action is needed. Acting collectively, local councillors can use the scrutiny function to oversee how councils and other providers are responding to calls for action by neighbourhoods across the area.

70. In the wider context of greater specialisation in councillor roles, there may be scope to look at redirecting resources to more effective support for scrutiny. The Government would be interested in views on what more could be done to ensure that the opportunity that scrutiny by local councillors can offer is grasped more firmly, as well as on how scrutiny is developed as part of the advocacy and leadership roles played by local councillors.

Supporting the leadership role of local councillors

71. The induction and support arrangements for councillors has traditionally focused more upon supporting them in their role at the Town Hall – in being members of committees, or in making decisions, or even in exercising their scrutiny role, than it has in supporting councillors in their representative role.

72. This has shifted to a degree since the Local Government Act 2000, but not markedly in most places. Yet most exit surveys of councillors show that one of the primary reasons that people stand down is their perception that they have failed to get things done on behalf of their constituents¹¹.

73. Councillors can be elected to represent a particular area with few local networks outside their political party, having to juggle work and family commitments as well as their council duties, and are expected to make immediate sense of all of the local service providers, organisations and individual communities within that area.

¹¹ see footnote 2.

74. It will be important for this role that consideration is given to how resources are used to support councillors in this local champion role. Suggestions have been made that, at the very least, councillors' induction could, as a matter of routine, include a contact programme with all the relevant public service managers in their ward and other key partners of the council relevant to their patch. Moreover, the way that basic administrative, technical and research support could be tailored to support councillors in playing their local advocate role needs to be considered. We would welcome your views on these issues.

Numbers of councillors playing a leadership role within wards

75. Part of the argument for a clear leadership role for local councillors within their areas is that the public would come to recognise these individuals as the key players in being able to get things done within a local community – a street, village, parish, neighbourhood, ward or electoral division. Just as with executive leadership of the locality as a whole, visibility and clarity of leadership is important at the most local level also. This raises the question of whether multiple member wards in non county authorities facilitate such visible leadership or not. It could be argued that if the ambition is for every ward to be able to look to a councillor who, in effect, acts as a 'mini mayor' for a particular area, then multiple ward membership confuses this role.

76. Against this, however, is the argument that in many parts of England the number of councillors compared to the size of population being served is already quite small in comparison to many other countries. Also, many councillors feel that the role, which is of course part-time, is already an onerous one even when shared among two or three councillors covering the same patch.

77. The Government is keen to ensure that a councillor's role is not so onerous that it acts as a disincentive to a representative group of people being prepared to stand for election. Are there ways of achieving this? Might we move towards, for example, a clearer separation and specialisation of different roles among non-executive councillors? This would seek to take account of the difficulty that individuals might

have in finding sufficient time to play a role as a clear community champion and advocate on behalf of local communities within a ward and play a full part in the broader council scrutiny process.

78. The Government would be interested to hear views on how the visibility of leadership of local communities and neighbourhoods within a ward can be combined with the overall burden of representation and the wider responsibilities of non-executive councillors, including scrutiny.

Experimentation

79. Clarity of role and of purpose is critical. The Government believes that the separation between clear and accountable executive leadership roles and local representation and scrutiny among councillors has helped facilitate effective leadership. The Government would not wish to see a departure from this principle in those authorities to which it currently applies.

80. In developing neighbourhood arrangements, the Government recognises that there is significant activity already taking place in local government, much of it effective. No single approach will fit everywhere; neighbourhood models clearly reflect local circumstances and need. The Government is seeking views on how to take this forward through both this document and the one dealing with neighbourhoods and citizen engagement.

81. Neighbourhood arrangements should be seen as an increasingly important part of a council's overall governance arrangements and not in isolation from it. The Government is, therefore, interested in the potential for piloting a range of governance approaches which integrate wider locality and community dimensions in a way that is tailored to local circumstances.

82. There is a question as to whether, looking ahead over the next ten years, more can be achieved by encouraging greater local flexibility in determining leadership structures within a set of overall principles. At present, regulations allow an authority operating executive arrangements to make changes within the three existing executive models. The Local

Government Act 2000 enables the Secretary of State to make regulations which provide for local authorities operating executive arrangements to be able to amend them in any respect or to operate different executive arrangements.

83. So, there is more scope within existing legislation than is sometimes presumed. If, however, councils do begin to consider packages of change, in particular to reflect increasing opportunities for neighbourhood influence over issues of very local concern, then it might be an appropriate point to consider the case for more locally tailored leadership structures overall. This would include how to strengthen scrutiny and make it more effective.

84. As indicated earlier, the Government sees considerable merit in the basic separation of the executive role. The Government can, however, see benefit in inviting councils to put forward ideas for piloting innovative governance models to better understand the characteristics that make for effective leadership of council wide areas, communities and neighbourhoods.

85. Such experimentation would operate within a requirement that any new governance models would need to exhibit a number of core attributes (see Box D for a list of possible attributes). The Government wishes to work with local government and key stakeholders to establish such a framework and a prospectus underpinning these principles within which councils could put forward pilot proposals.

Box D: Possible core attributes for any new governance models

The Government envisages that effective new governance models would exhibit the clear potential for achieving:

- visible and accountable leadership;
- a vehicle for partnership working and bringing key stakeholders together to work collectively to solve local problems;
- efficient, effective and transparent decision making;
- strong and effective scrutiny;
- coverage of the whole of a council area;
- arrangements that are inclusive of all communities;
- encouragement to people from all sections of the community to play key roles;
- a clear, effective neighbourhood dimension;
- the support of local people and stakeholders.

Conclusion

86. This chapter has considered the critical importance of strengthening the role of locally elected councillors as champions and advocates of the communities that they represent. It has focused on ways in which that role needs to be defined and supported in order for it to be given the emphasis that is vital for our vision of engaged neighbourhoods, with elected councillors at the centre of them, to be realised.

Chapter 5 – The future supply and development of local political leaders

87. Achieving effective local political leadership is critically dependent upon ensuring that there is an adequate supply of able and representative people willing to serve as leaders of individual communities and localities as a whole. They also need to be ready and willing to be developed in their roles – individually and alongside senior officers and other local partners. This section of the document addresses itself to those issues. It considers:

- the current position of local political leadership;
- the task of attracting and retaining the local leaders of tomorrow;
- the task of providing ongoing development for local political leaders.

The current position of local political leadership

Profile

88. There are something like 21,000 elected councillors in England. Approximately 95% of councillors in principal authorities are elected under a party political label¹².

89. Elected councillors are a long way from being broadly representative of the communities that they serve. In 2001-2, 71% of councillors were male, compared to 49% of the population. Only something like 11% of council leaders were women and yet the Equal Opportunities Commission estimate that something like 36% of all public appointments are now filled by women. The total number of women councillors has risen, but the proportion of women councillors voluntarily standing down from councils is significantly higher than the number of men. Recent legislation¹³ may go some way to enable more women candidates through the adoption of women only shortlists.

90. More than eight in ten councillors are aged over 45 and 36% are retired from work, compared to 22% of the population as a whole. The number of councillors under 25 years of age halved between 1997 and 2001. The average age of councillors has risen from 55.7 years of age in 1997 to 57 years of age in 2001. Whilst aiming for a better, overall age profile amongst councillors, it is, of course, also important that older people, of all ages, take responsibility for making their voices heard in their local community and democratic participation is a key way of doing this.

91. The proportion of councillors drawn from a minority ethnic community background has gone down from 3% in 1997, which is still only half the proportion of such people in the population overall, to 2.5% in 2001, although more recent Electoral Commission evidence has pointed to an increase in the overall, aggregate number of councillors from ethnic minority backgrounds.

92. These figures are stark. Research has pointed to various contributory factors, including:

- the attitudes shown by both those selecting candidates, and voters themselves in elections, towards candidates that differ from the more established profile of councillors¹⁴;
- the comparative level of access that potential candidates from under-represented groups have to political party networks and resources¹⁴;
- the amount of time required to carry out a councillor role may be a disincentive to people in work, particularly those younger people trying to forge the early stages of their career or care for young children¹⁵. Research suggests that, on average, councillors spend more than eighty hours per month on their duties. This may also be a particular disincentive for women, many of whom still undertake a majority of domestic, household and childcare tasks;

¹² Employers' Organisation's Census of Councillors 2001.

¹³ Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002.

¹⁴ Bochel, C. and Bochel, H.M. 2000, 'The Careers of Councillors: gender, party and politics', Ashgate: Aldershot.

¹⁵ Courtenay et al, 'The Impact of Releasing People for Council Duties' DETR: London.

- experience of discrimination. Some research¹⁶ has found that women councillors, as well as councillors from ethnic minority backgrounds, have reported direct and indirect discrimination during their service.

Competition for civic governors

93. There are other issues that impact upon the diversity of local political leadership. Local government and, more specifically, the political parties recruiting candidates to stand as local councillors, are operating in an increasingly competitive environment for people to play civic governance roles. There have been, for example, promotional campaigns to attract people from under-represented groups to serve as Magistrates. Other local organisations, including Housing Associations and Health Trusts have used open advertisements and professional search techniques to attract a broader pool of talent to serve in a governing role.

94. Many individuals will, as the accompanying document on Citizen Engagement makes clear, be most attracted by becoming involved in issues of most direct concern to them and their family, e.g. school governors or Sure Start, or their immediate neighbourhood, e.g. neighbourhood renewal programmes or a local residents' group.

95. Many people also play highly valuable roles in the voluntary and community sector. There are, for example, over 70,000 voluntary members on local boards delivering services and benefits for local communities. Part of the challenge that we want the longer-term vision for local government to address is how to attract more of these people to develop from these roles into representing and championing local communities as elected councillors.

96. In some respects, the comparative profile of councillors is not surprising, even if it is not desirable. The age profile, for example, may well reflect the time people have available to be involved in local politics. It may also reflect the journey that some individuals do make from some limited engagement with, perhaps, a single local issue through to wider community involvement and then to service as a councillor. As indicated previously, we would wish to encourage that journey to be taken more often and earlier.

97. We need a better overall understanding of the factors that lie behind this relative lack of diversity in the profile of people putting themselves forward for elected office at a local level. It is clearly the case, however, that the credibility of councils as community representatives and leaders is damaged by this overall profile. Moreover, it is not a profile that points to a sustainable future looking ahead ten years and beyond. The Government believes that there should be a common determination, between Government, local government, political parties and other key partners, potentially involving employers, trade unions, equality bodies and the voluntary and community sector, to see a more broadly representative profile of local councillors. This is something that the Government would wish to see pursued as part of the development of its longer-term vision for local government as well as its wider Citizen Governance Initiative which will examine how citizens are recruited and supported in taking on public governance roles in general.

The task of attracting and retaining the local political leaders of tomorrow

Removing barriers

98. If there is to be a stimulation in the supply of people willing to put themselves forward for positions of local elected leadership, we must have a better understanding of the barriers to individuals entering into and staying in such roles. Why, for example, is it that 40% of councillors voluntarily stand down at each election? Why is it that recent evidence suggests that it is councillors drawn from the most under-represented groups that are standing down in greater number than others?

99. The Government is keen to see the profile of local leaders and councillors becoming more representative of the communities they serve. Without this, leaders and councillors as a whole may be less able to gain the trust and support of their communities. Being more representative means being able to attract more women and more people from a range of diverse backgrounds – both culturally and in terms of personal experience. It also means having a representative group across the age spectrum – both young and old playing a full part in representing their communities.

¹⁶ Gill, B. 2000, 'Losing Out Locally: women and local government; Fawcett: London.

Solomos, J. and Back, L. 1995, 'Race, Politics and Social Change' Routledge: London, NY.

Yule, J. 2000, 'Women councillors and committee recruitment', Local Government Studies 26(3), 31-54.

100. The demands of providing leadership of the council and across a whole locality is likely to be a very significant one in many cases. The time commitment that this implies for those who are Directly Elected Mayors, Council Leaders and, indeed, some members of Executives can, often, point to a role that is, or is close to being, full-time. That can already be seen in a number of councils. There is, however, a question as to whether steps could be taken to make it easier for more people to take time out from their careers to play one of the senior, locality wide leadership roles within a council. There may be individuals who could, and would, take time away from work, for a fixed period, to play one of these roles if they felt that there was some opportunity for them to return to their career after that time.

101. Aside from those needing time away from work to take on the most senior leadership roles, is there more that can be done to make it easier to combine work and for caring responsibilities and serving as a councillor at the most local levels? The 'Good Employer Award' already celebrates employers that have taken a positive view about their employees serving as councillors, in part because that experience has acted as a form of development for those individuals that has, in turn, also been of benefit to the employer.

102 Remuneration arrangements for councillors is a matter of local discretion and, the Government believes, should remain so.

103. The Government would be interested in pursuing these issues, with others, as part of its work on developing a longer-term vision for local government. There are also other related issues about potential barriers to being a councillor. For example, is there a case for considering the interaction of the Benefits System with Councillor Allowances to understand whether this acts as a disincentive to office to those in receipt of benefit?

The role of political parties

104. Whilst the overwhelming majority of councillors are elected on a party political ticket, there is, of course, no requirement for them to be so. It may be that if greater scope and prominence is given to councillors as local community advocates, then the balance between those elected under a party political label and those elected who are independent of that will alter. Political parties do, however, offer benefits to both local democracy and community leadership. They play a part in structuring choices in elections and in linking political accountability to the pursuit of a broad set of values. They can provide a ladder of opportunity for active citizens to become involved in civic life and offer training and knowledge on a range of political skills that would be important for any councillor, regardless of whether they had a party affiliation or not.

105. Ultimately, of course, it is for the electorate to decide who serves as local councillors and whether they represent political parties or not. Given the overall profile of councillors discussed earlier, however, there is clearly a challenge for political parties in considering how they are able to broaden the pool of people that they are able to recruit to put themselves forward for election as councillors.

106. Commentators have posed the question as to whether political parties are prepared to act more in the guise of local 'talent scouts', looking to attract people to their cause who broadly share their values and who already are, or who potentially may be, active in a community?¹⁷ Parties would, under this scenario, be helping to equip those people with the political skills required to become effective community representatives.

107. This is, ultimately, a matter for political parties to take a view on. The Government believes, however, that any discussion of this nature about helping to create future, vibrant local leadership will pose challenges for all of the key actors, including political parties.

¹⁷ Taylor and Wheeler, 2003 'In defence of councillors' IDeA/IPPR.

The task of providing ongoing development for local political leaders

108. Until comparatively recently, little attention and resource was given to the development of local political leaders. Both have increased in recent years, but this remains an under-developed area given the importance of the role that councillors undertake.

109. A number of organisations, including the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA), have made valuable strides in raising the importance of this issue in recent years. Aside from programmes such as 'The Leadership Academy' for leading members, many councillors have benefited from being involved in peer based activity – participating in or receiving peer reviews, or acting as, or benefiting from political peer mentors.

110. Looking ahead to the scale of the challenge facing councillors over the next ten years, however, there is much more that needs to be done. The level of penetration in terms of numbers of elected members exposed to development opportunities needs to increase. As well as individual development opportunities for councillors, there is a pressing need for more joint development within top teams of elected members and senior officers. There is also a need for key members of local partnerships – councillors and senior officers along with local area partners – to develop their capabilities to work together, as a leadership team for a locality.

111. The Government has actively supported the establishment of the LGLC to provide a sharp focus on the development of leadership among local politicians and managers. It sees the LGLC having a key role in taking this agenda forward.

112. The Government has also made a substantial investment in leadership capacity via its Local Government Capacity Building Fund. After an initial allocation of £135 million for the Spending Review 2002 period, a further £150 million has been allocated for the Spending Review 2004 period. The Fund has, to a large extent, been subject to joint control by the Government and the Local Government Association. Increasing emphasis is being given to partnerships between councils to invest in and deliver improvement

collaboratively. Leadership has featured as an important dimension of many of these proposals. In future, mechanisms will be introduced that ensure that leadership based proposals align closely with the work of the LGLC.

A skills framework for elected members

113. Earlier in this document, we discussed the sort of abilities we envisage local political leaders requiring as we look forward ten years and beyond. It is an ambitious and demanding requirement. Because of that, and because political parties, councils and bodies such as the LGLC and training providers need to have a degree of consensus about this, the development of a core skills framework for local councillors could have real advantages. The main components of a possible skills framework, developed for the IDeA and LGLC, is summarised in Box E.

Box E: Skill framework for elected members

To be effective in any job you need to know what is required of you, and you must also have the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve it. Surprisingly little attention has been paid to the role played by local councillors. Yet it is arguably one of the most complex roles that exists within the political field or within the work context. The role of local councillor has also undergone many changes and there is little doubt that the breadth and complexity of a councillor's responsibility has increased considerably over the past few years.

Professor Jo Silvester has worked with IDeA and LGLC to undertake a systematic analysis on roles. This has produced a skills framework for elected members, identifying positive and negative indicators under nine essential leadership elements. These roles are summarised below:

The elements of that skills framework for councillors are:

- a. community leadership
- b. regulating and monitoring
- c. scrutiny and challenge
- d. communication skills
- e. working in partnership
- f. political understanding

In addition Cabinet Members need:

- g. providing vision
- h. managing performance

And Leaders

- i. excellence in visionary and charismatic leadership

Source: Skills Framework for Elected Members (IDeA)

114. The relevance of approaches of this type will eventually be judged by the party groups, councils and councillors who adopt them. The framework is being rolled out to groups of all political complexion at present. A clearly understood benchmark of skills that can underpin a range of targeted development opportunities does, however, offer significant potential in terms of building the value that councillors are able to contribute to local communities.

115. The Government would welcome views as to what other steps need to be taken to promote the ongoing development of future local political leaders.

Conclusion

116. This Chapter has focused upon encouraging a supply of future, local political leaders who are more broadly representative of the communities that they serve, better able to experience relevant and valuable development opportunities and more likely to meet the challenges that they will increasingly face in leading local communities.

Chapter 6 – The challenge for future local managerial leadership

117. Over the next ten years, local government will require a sufficiently large group of future senior officers able to combine service and professional skills, managerial excellence and the ability to provide clear organisational leadership. Local government needs to attract – and retain – its share of the best talent available. To do that it needs both to market the potential of working in the sector to a wider talent pool as well as being part of a more permeable labour market for talent across the public sector and more widely. The profile of this group also needs to be more diverse – both to reflect better the nature of communities being served and to maximise the potential talent pool available.

118. Three main issues are considered in this Chapter:

- the current position of local managerial leadership;
- the task of attracting and retaining future local managerial leadership;
- the task of providing ongoing development to future local managerial leadership.

The current position of local managerial leadership

Organisational Leadership

119. Many sources of evidence and, most recently, the lessons learned from the Comprehensive Performance Assessments of councils have pointed to the vital importance of a strong combination of political and managerial leadership in high performing councils. That does not mean, however, that there is a standard recipe for how that combination is best achieved. It can be seen operating in different ways, with different types of political and managerial input and different levels of visibility at varying times. It is, in reality, often a subtle and dynamic partnership that is not easily captured by a straightforward list of respective responsibilities.

120. It is necessary, however, for this relationship to be very clearly bounded by a shared understanding of respective roles and purpose and a very well understood sense of the professional, statutory and political accountabilities that these roles variously carry. Clarity here is at the heart of effective and robust corporate governance.

121. The Government is aware that the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) is examining the challenges that this mix of politics and management brings to a modern council. The Government looks forward to discussing this work with the Society as part of the debate on these issues looking ahead to a longer-term vision for local government.

122. The Government is clear that it wishes to see councillors willing and able to play real and visible leading roles – as leaders across localities and as leaders in neighbourhoods. It recognises, however, that the task of facilitating and supporting that political leadership and of leading and enthusing an organisation to deliver the vision that political leaders have primarily shaped, is a critical challenge for the most senior managerial leaders.

123. The Local Government Act 2000, along with changing political and managerial cultures at a number of councils, has led some to question the stability of the settlement that has underpinned the relationship of members and officers in our system of local government. Councils have had to adapt to changing circumstances and demands, but the principle of independent, politically neutral officers serving the council as a whole, and with clearly defined and protected statutory responsibilities attached to a number of posts, is one that should remain at the heart of future arrangements.

124. The sort of development that this document – and the accompanying one on Citizen Engagement – calls for, presents a challenge to the practical demonstration of that status. Realising the potential of non-executive councillors through the development of real, local community advocacy and more effective scrutiny will require a strong commitment from councils and senior officers to identify ways in which the resources of the organisation can be made to more effectively support these types of activity.

Profile

125. The most senior managers in councils are responsible for providing leadership to often large, complex, multi-functional organisations that combine a wide range of quite diverse service and regulatory responsibilities. They often need to manage a high degree of organisational change and a drive for ongoing efficiency in operations. This is within an environment where managing the relationships with, and influence of, both political leaders and other partners is a complex one.

126. The scale of the challenge makes it vital that local government is able, effectively, to tap into the widest possible pool of talent to provide its future managerial leaders.

127. Women only make up just over a quarter of local government's top 5% of earners, but that proportion has shown signs of growing more rapidly in recent years. The rate of increase in senior managers from black and ethnic minority backgrounds has been slower and this group is only still 2.6% of the overall total. Apart from low levels of representation, the tendency for senior managers from excluded groups to leave their posts earlier than might be expected means that we fail to build on and utilise the experience those managers have acquired. It is clear that the scale of the challenge facing local government in this area as we look ahead is a comparatively large one.

128. The issue of diversity, however goes wider. A recent survey found that local government recruited nearly nine out of ten of its senior managers internally from within the sector. The table below illustrates the source of appointments to these senior roles.

| Organisation/Sector | Number/Percentage |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Internal Appointment | 488 (46.3%) |
| Other local authority | 450 (42.8%) |
| Private Sector | 51 (4.8%) |
| Other Public Sector Body | 41 (3.9%) |
| NHS | 10 (0.9%) |
| Civil Service | 10 (0.9%) |
| Voluntary Sector | 4 (0.4%) |

Source: ODPM and Employers' Organisation 2004, 'Pay and Workforce Strategy for Local Government.'

129. Succession planning for senior managers still tends to be the exception rather than the rule in most authorities and only a limited number would appear to make a proactive effort to manage the careers of potential 'high flyers' within an authority.

130. More positively, the National Graduate Development Programme has begun to have success. The Scheme has begun to market the broader career of managerial leadership in local government to graduates, rather than simply relying on people emerging through a variety of separate professional and technical disciplines into senior management.

The task of attracting and retaining future local managerial leaders

131. The National Graduate Development Programme exemplifies a way of addressing the sort of challenge facing local government as a sector in terms of developing its future leadership and broader workforce. The challenge is for the sector to find a way to be able to continue to manage these people in a positive and proactive way beyond the initial period of the scheme. That is difficult given the separate employer status of individual councils and the pressures that exist upon individual budgets. Without it, however, the sector runs the risk of a failure to maximise return from the investment that has been made. The joint work of local government and Government on the implementation of the Pay and Workforce Strategy is addressing itself to sectoral issues of this type.

132. This strategy has also addressed itself to the issue of attracting tomorrow's leaders in a highly competitive environment. The Government shares the view that further work needs to be done to ensure that the task of marketing of local government careers is well evidenced, efficient and exploits fully some of the advantages that exist to a career in local managerial leadership.

133. The Government would be interested in views about how, working with the sector, this work can be accelerated as part of the implementation of the Pay and Workforce Strategy.

134. Aside from local government's relative competitive position with other sectors – including other parts of the public sector – in attracting talent, there is also the issue of whether the public sector more broadly could benefit from greater movement of talent between its various streams. This, of course, already happens to some degree but not on a particularly wide scale. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working closely with the Office for Public Service Reform and other Government Departments on the development of a Public Sector Leadership Consortium. This, in part, is about joint leadership development across sectors and we shall deal with that in the next section of this Chapter. It is also, however, about developing the scope for real interchange, career movement and a more joined-up approach to succession planning within the public service delivery system. The Consortium has the objective of developing incentives for building careers that link up different parts of the public sector. The LGLC will be a key member of this Consortium.

135. The Government is interested in the views of those in local government and more widely about promoting greater career interchange within the public sector and practical ideas about how some of the barriers to this could be overcome.

The task of developing future local managerial leadership

136. Many steps in this area have already been taken. Local government's own central bodies, as well as professional bodies such as SOLACE and Society of Chief Personnel Officers (SOCPO) have been working together to raise the profile of leadership development in the sector. They and others combined last year to produce the report of the Leadership Development Commission that has informed the early business planning of the LGLC.

137. There is, however, a wider dimension to the task of developing local government's future managerial leaders. Increasingly, there is a recognition that the issue of building leadership runs right across different parts of the public sector and beyond. While it is right to highlight the unique significance of the political leadership role in the context of local government, there is undoubtedly a core of leadership qualities that prevail in every sector that need to be developed and nurtured.

138. To that end, through active participation in the Cabinet Office sponsored Public Sector Leadership Consortium, LGLC and ODPM are working to ensure that the linkages across the public sector are made and the opportunities that can be created are realised.

139. It is not just about joint public sector development. The organisational boundaries over which managerial leaders need to be able to operate go far wider – to business and the voluntary and community sectors. Local government will also wish to expose itself to development opportunities here, including the Cabinet Office and CBI initiative on developing the collaboration skills of public service managers.

140. The development of the Academy for Sustainable Communities also provides an important opportunity in this regard. Its establishment is being linked with that of the LGLC.

141. We have also worked closely with the Audit Commission as it has developed its proposals for the evolution of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment from 2005 and beyond. This will assess the contribution of councils in providing overall leadership to localities as well as the impact that their own organisational leadership is making upon that. The evidence that emerges will play a critical part in informing the longer-term vision for local government and as we begin to evaluate the impact of the actions that have been taken so far.

142. So, the challenge looking ahead ten years is not to create a whole new set of initiatives. There is work to be done to ensure coherence to the leadership development offering that supports local authority managers as we move forward. That work has already begun and the establishment of the LGLC is a major step in ensuring that we are able to build on that work in a sensible and efficient fashion.

143. We need, across Government and in local government, to monitor the effectiveness of action to improve the capacity and calibre of managerial leaders. But together, we also need to go further and challenge some of the orthodoxies about the way in which leadership is practised and developed throughout the sector which might serve to act as ongoing barriers to entry or the development of new talent.

144. Amongst these are:

- examining the nature of the specific leadership challenge in local government and understanding how far, in practice, this actually calls for a unique approach to capacity and calibre issues;
- having done that, working hard to achieve linkages across the public sector to develop a common set of leadership characteristics and developmental and HR tools that can help foster and bring us closer to a 'single public service leadership cadre';
- critically examining the way in which the everyday working practices and culture of local government may serve to inhibit new and more diverse leadership talent from coming into, and staying in, the sector;
- identifying the need for common approaches to leadership at a local area level. Exploiting the potential for LAAs to act as a critical focus for joined up leadership at a locality level would, in itself, begin to have a major impact upon the nature of the leadership development that local partners demanded.

Conclusion

145. As with political leadership, the challenges facing managerial leaders in the local government of the future are demanding. This Chapter has focused upon the steps required to maximise the supply of talent to play these roles and to ensure their ongoing development.

Chapter 7 – Vibrant local leadership – the future

146. Vibrant local leadership is at the heart of our vision for the future of local government. Our vision is to build on the best examples of local leadership so that all councils demonstrate:

- effective leadership that drives performance, engagement with local people and relationships with partners;
- clearer, more attractive roles for councillors and more effective means of attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining talented and representative people to play these roles;
- leadership at both strategic and neighbourhood level;
- reinforcement of these roles in governance and support structures, including scrutiny functions;
- a strong focus on officer leadership capable of combining professional and managerial excellence.

A framework for the future

147. A framework for the future should signal significant changes in the nature of local leadership, which in effect would be to:

- place community leadership at the centre of every council's role;
- put the role of neighbourhood leader at the heart of every local councillor's role;
- provide opportunities for more visible, stronger and more accountable leadership of towns, districts, cities and counties;
- facilitate the wider development of the sort of effective political and managerial leadership found currently in the highest performing councils so that localities everywhere can benefit from councils being at the heart of leading sustainable communities;
- stimulate a healthy supply of people, which also better reflects the overall makeup of the communities being served, to come forward to

be councillors or managers by making these roles clearer and more attractive and tackling some of the current barriers to participation.

148. Councils would be champions of their area setting out the vision for the local community in partnership with other agencies; acting as challengers and scrutineers of public services and providing a horizontal challenge to the performance of all of the delivery agencies in a locality – including the council itself. They would set priorities for the area and the council, be accountable for the choices made and shape services around the citizen by influencing the mix of services and resources that are brought together from a range of delivery partners.

149. Councillors would be seen as 'mayoral' figures leading their neighbourhoods, actively representing and championing communities in their area, playing important roles in neighbourhood consultative arrangements and participating in a range of very local, community and partnership organisations. The scrutiny process would be an important mechanism for them to influence policy and deliver real changes and improvements on the ground.

150. A framework for the future needs to address these issues and might therefore include:

Clearer and more attractive roles

- development of the community leadership role of councils who have a key role in leading their communities, focused on networking, influencing and working through partnerships, building on the governance arrangements for LSPs and approaches for Local Area Agreements;
- greater discretion on models of governance and leadership, which integrate wider locality and community dimensions in a way that is tailored to local circumstances;
- reinforcing a distinctive role for community councillors as neighbourhood champions who have a primary role to act on behalf of their communities and represent them to the council. They would be, in effect, a 'mayoral' figure for their individual locality.

Developing the supply of people

- attracting people and those from a wider range of ages, gender, ethnic backgrounds, and employment status into positions of political leadership;
- attracting managers from outside the local government sector; working more collaboratively with others as part of both a varied public sector career path as well as attracting more managers from the private sector;
- mainstreaming succession planning into the core business of the local government sector, of councils and political parties;
- promoting the overall benefits of public sector careers within local government in a more positive and active fashion;
- take diversity more seriously, working to identify and actively remove barriers and obstacles for groups that continue to be under-represented in political and managerial leadership positions.

Next steps

151. This document sets out a range of issues and questions on the future of local leadership. These raise a number of challenges for Government, local government and other partners, as well as political parties, which can only be addressed through working together.

152. To move forward we therefore need an open and inclusive debate on how we can develop vibrant and effective local leadership everywhere. This document is intended to frame that debate. We would welcome views on the issues which we have raised throughout the document, in particular:

- whether the right political and managerial leadership roles been identified and how they can be reinforced;
- the different characteristics and skills required to undertake these roles effectively;
- what more can be done to encourage the clarity and visibility of local political leadership;
- how to ensure scrutiny becomes a more effective tool, both across a locality and at a neighbourhood level;

- the Government's proposed response to the Electoral Commission's report. In particular, the attraction to moving to whole elections every four years for all councils and the importance of adopting a consistent pattern across the country to aid public understanding, together with views on how this might be brought about;
- proposals to develop, in partnership with local authorities, a new approach to create more mayors with greater powers to transform our major cities;
- the governance arrangements needed to achieve effective local leadership including piloting models that are tailored to local circumstances and could help to develop a better understanding of the characteristics that make for effective leadership of the locality and neighbourhoods. The Government intends to work with local government to establish a framework and prospectus for councils to put forward proposals for piloting new governance arrangements;
- how we can better understand and overcome the barriers to individuals entering or staying in elected positions;
- the steps needed to attract, recruit, develop and retain an able and diverse range of people to play the political and managerial roles required for the future.

153. We 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 sector over the coming months. The feedback and key issues arising from that debate will be drawn together, along with the issues from discussions on other documents published on local:vision, over the next twelve months into a fuller strategy document.

154. Please send your views and comments to: leadership.localvision@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

155. More details can be found at: www.odpm.gov.uk/localvision

Annex A – Electoral Commission findings and factors affecting electoral cycles

The electorate's understanding of local government elections

A1. The Electoral Commission concluded that the current pattern of local electoral cycles in England is unclear and inconsistent, both within and between local authorities and it is unnecessarily complicated and confusing in that many electors do not know when or why local elections are held in their area. More worryingly, it allows electors to be unclear about which body they are voting for on a given day. The Commission is concerned that whilst the current complexity of English local government elections is not an issue in itself, the complexity might not encourage understanding of the democratic opportunities across England, which is a significant matter.

A2. The Commission also noted the variation in the proportion of the local government electorate that has been eligible to vote over the years. For example, in 1999 and 2003 80 per cent of the total local government electorate in England were eligible but in 1996 and 2000 less than half were eligible to vote. This pattern of elections, mitigates against continuing interest and encouraging higher participation in elections.

A3. A study by MORI on behalf of the Commission in 2003 showed that one-in-six people in areas where elections were due to be held were unaware of it. The year before, MORI had found this to be a quarter of the electorate. Younger people and respondents from black and minority ethnic groups were three times more likely to be uninformed. Disturbingly, one-in-five respondents did not know which authority they would be voting for in 2003. To outline this, MORI found that in unitary authority areas 21 per cent of respondents thought they would be voting in a county council election.

A4. The Commission has concerns that the varied pattern of electoral cycles across England may have a particular effect on the levels of awareness and understanding of the electorate. 30 per cent of respondents conceded that they did not know how often elections were held in their area and only 16 per

cent were actually able to correctly identify the actual cycle of local elections. A higher proportion of respondents where elections were held once every four years were most likely to correctly identify the cycle of local elections in their area, around one-third of correct responses. Only 5 per cent of respondents facing elections in three or two out of four years could correctly identify the cycle. These respondents were much more likely to think that local elections took place every year, which is not the case.

A5. Respondents to the Commission's consultation paper on electoral cycles were divided on the merits and desirability for change to a more uniform pattern of elections. Many accepted the benefits of increased voter awareness; others resented interference from the centre in what they saw as a matter for local choice. (Interestingly, whilst respondents felt that electors did not understand the cycle of local elections the Commission's research suggests otherwise.)

A6. The majority of respondents accepted that a more uniform pattern of local elections would be beneficial: a clearer more predictable pattern would help electors to understand when elections take place. Some noted the importance of consistency both within and across local authorities, ensuring all electors have the same rights and opportunities. Others noted that consistency across England may develop a 'national voting habit' which could promote local democratic renewal and civic responsibility.

A7. There is some opposition among local government stakeholders on the idea of imposition of change. Some consider that what works well for some authorities will not work for others. They argue that local choice is important and that local elected representatives are best placed to determine which pattern is most suitable for their area, responding to local need and circumstances but only shire district/borough and unitary authorities have local choice under our current arrangements.

A8. On balance, the Commission felt that locally determined arrangements would merely suit those with established interests. Well-informed electors are better placed to hold their local representatives to account. Removing confusion on the cycle of elections was an important step forward and outweighs the potential costs of change.

Equity between electors

A9. The Electoral Commission is clear that opportunities for access to the local democratic process should be equitable. In its view it is unfair and unacceptable that within an individual local authority some local electors may have fewer opportunities to vote and influence the political composition of the *same local authority* than their neighbours in a different ward. (Many authorities that elect by thirds, outside metropolitan borough areas, do not have a uniform pattern of three-member wards. In these areas, some electors may have three opportunities to vote for their local authority in a four-year period while others can only vote once in the same period.) In areas with partial elections but no uniform pattern of members per wards, electors may become disaffected if control of the council changed as the result of an election in which they were not able to participate.

A10. A strong theme that came from respondents to the Commission's consultation paper was the importance of ensuring the equity and fairness in electoral arrangements, in line with the Widdicombe Committee's thinking. Respondents felt that all electors within each individual local authority should have the same opportunities to influence the outcome of local elections and the policies of the authority. This is clearly not the case at present.

A11. An alternative way of achieving equity for electors in each individual local authority would be to require a uniform number of members per ward within the authority. However, the Boundary Committee for England has noted that the requirement to recommend a uniform pattern of three-member wards in all 36 metropolitan borough areas caused specific difficulties when attempting to reflect community identities in some authorities. They note that the flexibility to recommend single, two or three-member wards enables the Committee to more easily reflect local communities' identity while continuing to provide good levels of electoral equality.

A12. A pattern of whole council elections would not require authorities to be restricted to any particular size of ward, yet there would be equity for electors in that the whole electorate would be eligible to vote together once every four years. It is worth reiterating at this point, over half of all principal authorities in England already operate on this basis.

Leadership stability within councils

A13. Local government stakeholders value the role of stability and leadership in enabling the effective management of authorities. However, there is no clear evidence directly linking the electoral cycle of an authority with its CPA score.

A14. Stability means different things to different people:

- For some supporting elections by thirds, stability means less potential for abrupt changes of political control and switches of policy. They would also tend to suggest that important but controversial decisions may be postponed for political reasons until after an election, giving electors no opportunity for democratic protest for four years where whole elections are held;
- On the other hand, those favouring whole elections point to importance of consistency of policies and representatives through a defined period of office, without the interruption and diversion of intervening elections. Whole elections provide a degree of inherent stability with a clear mandate to representatives for a programme of policies during a four-year period, allowing time for the administration to carry its policies through before being held to account by the whole electorate on its record, its success or its failures.

A15. Equally, some commentators will note that where the balance of power within an authority is on a knife-edge, political control could change frequently where the authority elects by thirds, with significant instability as a result. Others note that where authorities elect by thirds and have strong single-party control where the will of the electorate means that the ruling party loses all seats in a given year, overall political control may not change because too few seats are contested at that election and therefore has the desired outcome of leading to greater stability. In short, elections by thirds can lead to greater stability to those areas where one party tends to dominate, but to reduce stability where support for the parties is more evenly balanced.

A16. We would tend to the view that whole elections do provide a degree of inherent stability, providing an administration with a clear four-year mandate to implement its policies on which it can clearly be judged. Indeed, this is one aspect of the mayoral model, which makes Directly Elected Mayors attractive.

Participation and turnout

A17. Another area of conflicting views relates to participation and turnout. Annual or biennial elections hold the potential for more frequent opportunities for participation by electors. Equally, more frequent elections may tend to dilute public interest in elections and electors may, in practice, tire of passing judgement on their representatives annually.

A18. Good levels of turnout are important to ensure the continued relevance and legitimacy of local government. Continued low turnout may undermine the authority of local government to speak and act on behalf of the communities it represents. Turnout could clearly be affected by the electors' weak understanding of electoral matters, driven in part by confusion over electoral cycles. Equally, electors may perceive a disincentive to vote where they feel they cannot change a council because too few seats are up for grabs at a given election. However, the Commission have drawn upon some research by the LGC Elections Centre at the University of Plymouth.

A19. The Centre's research gives some weight to the notion that more frequent elections may dilute public interest and reduce turnout. They found that over the last 30 years, the four-yearly elected London boroughs generally have had a higher electoral turnout than the metropolitan boroughs, which elect by thirds. Furthermore, turnout in London has been between two and ten percentage points higher than in metropolitan boroughs in all years, except 2002, when both types of authority held elections. Similar differences were present for shire districts. The centre's findings also show that turnout would fall if authorities who normally had whole elections moved to elections by thirds and a rise in turnout could be achieved by moving to whole elections for those operating on thirds or halves.