Accountability and democracy in the new local governance: an evaluation

Michael Stephen Cole

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Accountability and Democracy in the New Local Governance: An Evaluation

By

Michael Stephen Cole

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

LGC Elections Centre
Faculty of Social Science and Business

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ABSTRACT

Accountability and Democracy in the New Local Governance: An Evaluation

Michael Stephen Cole

This thesis addresses the themes of the democracy and accountability of British local governance, in the context of the modernising agenda, through an evaluation of research in five areas: the role(s) of local councillors; external scrutiny inquiries; consultations; community appraisals; and changes to local boundaries. Key issues in relation to democracy and accountability include the role of external scrutiny in holding the unelected local state accountable to elected representatives; updating the literature on the activities of county councillors; and assessing the limited impact of local authority consultations and community appraisals. In particular, the assessment of consultations suggests a process that is often driven by a public relations focus and that few of those exercises both generate unexpected outcomes and have a substantial impact. In relation to the appraisals, the study suggests greater effectiveness in resolving small-scale problems capable of solution through town or parish local governance or community groups. The research on local boundary changes identifies the role of democratic local representatives in the reviews and the weak lines of downward accountability in respect of the process. This analysis also shows how these boundary changes impact on the way councillors perform certain core activities, including electoral campaigning.

In relation to the local government modernisation agenda, the analysis suggests that little progress has been made towards the aim of strengthening the responsiveness of service providers to the wider community and or service users. Similarly, the establishment of scrutiny structures has had a relatively marginal impact on external agencies. While the community representation focus of many councillors is in sympathy with local government modernisation, the Devon study suggests that such attitudes predated this agenda.
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

Word count of the main body of thesis = 69,375.

Signed: Michael S. Carlo

Date: 16/11/2008
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1: Introduction

The key objectives of this thesis are to gain a greater insight into the accountability of local governance and assess the extent to which contemporary arrangements are responsive to democratic pressures. This research agenda arose primarily as a response to the local government modernisation agenda, which has been developed as part of the Labour Government’s focus on public service reform and has encompassed a wide range of changes such as the establishment of unitary authorities; the creation of executive cabinets and directly-elected mayors; an expansion of performance measurements such as Best Value and Comprehensive Performance Assessment; the proliferation of partnerships; and a renewed focus on community and extending the range of participants in public sector decisions (see, Cole, 2003a; Stewart, 2003). This agenda has been extensive, in part at least, contradictory (Cole, 2003a; Cole 2008) and has notable implications for the extent to which local authorities were accountable and subjected to democratic scrutiny and influence.

The five substantive themes identified in this thesis all connect to the local government modernisation agenda. The evaluation of the role(s) of county councillors and the assessment of external scrutiny relate directly to the new structures of political management. These reforms were intended to shift the emphasis of councillors’ work towards ‘bringing the views of their community to bear on the council’s decisions’ (DETR, 1998, 25) and to strengthen substantially the accountability role of elected members through the establishment of scrutiny committees. Similarly, the analysis of
consultations and community appraisals links with a wider focus on making local governance more responsive to the communities they serve and ensuring that 'consultation and participation' were 'embedded into the culture of all councils' (DETR, 1998: 39). The review of ward and divisional boundaries taps into wider concerns about local elections, which have encompassed issues such as postal voting, rolling electoral registers and proportional representation (DTLR, 2001; Stoker, 2004).

1.2: Political science and local governance: analysis of these issues

In this thesis, the five specific evaluations are linked to the broad themes of governmental accountability and democracy. The evaluation of the role(s) of councillors illustrates how democratically elected local politicians operate to serve their electorate and other narrower interests and thus enforce a channel of public accountability for the operation of local governance, within a framework of constraints from factors such as the party groups and a wider notion of county-wide interests. The assessment of the role of local authority scrutiny committees in holding external organisations accountable is concerned with the capacity of local authorities to influence and constrain the actions of other agencies and thus strengthen local democracy. There is a specific link to the literature on quangos, which concerned, in part, the problems in holding such organisations accountable to representative democracy.

The evaluations of consultations and community appraisals undertaken in Devon also focus on issues of democracy and accountability; specifically the responsiveness of the public service providers to the opinions and attitudes of the
electorate. Whilst the analysis about consultations is confined to the response of the county council, the assessment of the community appraisals also concerns the accountability and democratic responsiveness of a substantial range of public and private sector bodies. The community appraisals assessment also focuses on mechanisms to enhance accountability and democratic responsiveness by strengthening the capacity of local communities to undertake initiatives.

The analysis of local boundary reviews concerns a theme central to the mechanics of democratic accountability: elections - a topic that rose to the top of the British political agenda in the early 1830s with the debate over the 1832 Reform Act (Pearce, 2003) and has retained a notable position in British political discourse. Furthermore, this study considers the role of democratically elected local politicians in the boundary review process and the impact of such changes on how those local politicians operate.

Each of these issues was selected to close gaps in the existing literature, arising from traditional neglect by scholars and or developments generated through contemporary reforms. In the next few pages, the weaknesses in the literature are identified and assessed.

1.2.1: The role(s) of local councillors

Previous studies had suffered from some important weaknesses. First, many scholars overlooked the representation of distinctive sections of the community. Second, it was difficult to draw precise conclusions about the hours spent on council duties. While there was evidence to suggest that over the last three decades the time
councillors devoted to their local government work had increased, there were wide variations in the results and data.

Third, there was a substantial urban bias in the literature. Many studies were confined to urban areas (Heclo, 1969; Hampton, 1970; Budge et al., 1972; Corina, 1974; Newton, 1976). Most of the other evaluations were dominated by urban data (Bochel and Bochel, 2000). There were only two major studies about the role(s) of county councillors, one of which was more than 40 years old (Lee, 1963; Barron et al., 1991). Fourth, the studies supplied an inadequate basis on which to make evaluations about the contemporary impact of party groups. For example, the model of councillor behaviour devised by Corina (1974) largely ignored party group discipline. Other academics treated the subject in an inconsistent fashion. For example, Newton (1976) commented on the cohesiveness of party groups but paid insufficient attention to this issue when delineating distinctions between different types of councillors.

Contemporary research, however, suggested that loyalty to the party group had a significant impact on the perceptions and performance of councillors (Copus, 1998).

Fifth, many of these publications were based on research undertaken over 25 years ago. There have been few notable assessments of the role(s) of councillors since the early 1990s\(^1\), although some scholars have touched on important aspects of the issue (Leach et al., 1997; Copus, 1998). Some of the analysis predated the structural and organisational changes of the early 1970s. For example, Newton (1976) incorporated aldermen in his analysis. All the studies mentioned in this section were undertaken prior to the introduction of executive and scrutiny structures, which had important implications for the role(s) of councillors.
1.2.2: *External scrutiny*

Evaluations of scrutiny undertaken by local authorities have either concerned general assessments or adopted, in part at least, a specific focus on internal scrutiny of the relevant local authority (see Baker, 2000; Cole, 2001a; Ashworth, 2003; Leach et al., 2003). Scholarship about the scrutiny of external organisations had been restricted primarily to the NHS and broader health matters (Campbell, 2005; Coleman, 2006). Similarly, academics had, in general, ignored the extent to which the local media covered local authority scrutiny, and had, therefore, overlooked a key mechanism through which democratic responsiveness and accountability could be enforced.

1.2.3: *Consultations*

Despite the increasing importance of consultation to the delivery of services by local authorities and other governmental organisations, the subject had been relatively neglected in the academic literature. The topic was overlooked in most accounts of New Labour (see Taylor, 1999; White 2001). Similarly, the consultation agenda had been marginalised in the public management literature (see Horton and Farnham, 1999). Furthermore, most of the studies about consultation or public participation were primarily descriptive, uncritical and/or restricted to identifying best practice (Sergeant and Steele, 1998). There had been an emphasis on processes rather than outcomes (see Fenwick and Alford, 2000), while the topic had also been subsumed into a wider debate about partnerships (Glendinning, et al., 2002). Similarly, most of the literature focused exclusively on public consultation and ignored consultations on internal matters (Sergeant and Steele, 1998; Lowndes et al., 2001a).
1.2.4: Community appraisals

Although appraisals had been held in almost a quarter of local authority areas (Pearce and Ellwood, 2002: 41), scholars had made few attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of these exercises, an omission that reflected the neglect of public participation and governance in rural Britain. Moseley (1997) outlined a research agenda but did not undertake an empirical assessment. Pearce and Ellwood (2002: 41) concluded that while appraisals were effective at 'stimulating public debate on local issues they have not always been successful either in clarifying local community priorities or inducing a shift in the priorities and budgets of agencies responsible for providing local services'. These authors did not, however, base these assertions on original empirical research.

The empirical studies suffered typically from methodological weaknesses. First, the small-scale of the analysis weakened the value of the conclusions obtained by most studies (Derounian, 1984; Ashman, 1993; Bovey 1993; Horton, 1996). Second, many studies focused on monitoring the extent to which recommendations contained in the appraisal report were implemented (Ashman, 1993; Moseley et al., 1996; Taragon, 1998). This approach concentrated on the interpretation of the steering group at the expense of the issues identified by the respondents and could inflate achievements because some recommendations were restricted to communicating concerns rather than resolving them. Third, the impact of the appraisals on community development was typically marginalised or ignored in these studies (Horton, 1996; Moseley, et al., 1996; Moseley, 1997). Fourth, scholars failed to link this process with the debate about social capital.
1.2.5: Local boundary reviews

Academic analysis of changes to electoral boundaries in the UK and elsewhere had focused primarily on parliamentary constituencies (McLeod, 1996; Bowden and Falck, 1996; Johnston et al., 1996; Rossister et al., 1999). The main exception in relation to the UK was One Vote, One Value (Rallings, Thrasher and Downe, 2002), which concerned reviews to local electoral boundaries in England and had become established as the key text in this field. One Vote, One Value, which should be viewed as the background to and the starting point for the evaluation contained in chapter eight, supplied a comprehensive assessment of the process of local redistricting. This thesis aims to supplement and build on that study by shifting the focus away from a macro analysis of the whole process to a micro analysis of the perspective of individual councillors.

1.3: Thesis structure

In chapter two, the academic literature relevant to the study is discussed. There are sections about the themes of democracy and accountability as well as the five substantial areas covered in the thesis: the role(s) councillors; scrutiny; consultation and participation; community appraisals; and local boundaries and the review process. In addition, scholarship in relation to community development and social capital is discussed because these issues are relevant to one of the substantive topics.

Chapter three outlines the methodology deployed to obtain the data relevant to each of the five component studies of this thesis. The chapter incorporates methodological discussion of a range of issues, which include interview techniques; questionnaire design; the tactics and strategy required to maximise questionnaire
responses; and the development and analysis of SPSS datasets. The chapter culminates with a discussion about the use of case studies, which has particular relevance given the focus on Devon County Council in relation to the role(s) of councillors and consultations.

In chapter four, there is an analysis of the role(s) of councillors at Devon County Council. This analysis supplies the first substantive evaluation of the impact of the executive and scrutiny reforms on the role(s) of councillors. There is a thorough analysis of the representational role(s) of councillors in relation to their divisions and sub-areas of the county; voluntary groups; their ombudsman function; sections of the community; and other local authorities. The study also considers the policy role; the balance between representation and policy; the impact of the party group; and the time devoted to council work.

In chapter five, the issue of local authority scrutiny of external organisations is explored. The study delivers the first significant survey of the external scrutiny undertaken by British local authorities that covered non-health organisations. The starting point for this assessment is an audit of the external scrutiny undertaken in British local government, which serves as the prelude to a detailed evaluation of the specific inquiries. The subjects of each inquiry and their distribution amongst different types of authority are examined before considering the decision to undertake the inquiries; support for scrutiny; the attitude of the scrutinised agencies; the scrutiny process; media coverage; and the impact of each inquiry.

Chapter six contains an evaluation of consultations performed at Devon County Council and can be viewed as complimentary to a national analysis.
undertaken by a research team based primarily at De Montefort University (Lowndes et al., 2001a; 2001b). The Devon analysis is the first extensive appraisal of consultations undertaken in the context of the local government modernisation agenda. The analysis presented in this chapter concerns the relationship with consultees; the methodological expertise of the officers with responsibility for these exercises; co-ordination of consultations by the corporate centre of the local authority; and the results and impact of each consultation.

In chapter seven, there is an evaluation of community appraisals undertaken in 46 primarily rural communities in Devon. The analysis focuses on two issues. First, the responsiveness of the external agencies to concerns expressed in those communities is considered. Second, the capacity of those appraisals to promote community development and enhance the stock of social capital is assessed. The concepts of community development and social capital are at the centre of international debates about civic society, the delivery and accountability of public services and democracy (Putnam, 1993: 2000; Hambleton, et al., 2002; Knight et al., 2002). The international implications of this analysis also arise from the use of similar initiatives in other countries (Parola, 1994; Horton, 1996).

In chapter eight, the attitudes of councillors towards reviews to ward and divisional boundaries are assessed. The analysis incorporates the decision to review; the local community and these reviews; the role(s) of elected councillors in the review process; and the impact of re-districting on electioneering and the role(s) of councillors both in relation to their ward or division and the wider aspects of their local authority work.
Conclusions about the research are drawn in chapter nine. Conclusions specific to each section are discussed and placed in the context of the existing literature, the focus being on the contribution the research outlined in this thesis has made to academic knowledge. In addition, these research findings are related to democracy, accountability and the local government modernisation agenda.

1.4: Conclusion

In this chapter, the research programme has been placed in the context of the local government modernisation agenda. In addition, the broad themes of accountability and democratic responsiveness have been linked to the five areas of substantive research. Weaknesses in the existing literature have been identified and the research agenda for this thesis has been mapped. This research is grouped around two key themes, which recur throughout this thesis. First, there is the issue of the responsiveness of local governance and some private sector bodies to opinion in the locality. The second theme concerns the role of local political and administrative structures as mechanisms of local democratic responsiveness and accountability. Key elements include the role(s) of councillors as local representatives, the impact of scrutiny committees on holding external bodies accountable and the effectiveness of the community appraisal process in delivering a local agenda. Both themes are, of course, central issues in an evaluation of the extent to which the local political and administrative culture is accountable and responsive to democratic pressures.

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2 The interviews were held between February and April 2001 (see chapter three).
CHAPTER 2
PREVIOUS RESEARCH

2.1: Introduction

In this chapter, a wide range of academic literature relevant to the study is identified and evaluated. The analysis opens with a discussion of democracy and accountability. The subsequent sections deal with the substantive issues to be discussed in future chapters: the role(s) of councillors; external scrutiny; consultation and participation; community appraisals; and local boundaries and the review process. In addition, there is a discussion of the concepts of community development and social capital, which are crucial to the analysis of the community appraisals.

2.2: Democracy

The ancient Greeks drew a contrast between monarchy, government by one; oligarchy, government by a few; and democracy, government by all; this typology dominated ‘political theory down to the time of Montesquieu’ (Duverger, 1972: 81). More contemporary scholars have also considered the definition of democracy. For example, Lively (1975: 49-51) identified the characteristics of political equality and an inclusive concept of citizenship.

Ruling elites have traditionally seen a pure form of direct democracy as a threat to their privileges. As Wright (1994: 9) noted, in relation to British government, democracy ‘represented the spectre of the untutored poor finding the means to expropriate property and destroy culture, liberty and civilization’...
entered British political culture as a problem’. Similarly, in writing about early American government, De Tocqueville (1994 ed.: 260) viewed ‘the omnipotence of the majority’ as a threat.

A more contemporary contribution was supplied by Copus (2006: 101), who considered how the representative model had operated to contain this problem, and commented that representative government had succeeded because ‘it produces the illusion of wide-scale political involvement and control without threatening certain fundamental political beliefs about the hierarchical nature of society’. This legacy had strong echoes in nineteenth century municipal reform, which, as Young (1989: 6) argued, could be characterised as the establishment of a 'form of ratepayer democracy'. Furthermore, for many decades this representative model was based on a small franchise (see Seymour, 1915).

In Britain, the pure form of direct democracy became marginalised and has been confined primarily to occasional referendums and the governance of some small communities¹, which have few powers and a very limited capacity to raise money. Initiatives to extend public participation (including expanding and enhancing consultation mechanisms) in decision-making should also be interpreted as a form of direct democracy and are treated as such in this thesis. The extent of influence afforded by typical participation and consultation initiatives (which included community appraisals) was, however, much lower than under pure forms of direct democracy through which power resided clearly with the popular will.

There has also been an assumption amongst many practitioners that governance was best left to the professionals. This elitist approach was summarised by
Saward (2003: 41), who commented that the prime reason for ‘downgrading the role of ordinary people in democratic politics’ was ‘because most people are ignorant about issues, irrational in their opinions and preferences, and easily swayed by manipulative appeals from unscrupulous politicians’. There was a clear implication that ‘people should vote, choose their government and then get out of the way’ (Stoker, 2006: 152). This distrust and scepticism about ordinary voters had echoes in both the socialism of Labour politicians and paternalism of Conservatives, although from the late 1960s such assumptions were challenged by movements such as the new left and the libertarian right. Political elitism has been matched by the behaviour of professions such as doctors and teachers, which have sought to retain self-regulation, or horizontal accountability, and have often been wary of proposals either to extend the powers of non-specialist managers accountable to politicians or measures to promote responsiveness to clients and or the wider community.

A wide range of academics have challenged this elitist notion, in which the substantial role of most citizens was confined primarily to voting. As Stoker (2006: 152) observed, ‘the academic/theoretical narrative of democracy….has now moved towards a more participative, expansive understanding of democracy’. For example, Dahl (1956) stressed the importance of active citizens focused on expressing opinions and obtaining information between elections. Putnam (1993) and others considered similar issues through the establishment and development of the notion of social capital (see below). This agenda has encompassed social entrepreneurship and a focus on communities solving problems in their locality (Pike, 2003). There has also been a broader concern amongst many writers about the level of democratic participation. For example, scholars such as Habermas (1984) and Laclau and Mouffe (1987) have
emphasised the importance of 'an inclusive, radical or participatory democracy, and give ideas about how public participation initiatives can be judged in terms of their democratic potential' (McLaverty, 1999: 38). Arnstein (1971) developed a conceptual framework to measure participation in decision-making (see below). Stoker (2006: 102) noted weaknesses in political engagement and suggested that the problem was 'how to construct a political system to cope with the kind of engagement people want and to enable the political system to be both sustainable and effective'.

Public choice theorists have challenged this consensus on the basis that the delivery of public services was paternalistic and concerned mostly with the self-interest of bureaucrats (Niskanen, 1971; Tullock, 1965). Proposed solutions had 'a strong right-wing prescriptive dimension' (John, 1998: 139), which typically involved extensions of competition and shrinking the size of the public sector.

In this thesis, each of the five substantive areas is evaluated in terms of the impact on democracy. This analysis covers two distinct issues: changes in the general characteristics of representative democracy; and the extent to which democracy has become more participatory and, at least in theory, involved an extension of the influence of a wider circle of people over the decision-making process. In the case of the community appraisals, this discussion incorporates the extent to which the communities have been empowered to undertake socially useful initiatives.

2.3: Accountability

Accountability and its pursuit have a key place in British constitutional practice and the academic literature about British government. As Pyper (1996a: 1) commented, the 'concept of accountability is often a basic benchmark against which
systems of government can be judged'. A useful framework was supplied by Flinders (2001: 13), who defined accountability in terms of 'the condition of having to answer to an individual or body for one's actions'.

The debate about public sector accountability in the UK and governmental structures in other countries derived from the Westminster model had traditionally focused on the idea of ministerial responsibility to Parliament. The notion was a 'vertical' concept through which accountability operated 'upwards' to governmental scrutineers. This notion also incorporated accountability to structures operating independently or at 'arms-length' from ministers such as parliamentary select committees, the National Audit Office, the utility regulators and local government scrutiny committees.

It has also been argued that the operation of vertical accountability had been affected by accountability to 'whom' issues. For example, a strong focus on officials might emphasise mechanisms such as 'systems of performance appraisal and review, which identify key indicators, against which the general and specific performance of officials can be judged' (Pyper, 1996a: 7). Such devices were tailored to internal line management forms of accountability and also were suitable for internal financial accountability through devices such as 'delegated budgetary systems' (Pyper, 1996a: 8). In contrast, the accountability of politicians had been traditionally focused on a range of distinct mechanisms such as parliamentary debates, parliamentary questions, select committees, the Ombudsman and external audit agencies (Pyper, 1996a: 8). It could, however, be argued that the emergence of the performance agenda and the use of an array of published performance indicators to hold politicians accountable meant
that the spirit and, to some extent, style of the mechanisms used to appraise and assess officials had been adapted to politicians.

Weaknesses in the vertical model had long been the subject of debate amongst commentators and political scientists. In the 1920s, the expanded role of the state led to scepticism that the traditional notion of ministerial accountability was still adequate. In 1929, Lord Hewart published an influential critique of these arrangements in *The New Despotism*, which led to the establishment of an inquiry on ministers' powers (Donoughmore Report, 1932). In the 1950s, Finer drew attention to the reluctance of UK ministers to resign following policy or administrative failures and distinguished between being 'answerable to' and 'answerable for' mistakes. The former concept required ministers to 'explain and defend to Parliament the actions carried out on their behalf' (Finer, 1956: 379) but did not incorporate an obligation to resign in the event of serious failure. In 1954, the Crichel Down Affair led to the establishment of the Franks Committee, which made a series of recommendations about tribunals and the conduct of public inquiries.

The theme that the increasing scale of governance, combined with the fragmentation of public service provision, had undermined traditional vertical accountability mechanisms or, at least, affected them significantly had been reflected in the writing of more contemporary scholars (Sutherland, 1991; Pyper, 1996a, Pyper 1996b; Barberis, 1998; Elcock, 1998). As Flinders (2001: 367) observed, the 'challenge....will be to reconcile a complex and fragmented state based around a nexus of inter-organisational contacts with a coherent and workable framework of accountability'. These issues could be viewed more clearly through the experience of executive agencies, which (in theory) allowed ministers to retain responsibility for
policy while devolving a substantial degree of operational autonomy. These changes led to officials being blamed for failure, often in controversial circumstances, the dismissal of Derek Lewis as Head of the Prison Service being a notable example (Lewis, 1997). It has, however, been suggested by Talbot (1997) and Cole (2000) that, in practice, the relationship between ministers and agencies often did not reflect the formal position outlined in the policy and resources frameworks. The establishment of executive agencies could, therefore, be viewed as allowing ministers to retain power whilst devolving responsibility.

The debate about the vertical accountability of British government has also focused on the accountability of quasi-governmental organisations (quangos), the academic analysis of which was concentrated into two time periods: the late 1970s to early 1980s and 1992 to the late 1990s. The first wave of interest drew on the Anglo-American accountability discussions and more populist criticism of the operation and scale of governance through quangos under the 1974-79 Labour administration. The political debate was fuelled primarily by a centre-right critique although centre-left politicians and commentators contributed substantially to criticism about the system of appointments (see Hood, 1973; Coote, 1978; Holland and Fallon, 1978; Davies, 1979; Holland 1979; Holland, 1980; Holland 1981; Barker, 1982; Cole, 1998; Cole, 2005).

Concern about quangos re-emerged in the early 1990s and focused around the notion that a proliferation of these organisations had created a democratic deficit, especially in relation to local governance (Flinders and Smith, 1999), this 'intellectual climate' (Cole, 2000: 34) served as the framework for the 1990s' debate. Concern about a 'democratic deficit' led Weir and Hall (1994) to construct a model of public
accountability that could be applied to a wide range of quasi-governmental bodies. This approach combined governmental institutions such as the Ombudsman and the National Audit Office with the public disclosure of a wide range of information and public access to meetings. Stewart and Davis (1994) argued that the democratic deficit would be diminished if local authorities acquired direct responsibility for many of the functions undertaken by quangos. Hirst (1995) claimed that accountability could be improved by shifting some quango functions to voluntary organisations.

Debates about the democratic deficit and the weaknesses in ministerial responsibility should not/have not obscure(d) the reality that contemporary British government was also characterised by an array of regulatory mechanisms. In particular, local authorities have been the subject of an extensive range of regulatory institutions such as OFSTED, the Audit Commission, the Standards Commission and the Commission for Social Care Inspection and regimes like Best Value and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (Cole, 2008). These arrangements have attracted criticism from academics such as Stewart (2003: 210), who questioned the assumption of 'inspectoral infallibility'. Central and devolved UK governance has also been subjected to a notable regulatory regime characterised by bodies such as the National Audit Office, the parliamentary select committees and the Prisons Inspectorate (Hood, et al., 1999).

There was also a significant regulatory structure to monitor and constrain the privatised utilities. For example, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) regulated those industries, while the Office of Communications (OFCOM) acted as the regulation and competition authority for the communications industry and the
Water Services Regulation Authority (OFWAT) had a similar role in relation to the water utilities.

The traditional vertical accountability has been supplemented with horizontal and downward concepts. Mackenzie and Hood (1975: 44) considered horizontal accountability to peer groups and commented that such loyalty could challenge obligations towards vertical mechanisms. In particular, professional loyalties to fellow experts could often counteract vertical structures and might be a much better guarantee that standards were sustained than 'any formal accountability to a higher body' (Cole, 1991: 145).

Horizontal accountability was also addressed by Day and Klein (1987), in relation to the concept of professionalism in the British welfare state. The profession established the objectives and rules and was 'incompatible with the concept of accountability as a series of linkages leading from the people to those with delegated responsibilities via Parliament and the managerial hierarchy since it brings onto the stage a set of actors who see themselves answerable to their peers, rather than the demos' (Day and Klein, 1987: 19). The medical profession was the classic example of a self-regulating profession. As Day and Klein (1987: 57) observed, 'the case of the doctors provides a neat and clear-cut example of professionalism in the strict, traditional sense of a State-licensed monopoly of expertise and the privatisation of accountability'.

Scholars have also identified the importance of downward accountability to clients and service users, which incorporated wider notions of participation amongst those groups (Hague et al., 1975). In this thesis, the notion of downward
accountability is addressed primarily through literature on consultation, participation and the community appraisals (see below).

The five substantive issues are evaluated primarily in terms of the impact on holding governance to account for their activities, although the sections on external scrutiny and the community appraisals incorporate the accountability of other organisations. There is a close relationship between the notions of democracy and accountability. The former was focused on the issue of where sovereignty lay within a political system and the extent to which such power was dispersed. In contrast, the concept of accountability was narrower and concerned the capacity of the people, audit agencies, peer groups and or their elected representatives to monitor, influence and obtain remedies from service providers. Accountability was a prerequisite for democracy - it would be possible to subsume completely the analysis of accountability within the framework of democracy. That approach was rejected because such a strategy would have risked understating the issue of accountability, which was central to the thesis. Both democracy and accountability could, therefore, be seen as intrinsic to each other but offering distinctive frameworks to illuminate different conclusions.

2.4: The role(s) of local councillors

2.4.1: Ward and divisional representation

A key role for councillors was the representation of their ward or division. While councillors had a specific responsibility to tackle grievances of individual constituents, they also possessed a general role in representing their locality.

Newton (1976) distinguished between trustees, delegates and politicos through a study of councillors and aldermen at Birmingham City Council. Trustees regarded
themselves as a 'relatively free and independent agent who is elected to follow his own conscience'. In contrast, delegates gave 'greater weight to the wishes and views of the electorate' (Newton, 1976: 118). The delegate could 'listen carefully to public opinion in the hope of picking up general clues which might guide his actions', or alternatively s/he could 'seek out a specific mandate and follow orders' (Newton, 1976: 118). Politicos attempted to balance delegate and trustee orientations. Almost half of the sample of Birmingham city councillors and aldermen identified themselves as trustees, while the others divided evenly between the other categories (Newton, 1976: 119). Grant (1977: 23) applied Newton's classification to a sample of 26 predominately Independent councillors and identified 14 delegates, ten politicos and two delegates.

Heclo (1969: 193) observed that there was 'very little policy discussion or pressure transmitted from constituents to councillors'. In contrast, communication was almost exclusively restricted to specific grievances. The member was, therefore, 'far from a delegate representing the given policy view of his constituents'. The councillor had 'considerable latitude in the conclusions he draws from these specific grievances'.

Newton concluded that many councillors emphasised the government of the city as a whole and gave a lower priority to representing their ward. In Birmingham, he found that 40% stressed governing the city as a whole, 30% emphasised their ward role and the remainder noted the mixed ward and city roles (Newton, 1976: 125). Budge and colleagues found that Glasgow city councillors typically stressed their dual role towards the city and their ward, only eight percent emphasised their ward representation role. First term councillors tended to 'endorse ward commitments more heavily than other councillors' (Budge et al., 1972: 88). Newton (1976: 125) also
claimed that the most junior members typically emphasised representing their ward, whilst senior colleagues were more likely to stress governing Birmingham as a whole or possessed a dual focus. Finally, Leach et al. (1986: 58) commented on the importance of loyalties to geographic areas larger than wards or divisions but substantially smaller than the whole authority; they quoted one politician as observing that this 'council is divided by area not party'.

Copus (2006) noted the impact of the establishment of directly-elected mayors on the balance councillors made between the interests of their ward or division and the whole local authority areas. He observed that 'the office of mayor makes it easier for councillors to manage' the tension 'between their political focus on governing an authority area and their specific (ward-based) community responsibility to act as a very local representative'. This effect arose because 'the governing mandate is clearly given to the mayor, not to councillors' (Copus, 2006: 188). Snape (2004: 73) suggested that the wider modernisation agenda had generated a subtle change in the nature of ward or divisional representation through the development of the idea of councillors as community leaders, which obliged them to adopt a wide-ranging focus on their area 'extending beyond the services provided'.

2.4.2: Voluntary groups

Several studies have distinguished between councillors with positive attitudes towards engagement with voluntary bodies and members with a more cautious or negative approach. For example, Dearlove (1973: 126) observed that the Conservative leadership of Kensington and Chelsea encouraged councillors 'to be wary of external groups' and 'to limit their contact' with them. Both Hampton (1970) and Newton (1976) showed that councillors were responsive to voluntary bodies. Hampton (1970:
297) asked Sheffield city councillors about the use of voluntary groups in ‘meeting
new and developing needs in the community’ and concluded that 90% of the
interviewees ‘thought that there were advantages’.

Similarly, Newton (1976: 128) discovered that most Birmingham city
councillors had positive attitudes towards the contribution of voluntary bodies. He
asked members whether they thought voluntary organisations interfered with or
assisted the democratic process and classified councillors as facilitators, resistors or
 neutrals according to their response; 82% of Birmingham councillors were listed as
facilitators and less than an eighth were resistors. Grant (1977: 24) reached similar
conclusions and classified 21 out of 26 councillors as facilitators.

Barron et al. (1991: 178) found even less resistance to the idea of representing
voluntary groups. They concluded that pressure groups which were limited to the
councillor’s division or parish appeared to ‘evoke a clear-cut (and generally
cooperative) response and members were prepared to champion their case in spite of
some occasional misgivings’.

2.4.3: Representing a section of the community and or another local
authority

Jones (1973: 142) argued that councillors had a role in representing sections of
the community to which they felt an affinity. Grant (1977: 77-82) assessed the role of
raternpayer councillors in representing residents critical of the tourist industry in Seaton
(Devon). Leach et al. (1986: 61) implied that ward or divisional representation had
been supplemented by a ‘sectional focus – a concern with particular sections of the
local community’. In general, however, scholars have overlooked this aspect of
representation.
Jones (1973: 142) also suggested that, in a two or three-tiered structure, councillors could have an important role in representing the views of different authorities to each other. Scholars of local government have neglected this activity. Lee (1963: 141) was an exception and argued that the role of county councillors was 'largely concerned with the business of being a go-between', both on behalf of divisional authorities and the standing committees of the council.

2.4.4: Ombudsman

Councillors had a role in handling grievances from individual constituents. This function has been documented in many important studies. As Jennings (1982: 72) argued, casework had become an accepted element of the duties of councillors. Furthermore, as Wilson and Game (1994: 219) commented, many councillors found that casework was the part of the job 'that brings them their greatest satisfaction'.

Barron et al. (1991: 159) also drew attention to the 'positive attitude' of county councillors towards casework. There was, however, a marked difference between the parties; in general Labour councillors had heavier caseloads than Conservatives. The authors argued that Labour councillors were more proactive and inclined to generate casework (Barron et al., 1991: 162). In addition, these authors acknowledged that the different social and economic composition of Labour and Conservative divisions might also affect the volume of cases. As Heclo (1969: 191) had earlier noted, 'by representing many of the better-off areas of the city, the Conservatives have less demand for advice bureaux'.

Scholars also identified a tendency for junior councillors to be the most interested in casework. As Jennings (1982: 70) observed, 'most new councillors do a great deal of casework'. A similar observation was supplied by Newton (1976: 138),
who commented that the councillors with the greatest commitment to individual casework were also likely to be relatively junior members with less than five years service and hold only minor official positions.

2.4.5: Politician

Councillors had critical roles as politicians. All members had a function to balance interests within their electoral area. Tension between the roles of councillors as area representatives and party politicians was emphasised by Jennings (1982), who noted the problems posed for local authority leaderships by councillors with a strong focus on representing a locality. Young and Davies (1990) observed that the 'nature of party control in the most rural areas' could be distinguished from the position elsewhere. Those authorities typically had 'a greater degree of power sharing, with committee and sub-committee leadership roles being played by members of other parties' (Young and Davies, 1990: 24). Since this research was undertaken the committee system has, of course, been transformed, in most authorities, through the introduction of executive and scrutiny structures. Copus (2004) made a substantial study of the impact of the party group on the role(s) of local councillors and asserted that 'it is defending the position of the party group to the public, rather than channelling the views of the public to the council, that takes precedence' (Copus, 2004: 239).

In some studies, the analysis about party loyalty was detached from and served to weaken the main conclusions. For example, Newton (1976) discussed his concepts of delegates, trustees and politicos before evaluating the impact of party loyalty and discipline. His subsequent assertion that councillors often possessed 'a fierce sense of duty and loyalty to the group' (Newton, 1976: 122) reduced the credibility of the
previous distinctions. Newton (1976: 124) also found that councillors of both parties stressed their loyalty to support their group with the 'exception of special issues which affect the member's own ward'.

Dearlove (1973) identified a more rigid imposition of party discipline in Kensington and Chelsea. Although councillors were able to abstain on matters of conscience, 'voting against any committee or party decision in open council is forbidden and does not occur' (Dearlove, 1973: 126). Similar conclusions were made by Alexander (1985: 203), who showed that in the Reading Labour Group, apart from occasional free votes, 'members were expected to defy the party whip only on matters of conscience and then only after receiving the permission of the group'. Copus, surveyed more than 600 councillors and suggested that a councillor's loyalty to his/her ward or division 'must not be overplayed to suggest it can somehow compete with the demands of group loyalty' (Copus, 1998: 223). Furthermore, he argued that councillors were 'reluctant to transfer acts of representation against the group, from the group meeting, to a wider public theatre' (Copus, 1998: 223). The behaviour of councillors altered, therefore, in relation to the theatre of representation.

Leach and Wilson (2000: 56) noted differences between the political parties. In particular, they observed that 'group cohesiveness can be a particularly severe problem for Liberal Democrat leaders'. However, they also commented that when Liberal Democrats won power or obtained a share of power 'the group normally holds together' (Leach and Wilson, 2000: 56).
2.4.6: Policy-maker

Many scholars have distinguished between councillors with specialist and generalist policy interests. For example, Newton recorded that over 90% of councillors ‘claimed to concentrate on the work of one or two committees’ (1976: 131). Dearlove (1973: 125) supported these findings and commented that councillors were ‘more or less compelled to specialise’. Concern with a wide range of policy matters was often restricted to a small group of senior members. Jones (1973: 142) estimated that five percent of councillors made policy across a broad range of areas. Heclo (1969) identified narrower specialisation and claimed that in Manchester the ‘standard strategy is to specialize in certain subjects even within one’s committee assignments’ and that ‘most councillors (70 per cent) had done so within their first year on the council’ (1969: 188).

Newton distinguished between three types of generalists. First, some members with under two years experience were classified as generalists because they had ‘not yet had enough time to decide which aspect of council work they were going to specialise in’ (Newton, 1976: 131). Second, some councillors claimed that their ombudsman role ‘took them into every aspect of council work’ (Newton, 1976: 131). Third, two alderman said that their ‘positions in the majority group required them to keep a watching brief over the full range of committee activities’ (Newton, 1976: 131).

Scholars have also assessed councillors’ preferences for local representation or policy-making. For example, Jones concluded that three-quarters of councillors were ‘primarily representatives’ (Jones, 1973: 142). Newton (1976: 126-130) evaluated whether councillors preferred handling individuals’ problems or broad policy matters;
41% chose individuals’ problems, 26% broad policy issues and 32% said that they tried to mix both. Jennings (1982: 72) speculated that the specialist policy role of most councillors ‘seems to pull the elected member deeper into the structures, away from the public’.

The advent of overview and scrutiny altered the policy role of councillors. Non-executive councillors exchanged, in most local authorities, their direct decision-making input on the traditional policy committees, although this aspect of their job has been retained in relation to full council, for a scrutiny role which combined policy analysis and development with an enhanced focus on challenging executive proposals and decisions and, in some authorities at least, an interest in scrutinising external organisations (see Snape and Dobbs, 2003 and below).

2.4.7: Time commitment of councillors

Many surveys have asked councillors how many hours they spent on their council activities. Results are outlined in table 2.1., which also recorded the type of authorities included in each study. In addition, Bochel and Bochel (2000: 71) surveyed a sample of Scottish councillors and concluded that over one-third classified themselves as full-time members. These results showed some evidence of increasing workloads over time. There was also evidence that county councillors had heavier workloads than those in other types of authority. For example, England’s (1986) separate analysis of English county councillors produced a statistic of 74 hours a month, while Barron et al.’s (1991) survey of county councillors produced the highest total. These findings might, in part, reflect the predisposition of many county councillors to serve on district and parish authorities. Barron et al. (1991: 60) also concluded that women worked longer hours than men.
Table 2.1: Time spent on council business each month

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Hours/Month</th>
<th>Authority Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moss and Parker (1967)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampton (1970)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Sheffield City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinson (1977)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England (1986)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barron et al. (1991)</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>County Councils ²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rao (2000)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4.8: Modelling councillor roles

Some scholars identified distinct types of councillors based on the information obtained from their studies. Lee (1963) developed the terms ministeralist to describe leading councillors and officers and non ministeralist to cover other councillors. Corina (1974: 73) devised five categories. Party politicians tried to 'assess policies and decisions against a fairly coherent set of social values which they had resolved into political principles'. Ideologists expressed strong opinions that could be pushed to 'the point of open and uncompromising opposition'. Partyists placed most emphasis on allegiance to their party and were often responsible for 'overt party division within the committees and full council' (Corina, 1974: 75). Associates were members who, whilst belonging to a political party, had not 'fully identified' themselves with their party (Corina, 1974: 77). Politico-administrators were at the centre of party and council business. They tended to be the most powerful members and often held cross-party views.

Newton (1976: 136-142) constructed a fivefold classification. Parochials combined the delegate, ward and individual problem orientations. They focused primarily on their own ward and stressed their role as a local ombudsman. People's agents shared the parochials' concern with the problems of individual constituents but also regarded themselves as trustees with a responsibility to the whole city or a
combination of ward and city. Policy advocates combined the trustee role with preferences for policy matters and governing the whole city. Policy brokers shared the bias in favour of policy matters and city governance, but considered themselves to be politicos. Policy spokesmen combined the delegate inclination with city governance and general policy preferences.

Grant (1977: 28) adapted Newton's model to rural local governance. He distinguished between policy-makers and parochials and sub-divided both categories to separate those performing the role through necessity and inclination. In addition, his dovetailers category was used to classify councillors who 'see the potential tension between their ward/individual and policy/district roles, but are consciously trying to integrate the two'. Bochel and Bochel (2000) related Newton's classification to their study of the careers of Scottish councillors. For example, Bochel and Bochel (2000: 104) suggested that the rise of 'municipal socialism' (see, for example, Lansley et al., 1989) could be 'equated with councillors who were policy advocates or policy brokers'.

Barron et al. (1991) expressed scepticism about models but identified a distinction between minimalist and proactive councillors. Minimalists stressed attendance at council and committee meetings and attracted little casework. Proactive councillors regarded committee meetings as a relatively unimportant part of their work, except when they could play a crucial role in making policy. In contrast, they thought that their main role was to provide a service to their community(ies). These members 'take part in such activities as attending parish council meetings, holding surgeries, visiting outlying suburbs and villages regularly, putting out ward
newsletters and generally taking a very active part in local affairs' (Barron, et al., 1991: 180).

2.5: Scrutiny

Scrutiny and overview committees were established through the provisions of the Local Government Act (2000), which also facilitated the creation of executive committees and directly-elected mayors in English and Welsh local authorities governing a population of over 85,000. In local authorities with executive models of governance, scrutiny and overview committees were designed, in part at least, to compensate non-executive councillors for losing the main element of their direct-input into the policy-making process through the abolition of the traditional service committees (see above).

Wilson and Game (2006: 116) supplied a useful definition of overview and scrutiny. Scrutiny was defined in terms of holding the executive accountable by focusing on decisions before they were made or implemented "ideally through consultation with the executive, but if necessary through the use of 'call-in' powers, requiring the executive to reconsider its decision; and scrutinising decisions after implementation". Overview was identified in terms of policy development and review through which non-executive councillors were able to contribute to developing policy; examining the implementation and impact of policy; and reviewing broad policy areas. Wilson and Game (2006: 116) also said that overview encompassed reviews of external organisations, through which councillors had a role in 'investigating the work of outside bodies on local communities'. This neat typology was not reflected in the
survey undertaken by Stoker et al. (2002: 46), which found a diverse range of
permutations.

Overview and Scrutiny committees can be viewed as echoes of and as derived
from parliamentary select committees. Ashworth (2003: 1) drew a notable comparison
with parliamentary select committees and evaluated local authority scrutiny through
an analysis of five factors that had been identified as impediments to parliamentary
scrutiny. Copus (2004: 224) also noted similarities between both procedures and
commented, for example, that there ‘is the same attempt to generate all party support
for the scrutiny process, and to emphasise the role of evidence and analysis (rather
than party politics) in the proceedings’.

However, Copus (2004: 224) also highlighted three important differences
between scrutiny in national and local government. First, local government scrutiny
had a more ambiguous role and was required to assist the executive as well as hold it
to account. Second, there was ‘a clear division of support responsibilities at
Westminster, which does not apply in local authorities’. Third, ‘the tradition of
aggressive questioning of ministers and civil servants....has not been given the same
emphasis at local level’. Leach and Copus (2004: 335) established a useful framework
for evaluating the effectiveness of scrutiny. It was suggested that scrutiny could be
‘judged as effective’ if it added value and they asserted that the ‘ultimate effectiveness
test for scrutiny is whether the decisions (or policies or services) which result from the
intervention are better than those which would have resulted had that intervention not
taken place (and been accepted)’. Such an idea was, however, difficult to evaluate in
relation to specific inquiries and, therefore, did not form part of the research agenda
discussed in chapter five of this thesis.
Some studies have generated optimistic conclusions about the impact of scrutiny and overview committees. Snape et al. (2002: 7) suggested that overview and scrutiny was potentially the most exciting and powerful element of the entire local government modernisation process, put councillors 'at the heart of policy-making' and was a 'mechanism by which councillors can become powerful and influential politicians'. Similarly, Coleman and Glendinning (2004) noted that most respondents to a national study were fairly positive about the impact of health scrutiny, while Coleman (2006) commented on the potential for scrutiny to strengthen public and patient participation in the NHS. Many scholars have, however, drawn sceptical conclusions about the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny committees. Leach (2001) argued that overview and scrutiny committees were struggling to develop a meaningful role, while Baker (2000) expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny in relation to education.

Studies generated evidence that scrutiny had little success in holding the local authority executive to account (Ashworth, 2003; Leach et al., 2003). In particular, there was a pronounced focus on pre-decision scrutiny arising from factors such as "scrutiny's lack of 'teeth' or influence, inadequate officer support and the impact of party politics" (Ashworth and Snape, 2004: 544). Holding the executive accountable had been limited 'even in those authorities which have determinedly attempted to undertake the role' (Snape et al., 2002: 42). Leach (2006: 80) concluded that in most local authorities 'overview and scrutiny has emphasised the supportive role, undertaking pieces of policy analysis' which 'do not by any stretch of the imagination involve holding the executive to account'.

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The weakness of the scrutiny side of local authorities could be illustrated in relation to finance. Executives controlled the budget and requests for expenditure on scrutiny 'can easily be refused on the basis that limiting council tax or maintaining front-line services has a higher priority' (Cole, 2001b: 243). Although many authorities had established special scrutiny units they tended to be small and had little influence within the officer structure 'which is primarily geared to the needs of the executive' (Leach 2006: 80). Furthermore, as Cole (2001b: 243) argued, there could be problems in relation to the fact that the staffing of scrutiny with officers seconded from elsewhere in the authority meant that there was a potential conflict of interest because scrutiny might want to scrutinise decisions made by current scrutiny officers or former/future colleagues. As the IDeA (1999: 12) noted in relation to Bury, the scrutiny panels were 'being supported by officers who themselves may be the subject of scrutiny'.

In an evaluation of scrutiny at Devon County Council, Cole (2001a: 30) commented that the agenda was controlled by the majority party political machine. He observed that scrutiny often concentrated 'on activities that posed a relatively minor threat to the power of the executive'. There was a 'tendency to concentrate on relatively minor matters such as tourist advice centres rather than key issues such as the funding of county schools'. However, there was little evidence of formal whipping being applied to scrutiny. Snape et al. (2002: 142) concluded that it was 'rarely the case that formal whipping or discipline is applied to overview or scrutiny committees'. Similarly, Stoker et al. (2002: 49) found that only 9.2% of local authorities reported that a party whip was used 'to control decisions'.

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Party influence over scrutiny and overview committees could also be measured by focusing on whether those groups held party pre-meetings before scrutiny or overview sessions. Stoker et al. (2002) concluded that 39.1% of councils had such party pre-meetings, against 44.5%, which said there were no such gatherings, while 16.4% didn't know whether such meetings occurred. It was claimed that this data 'indicates that parties take a great deal of interest in the workings of scrutiny committees, which could indicate that their proceedings follow the priorities of party politics' (Stoker et al., 2002: 49).

The capacity of scrutiny and overview committees to hold external organisations accountable was also constrained because the government had not given them the power to subpoena witnesses to attend scrutiny events. Scrutiny by councillors of external agencies had, therefore, to be 'a voluntary and negotiated affair' (Copus, 2004: 221). However, two caveats had to be made. First, the Health and Social Care Act (2001) gave 'county and unitary authorities the power to scrutinise local health authorities and opened the door to other such powers being extended over other bodies should scrutiny prove successful' (Copus, 2004: 221). Second, an analysis of formal powers bestowed through national legislation could not reflect adequately the nature of the governance, partnership and policy-making community in each locality. For example, external bodies part-financed or owned by the local authority might have a specific written obligation to supply witnesses and evidence to the relevant scrutiny or overview committee. Furthermore, where such an obligation was not codified it might nevertheless be required to comply with realities of the distribution of politico/administrative power at the local level (see Cole and
Similar incentives not to antagonise the local authority might also act
to compel partner organisations to assist local authority inquiries about their activities.

Stoker et al. (2002: 54) generated some notable data about the scale and scope
of external scrutiny and identified large differences in relation to the type of English
local authorities. London boroughs were 'far more likely to consider non-local
authority provision, which may reflect the complex governance arrangements in the
capital'. The inclination to scrutinise external bodies was also relatively widespread
amongst the counties and the metropolitan boroughs but much less common amongst
unitary and district councils. External scrutiny, however, 'remains a marginal activity'
for most local authorities (Ashworth and Snape: 2004, 550). In particular, it has been
suggested that external scrutiny has been inhibited through concern that this process
'might adversely affect relationships that were otherwise productive' (Ashworth and

2.6 Consultation and participation in the UK

Chapter six focuses primarily on the notion of consultation, which has been
used as the conceptual and linguistic foundation for the study. However, the close
links between consultation and participation and the many references to the latter term
meant that it was also considered necessary to discuss both concepts.

A strong 'rhetorical commitment' (Haughton, 1998: 872) to community
engagement and participation has long been present in UK public policy initiatives. In
particular, this emphasis has been evident in area-based regeneration programmes
undertaken since the 1960s. In practice, however, there have been 'considerable
fluctuations' (Haughton, 1998: 872) in the extent to which such schemes reflected a
community driven approach or, more typically, were the product of a 'top-down' agenda. For example, the Community Development Project and the Urban Programme 'represented at least partial attempts at locally-based holistic forms of urban regeneration' (Haughton, 1998: 872). In contrast, the Thatcher governments, in general, adopted a more prescriptive approach, which incorporated a substantial role for the private sector and marginalised community influence (Pearce, 1993).

Since 1997, the Labour Governments have embraced the idea of 'extending opportunities for citizens to participate' (PASC, 2001: x), which has become an important aspect of the public service reform agenda. As Sullivan and Skelcher (2002: 164) observed, this process involved 'the development of a new political ethos, where citizens are expected to contribute to the solution of key policy problems in concert with service providers and policy-makers'. Politicians and bureaucrats developed a range of mechanisms to promote community engagement and participation in public policy decisions. For example, the involvement of user groups in the provision of NHS services has been extended. Similarly, responsiveness to local stakeholders has been emphasised through the establishment of multi-agency partnerships (Cole, 2003b; Sullivan 2003; Cole and Cotterill, 2005).

Strengthening public participation and consultation was central to the local government modernisation agenda (DETR, 1998). In the white paper Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People, the government, therefore, stressed the requirement to 'see consultation and participation embedded into the culture of all councils' (DETR, 1998: 39). This agenda has been reflected in the Best Value process and the decision to oblige local authorities to subject their new political management structures to a public consultation (Copus, 2003).
The stress on enhanced consultation and participation strengthened a parallel focus on delegating responsibility for decision-making in rural areas to local communities. This approach predated Labour's local government modernisation agenda (see, for example, DOE and MAFF, 1995), but was adopted by the Labour Government and reflected in the 2000 Rural White Paper. That publication observed that central government wanted to give rural localities 'a bigger say in managing their own affairs' (DETR and MAFF, 2000: 146). This approach was also a component of the sustainable development agenda. It was suggested that sustainability depended on the involvement of local people who 'were best placed to identify problems and propose and implement solutions for better services, housing and jobs' (Owen, 2002: 44).

There is a significant academic literature about public participation in the delivery of public services in the UK. For example, Klein and Lewis (1976) studied arrangements for citizen involvement in health decision-making. Similarly, Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker (2001a) produced a census of local government activity to enhance public participation, while Sergeant and Steele (1998) assessed a variety of consultations about specific public-policy decisions. Fenwick and Alford (2000) considered the use of citizens' juries as a mechanism of public participation, while Glendinning et al. (2002) discussed these issues in relation to the partnership agenda.

Scholars have also questioned the reformist focus on and enthusiasm for consultation. Rouse and Smith (2002: 54-5) disputed the capacity of this agenda to be 'genuinely inclusive and representative of community diversity'. It has also been suggested that 'consultation risks merely framing questions that reflect the dominant discourse' (Brooks, 2000: 609). Furthermore, consultation initiatives have been
criticised on the basis that participants were drawn from local elites (Klein and Lewis, 1976; Rao, 2000: 145) and on the grounds that they might raise unrealistic expectations and generate ‘greater dissatisfaction’ (Rouse and Smith, 2002: 55).

2.7: Consultation and participation: definitions

There is a substantial academic literature about the definition of consultation and participation. Gyford (1991: 53) commented that participation involved some degree of ‘sharing in the processes of policy-making and service provision’. In contrast, consultation exercises acknowledged that the public had the right to be heard even if they did not take part in decision-making. Gyford (1991: 53) identified a series of ‘initiatives lying broadly in the field of consultation’, which included petitions, asking councillors questions and complaints procedures. Similarly, Hampton (1987: 127-128) asserted that participation could be viewed as the mechanism through which people protected ‘their rights as consumers of public goods and services; it can be described as the right to consultation or it can involve the full’ concept of ‘people sharing in the processes of policy-making and service provision’.

Arnstein (1971) studied US federal social programmes and constructed a ‘ladder of participation’ based on the extent to which participants affected decisions. This typology identified eight levels of participation “with each rung on the ladder corresponding to the extent of citizens’ power in determining the end product” (Burns et al., 1994: 156). The bottom two rungs related to non-participation, the aim being to “enable power-holders to ‘educate’ or ‘cure’ the participants” (Burns, et al., 1994: 156-157). The next three levels, which included consultation, were termed ‘degrees of tokenism’ and involved public dialogue in which citizens possessed the right to be
heard even if they did not have a direct involvement in decision-making. The top three rungs (partnership, delegated power and citizen control) provided participants with, at least, a share in the decision-making process. Participation was used as a generic term for a wide range of devices for involving outsiders in decision-making. Burns et al. (1994: 162) modified Arnstein’s model and introduced additional rungs. In particular, they distinguished between consultation and cynical consultation, the latter was regarded as non-participation.

Such definitions helped to clarify important theoretical distinctions. In particular, the analysis identified the key notions of participation and consultation and the capacity of agencies to deploy consultation mechanisms for manipulative and cynical purposes. These concepts were, however, subject to some weaknesses. First, the notion of rungs suggests that agencies should be attempting to reach the summit of the ladder, although, in practice, the extent to which decisions should, for example, be taken in partnership with external participants or delegated to them might need to be limited. Second, this literature often disparaged the notion of consultation and suggested that it was a mechanism to allow citizens a limited degree of influence. In contrast, other scholars with a less theoretical approach have used a much broader definition of consultation (Sergeant and Steele, 1998) or implied a wider definition by discussing consultation through the notion of participation (Lowndes, et al., 2001a). Third, the strength of the policy-based definitions of participation was weakened through use by psephologists in relation to elections and voting. In this context participation was, therefore, associated with a minimal degree of civic engagement that was seldom associated directly with decisions about specific issues (see, for example, Rallings and Thrasher, 1997).
Fourth, these models were constrained by an attachment to a definition based on methods. For example, Arnstein's (1971) 'ladder of participation' was constructed substantially on variations in the extent to which different methods affected the capacity of citizens to influence decisions. This approach, however, circumvented the possibility that citizens might exert more influence through methods located lower in the ladder. For example, dialogue methods might enable citizens to have a greater impact than partnership. Dialogue could supply substantial evidence of widespread opposition to a proposal, while the involvement of an elite group of citizens in a partnership might lead to their co-option into the decision-making elite. Fifth, the methods component also caused problems for the analysis of consultation exercises that combined methods at different levels on the ladder. For example, a consultation initiative incorporating one-way communication, such as pamphlets, two-way communication, such as public meetings, and an element of partnership, would be difficult to evaluate through Arnstein's approach.

The discussion about participation and consultation could also be linked to the concepts of horizontal accountability to peer groups and downward accountability to clients and service users. These notions emerged from the Anglo-American discussions held under the auspices of the Carnegie project in the late 1960s (Smith and Hague, 1971; Hague, Barker and Mackenzie, 1975; and see above). These ideas were linked subsequently to form the concept of mutual accountability, which involved a network of interrelated organisations (Barker, 1982). Other scholars chose to emphasise the importance of horizontal or downward forms. Rowe (1999: 100) argued that accountability arrangements must incorporate the 'experiences of users
and citizens'. Similarly, Hood and Schuppert (1988: 254-258) asserted that quangos should be held accountable through a combination of peers, clients and markets.

Participation initiatives have also been linked to debates about the structure and distribution of political and economic power. For example, Diamond (2002) applied a model developed by Fainstein and Fainstein (1982), which concerned the strategies used by local elites in the context of economic decline in US cities, to the UK's Single Regeneration Budget.

2.8: Community appraisals

Although communities have been undertaking assessments of their requirements for centuries, the first assessment designated an appraisal was undertaken in Stocksfield (Northumberland) in 1969. The perceived success of the Stocksfield appraisal encouraged some rural community councils to promote appraisals. It has been estimated that in the 20 years up to the mid-1990s approximately 1,500 appraisals were undertaken in Britain (Moseley, 1997: 197). In the last decade, several development initiatives have promoted the use of appraisals. For example, the good practice guide on Local Agenda 21 'advocates village appraisals as one way of fostering a genuine participative process' (Moseley et al., 1996: 310).

Community appraisals are questionnaire surveys undertaken for and by the local community. They have been characterised as social audits (Grayson and Horton, 1996) and represented an important device for obtaining community views on a wide range of issues. Scholars have identified two main objectives for appraisals. First, appraisals were undertaken to improve certain aspects of the community. As Moseley
et al. (1996: 312) commented, most appraisals were ‘intended as a means to an end, the end being some tangible improvement in the local area, its facilities and amenities, and the life of its people’. As Pearce and Ellwood (2002: 40) commented, appraisals could enable communities ‘to identify their own needs and priorities for future development’.

Second, the process can be regarded as the most important end ‘with the value of enhanced local skills, awareness and confidence outweighing the more tangible outputs’ (Moseley et al., 1996: 312). In particular, scholars have noted the importance to the process of obtaining opinions from people ‘who normally take no part in public life’ (Lumb, 1990: 181). This approach suggested, therefore, that appraisals promoted the community development ethos (see below) because they used the skills, commitment, enthusiasm and resources of local people, were ‘owned’ by the local community and strengthened the capacity of the community to undertake more initiatives. Long-term improvements in the more tangible outputs could be viewed as being, in part at least, dependent on community development. Some scholars have, however, suggested that appraisals had become separated from community development. Lumb (1990: 182) argued that the standardisation of the process had moved the emphasis away from community development. There had, therefore, been a shift ‘from being a process towards being a product in its own right’.

2.9: Community development

Community development has been defined as a ‘process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation’ (Moser, 1989: 81) and was meant to assist people to determine their
own needs (Wright, 1990: 48). Community development could, therefore, be viewed as a process focused on establishing economic and social progress for a locality, with the community’s active participation. As Buller and Wright (1990:12) observed, ‘the fundamental characteristics of genuine development’ were ‘an increased social and political role for local communities in the definition and choice of their own development objectives, and access to the material resources and political means to sustain them’.

Haughton (1998: 874), who focused on the economic aspects of community development, illustrated the scope of this approach. The aim of community economic development was ‘the development of stronger local economies through engaging local communities in shaping their own destinies, taking responsibility for local strategies which seek long term, durable solutions to addressing economic regeneration’. Community development aimed to empower those individuals and transform their capacity to address local issues. This agenda linked with the idea that an important benefit of extending participation in public affairs was that the process enhanced the capacity of individuals to participate (see Mill, 1873). It has also been asserted that public participation strengthened a focus on community because the requirement to express your opinions in public forced participants to adopt a more communal and less self-interested approach (Cohen, 1989; Elster, 1998).

Community development has been promoted as part of the Labour governments’ modernisation agenda. For example, community development was a component of the Health Action Zone initiative and reflected the need to enhance the capacity of local communities to engage with the development of health policy and the delivery of health services (Holden and Craig, 2002). Similarly, ‘time and resources
for capacity building at local level' (Taylor, 2003: 188) has been incorporated into the neighbourhood renewal programmes.

The community development focus also had implications for the evaluation of programmes and projects. For example, an assessment of progress towards community economic development could focus on the 'value of community ownership of assets as a good outcome in its own right' (Haughton, 1998: 876). Similarly, community 'confidence building would also be measured, for instance attendance at meetings of local community bodies, numbers of ideas generated by local community activists which are worked up into definite project proposals, and so on' (Haughton, 1998: 876).

The capacity of such initiatives to empower communities had, however, been questioned by Mayo (1975: 140), who identified reasons for the failure of community development. First, the local groups involved could be isolated and ignored because they lacked 'wider, less fragmented support'. Second, demands arising from these initiatives could be 'met by shifting the problem somewhere else'. In such circumstances community action could 'easily become divisive...the authorities can play off one group against another'. In particular, the process might favour vocal middle-class amenity and consumer groups and disadvantage working-class communities. In contrast, Haughton (1998: 876) observed that there was a widespread assumption that community development activities were suitable for marginalised communities but were 'largely irrelevant to middle-class communities'.
2.10: Social capital

The potential impact of community appraisals on the stock of social capital in a community meant that an understanding of this notion and the relevant literature was important. Robert Putnam’s books Making Democracy Work (1993) and Bowling Alone (2000) combined with a series of journal articles (see, for example, Putnam, 1995a; 1995b) inspired a substantial academic literature about social capital (see, for example, Foley and Edwards, 1998; Szreter, 1998; Johnston and Percy-Smith, 2003; Stolle, 2003). Social capital emerged as an important theoretical foundation for New Labour’s social policy and was ‘used in the specification of a wide range of social problems that New Labour seeks to address including, most obviously, social exclusion’ (Johnston and Percy-Smith, 2003: 322). For example, Brunsdon and May (2002: 63) noted that the need to rebuild social capital was seen as ‘a prerequisite not only for economic regeneration in deprived areas but also for the reconstruction of responsible citizenship’.

The debate about social capital reflected concern about a decline of trust and an assumption that this trend in western democracies had implications for both economic development and political stability. The ‘existence and maintenance of social trust and networks in communities’ (Stolle, 2003: 19) was thought to assist the achievement of important public policy objectives (Fukuyama, 1995; King and Wickham-Jones, 1999). Social capital had been identified ‘as a societal resource that links citizens to each other and enables them to pursue their common objectives more effectively. It taps the potential willingness of citizens to cooperate with each other and to engage in civic endeavours collectively’ (Stolle, 2003: 19-20). Putnam (1993) used the concept of social capital to explain the relative strength of political
institutions in the north and south of Italy. In particular, he related ‘the inefficiency of southern institutions to the weakness of its civic culture’ (Huysseune, 2003: 213).

There was, however, ‘considerable disagreement about the conceptualization and measurement of social capital and its sources and about exactly how and why it is important’ (Stolle, 2003: 20). In particular, there was an important distinction between academics who ‘view the source of social capital as residing mainly in the realm of civil society, centered chiefly on groups of voluntary associations and largely disconnected from the state and political institutions’ (Stolle, 2003: 21) and scholars (see, for example Tarrow, 1996; Berman, 1997; Foley and Edwards, 1998) who argued ‘that for social capital to flourish it needs to be embedded in and linked to formal political institutions’ (Stolle, 2003: 21). This latter group claimed that ‘social capital does not exist independently in the realm of civil society’ (Stolle, 2003: 21).

The idea that social capital was located mainly in civil society was associated with Putnam (1993; 1995a; 1995b), who equated social capital with the extent of associational involvement and participation within a community. For example, Putnam (1993: 167) defined social capital in terms of the ‘features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions’. Similarly, Giddens (2000: 78) observed that social capital ‘refers to trust networks that individuals can draw upon for social support’. Szreter (1998: 5) adapted this approach and emphasised the quality of relationships within those associations.

Maloney et al. developed a substantial critique of the Putnam school. First, these scholars argued that Putnam neglected ‘the role played by political structures
and institutions in shaping the context of associational activity and hence social
capital' (Maloney, et al., 2000: 803). In contrast, these authors suggested that political
institutions had 'a significant role, at least in helping to sustain civic vibrancy and
probably also stimulating its growth' (Maloney, et al., 2000: 803).

Second, Maloney et al. (2000: 803) claimed that Putnam was incorrect in
assuming that 'it is possible to read off the implications for governance from
knowledge about associational activity and stocks of social capital in a particular
area'. Maloney et al. (2000: 803-804) concluded that the impact of social capital on
governance had to be evaluated in the context of the characteristics of each locality. In
response to the criticisms, Putnam attempted to reconcile these two approaches by
arguing that employers, individual citizens, the government, the media and voluntary
associations should combine to increase social capital levels in the USA (Putnam,
2000; 2002 ed.).

2.11: Local boundary reviews

As Railings, et al. (2002: 7) observed, countries with 'single member electoral
districts and/or plurality voting systems need mechanisms for boundary reviews'. This
process was 'formalised over time as the move towards universal franchise brought in
its wake a demand that each vote should be of equal value' (Railings, et al., 2002: 7).
It had, however, also been acknowledged that ensuring that there was an approximate
equality in the size of the electorate in each electoral division was a 'minimal goal'
(Gelman and King, 1996, 212) and that this objective was not the sole factor. In
particular, boundary reviews were also typically required to acknowledge the
existence of distinctive local communities. This second criteria could encompass a
focus on securing representation for certain specific types of elector. For example, in
the USA, Supreme Court decisions reached in the 1960s about civil rights led
electoral boundaries to 'be drawn in such a way as to permit fair representation of
racial minorities' (Reeve and Ware, 1992: 124). This factor facilitated the
construction of some very strange districts, for example Reeve and Ware (1992: 124)
noted the case of New York's seventeenth congressional district, which 'had a voting
age population of 442,000 but in places... is no wider than one block of apartment
buildings'.

In the USA, the allocation of boundary reviews to state legislators allowed
politicians to implement configurations favourable to their partisan interests. As
Gelman and King observed (1996: 212), these provisions allowed 'the possibility of
partisan gerrymandering, incumbent protection plans and other apparently insidious
consequences'. In the UK, these effects were absent because independent boundary
commissions undertook the process of altering political boundaries. In relation to
local government, the main organisation was the Local Government Commission for
England, which was established in 1992 and had responsibility for reviewing local

The non-partisan review process in England had not, however, operated to
exclude the participation, of political parties, which were often involved in the
consultation process and generated proposals designed to promote their electoral
prospects. Submissions from political parties also reflected an internal bargaining
process in which the interests of certain councillors might be marginalised or
sacrificed in pursuit of the wider interests of the party. The attitudes of political parties
towards local government boundary changes could also be influenced by concern
about the implications for parliamentary constituencies. For example, in discussing
the Conservative response to the proposed 1976-77 changes to the wards on
Wandsworth Council, Lucas (1990: 64) noted the importance attached to ensuring that
Putney was not 'more difficult to win as a Parliamentary constituency'.

The review process in England, however, operated to constrain the political
parties through factors such as the primacy given to electoral equality and the
tendency for proposals to use existing electoral boundaries as the basis for new
schemes. Furthermore, officers could warn the Commission about blatant attempts at
gerrymandering, whilst the transparency of the process meant that other groups had an
opportunity to comment on and object to proposals. As Rallings et al. (2002: 172)
observed, "it soon became clear that 'biased' schemes would not be accepted and that
any local authority or political party tempted to put one forward was wasting its time".
Such pressures could generate a relatively apolitical process characterised by a
substantial consensus between the political parties. The key reason lay in the attitude
of the Commission; the more that organisation 'develops a reputation for being hard
to deceive, the fewer will be the attempts to hoodwink it' (Rallings, et al., 2002: 173).

Politicians were also involved in the boundary review process through
participation in local authority submissions. As Rallings, et al. (2002: 97) observed,
most local authorities established working parties to formulate their submissions,
which were often 'member-based, with perhaps half a dozen councillors drawn in
proportion to political strength and including the party leaders'. In authorities such as
Harrow and Kennet those working parties incorporated officers, who were asked to
formulate schemes for submission to the councillors, while in other authorities, such
as Bristol and Lincoln, the process was ‘purely officer driven’ (Rallings, et al., 2002: 98).

The tension between drawing boundaries to reflect a coherent local community(ies) and equalising the size of the electorate in each ward or division had been reflected in the work of the Local Government Commission for England. The Commission inherited ‘bandings of tolerance’ (Rallings, et al., 2002: 47) for electoral equality, which meant that proposals for redistricting should be ‘based on variations in each ward of no more than plus or minus 10 per cent from the average councillor/elector ratio for the authority’ (Guidance, 1996: para, 25), while variations of ‘plus or minus 20 per cent may be acceptable’ (Guidance, 1996, para, 25).

The Commission was also, however, obliged to take account of the ‘identities and interests of local communities’ and to generate boundaries that produced local authorities which were ‘effective and convenient’ (1992 Act, section 13(5)). In the initial stages of its deliberations the Commission decided, however, that electoral equality should be the prime consideration. It was asserted that the “definition of communities and ‘local’ ties was....subjective and likely to be contested, whereas electoral equality - notwithstanding the problems in arriving at accurate base figures – could be measured” (Rallings, et al., 2002: 48). In practice, the focus on electoral equality meant that variations seldom matched the tolerance levels indicated in the bandings. The Periodic Reviews in the urban areas resulted in variances of approximately two to three percent, while in London guidance was issued that the aim was ‘perfect electoral equality, and variances above 2-3% would only be acceptable in exceptional circumstances’ (Rallings, et al., 2002: 49).
This emphasis on mathematical equality could be viewed, in part at least, as a reaction to the substantial variations in the size of wards and divisions in local authorities that had been changed in recent times. For example, in 1993, the year after the Commission was established, the largest electoral division in Hampshire, which had been revised in the early 1980s, was over two and a half times larger than the smallest, while in Northamptonshire 'the largest division contained almost four times as many electors as the smallest' (Railings and Thrasher, 1997: 36). Despite an obligation to consider potential population growth, before 1992 the review process struggled to achieve a lasting parity in the size of wards and divisions.

A similar focus on equalising the electorates was also identified by Rossister et al. (1999: 131) in relation to parliamentary constituency boundaries. Those scholars concluded that in the 50 years after the passage of the 1944 legislation, which established a regular review process, there had been a 'gradual shift in emphasis away from the representation of communities....and towards the equal representation of people'. In rural areas, the demands of electoral equality were to some extent mitigated through recognition of the impact of low population densities on obtaining 'effective and convenient local government' (Rallings, et al., 2002: 49), although the absence of empirical evaluations meant that it was impossible to assess the impact of this factor.

2.12: Conclusion

The five substantive issues addressed in this thesis have been the subject of a significant amount of scholarship. There were, however, notable gaps in the literature and there was, in particular, a need to update the research evidence in the light of the
recent local government modernisation agenda. In the case of external scrutiny and
ward boundary reviews, the gaps in the knowledge base were broader and the
requirement for new research substantial.

The role(s) local councillors had been assessed by many academics and a wide
variety of functions identified, although many of the studies were undertaken over 20
years ago and there had been little evaluation of the role(s) of members in authorities
with executive forms of governance. The debate about local government scrutiny was
substantial and characterised by much scepticism about practice and some optimism
about its potential, although much of the analysis had focused on internal evaluations
of the relevant local authority or the NHS. Scrutiny of other external organisations had
been relatively neglected.

There had been substantial discussion about the renewed focus on participation
and consultation since the election of the Labour Government in 1997. The academic
literature was, however, still in the shadow of Arnstein's (1971) work and there had
been a failure to address adequately some of the weaknesses with this conceptual
framework. Scholars had also tackled community appraisals, both from practical and
theoretical perspectives, although the literature remained small, a factor perhaps
explained, in part at least, by the dominance urban studies has exerted over analysis of
local governance in the UK. There was, however, recognition that community
appraisals could promote both community development and social capital, which have
been subjected to extensive deliberations. In particular, during the last decade there
has been much interest in the notion of social capital, which was inspired substantially
through Robert Putnam's work and has often involved a development and or critique
of his theories.
There was a significant literature about the boundary review process, although much of this scholarship related to the boundaries of constituencies of members of national parliaments or assemblies. Apart from the work of Rallings, et al. (2002), scholars had almost completely avoided the issue of local authority boundary reviews, while even those academics had not focused significantly on the impact on/attitudes of councillors in relation to this review process and or the impact on their activities.

1 Parish meetings are used to govern some small parishes.
2 Total based on a diary kept by councillors. Figures from recall data were different.
3 There were no directly-elected mayors in Wales. Brighton and Hove Council, despite governing over 85,000 people, was allowed to retain the traditional committee system after a proposal for a directly-elected mayor was rejected in a local referendum.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

3.1: Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology deployed to study each of the substantive issues assessed in the thesis: - the role(s) of councillors; external scrutiny; consultations; community appraisals; and local boundary reviews. The discussion embraces semi-structured interviews; questionnaire design; statistical data analysis; and techniques for persuading potential respondents to complete questionnaires. There is also an assessment of the utility of the case study approach, which was of particular relevance for the research on the role(s) of councillors and consultations because the analysis was restricted to one organisation: - Devon County Council. In addition, consideration is also given to more general people skills, which proved crucial at key stages of the process and were of particular use in negotiating bureaucratic politics at County Hall.

3.2: The role(s) of local councillors

The evaluation was based on a series of interviews with councillors undertaken between November 1999 and February 2000. The interviews ranged in length from 40 minutes to two and a half hours. This work initially formed part of a wider study of modernisation at Devon County Council and the same interviews also covered attitudes towards the then new executive and scrutiny system, which had been implemented in 1999, ahead of the Local Government Act 2000, which compelled local authorities in England and Wales governing more than 85,000 people to introduce this model.
The project was influenced, assisted and constrained by its dual purpose – the production of a research report for Devon County Council and academic material suitable for journal article(s) and a ultimately a PhD. The author approached the interviews with the status of a semi-detached insider at County Hall, having been based in the Policy Unit part-time for over a month before the first interview was held. His work benefited significantly from the obvious attachment of the Chief Executive to the research process and high-profile support from the Strategic Development Manager, who was the Head of the Policy Unit and also sat on the Management Board, which comprised the authority’s six most senior managers.

The status and high-profile of the initiative facilitated access to councillors and meant that few members even raised significant problems about the timing of the interviews. The one refusal to participate came from a very senior Conservative member who was known to have a short attention span! The high profile of the project within County Hall also, however, meant that far more interviews were undertaken than would normally be the case in such a study. The author and his manager were worried that if a sample were used to represent the views of councillors those members excluded would complain. These concerns meant that 52 out of the 54 councillors were interviewed. The only other exclusion was a Liberal Democrat who had suffered a serious illness. The sample interviewed in this study, therefore, represented 96% of the total and was more extensive than any of the comparable studies, although some of the other projects surveyed more individuals because the authorities they appraised had more councillors. For example, Newton (1976) interviewed 66 out of 142 Birmingham city councillors, while Corina (1974) based the evaluation of Halifax councillors on survey responses from 80 out of 172 elected
members serving between 1945 and 1966. The high-profile of the project also, however, generated a pressure to meet deadlines, which primarily reflected managerial rather than academic timescales. The interviews had to be completed quickly, the first was held in late November 1999, the last in mid-February 2000.

The interviewing was also affected by the political sensitivity of the issues. Concerns about sensitivity meant that each interview had to be tape recorded and transcribed, although one senior councilor demanded that the tape recorder be switched off and implied that he would only make bland non-controversial statements, which had little value, if his comments were subject to a sound recording. Taping almost every interview, however, substantially increased the workload for a very small quality gain. The author lacked the secretarial skills to transcribe quickly, but in the absence of funds to pay for professional transcribers was forced to transcribe every interview, over 50 hours of interview time.

The success of the interview process depended substantially on the development of strong communication skills. It was essential to use charm to establish a rapport with the interviewee, make them feel comfortable and allow them considerable scope to answer the questions in the manner they desired. It was also, however, necessary to ask each member every question and not avoid asking some members questions that might provoke hostile and critical body language and or comments, such reactions were rare but occurred occasionally. The key skill was the capacity to draw the maximum number of councillors into making candid and interesting comments. Some people came with an agenda, while others were naturally communicative, such people would have given good copy to almost any interviewer. In contrast, two groups of councillors were uncommunicative and added little to the
process. First, some councillors with little influence or evident abilities were unable to add significant insights. Second, a few senior members were instinctively cautious and would approach any interviewer in the same manner a senior politician would handle a Humphreys or Paxman. In most cases, however, the amount and quality of their answers depended on the atmosphere of the occasion and the rapport between interviewer and interviewee.

The process necessitated the tactful handling of some eccentric and or difficult individuals. In general, councillors required a sceptical respect, whilst suggesting a mild empathy with their agenda. It was also crucial not to make enemies because these interviews occurred at the start of a two-year programme and antagonism from any important politician might have led to significant problems with the subsequent projects.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format. Although care was taken to ensure that everybody supplied answers to several key questions, members were allowed a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to their response. For example, one member demanded, and was granted, the right to answer the questions about his role before those on the modernisation agenda, an inversion of the standard format. Similarly, a colleague was allowed to ramble through long and irrelevant anecdotes because his was the only interview on that afternoon and it was felt that such an approach would increase the value of the data.

The discussions covered the following themes, which were identified through a study of the relevant literature:

- Representation of their division or sub-division of the county.
• Representation of a section(s) of their local community(ies).
• Representation of voluntary groups.
• Representation of other local authorities.
• Representation of individuals through casework.
• Impact of loyalty towards the party group.
• Policy interests.
• Relative importance of policy-making and representation.
• Time spent on council work.

The objective was to evaluate the literature in the light of the modernisation agenda and discuss the changing role(s) of the councillor. The study benefited from the lack of many similar studies in recent times and was the first assessment of the role(s) of councillors in an authority with an executive and scrutiny political management structure. Care was taken to ensure that evidence could be deployed to classify each respondent in relation to several issues. For example, councillors were grouped in terms of whether they focused on representation, policy or both. Similarly, respondents were assessed in relation to whether they tried to constrain or encourage their ombudsman workload.

3.3: External scrutiny

The analysis concerned the role of local authorities in scrutinising the activities of external organisations. It drew on the author’s expertise in local government research and, in particular, the evaluation of scrutiny arrangements at Devon County Council in the first few months after the executive and scrutiny model was established (Cole, 2001a). In this thesis, the term ‘scrutiny’ has been preferred to ‘overview’ with regard to evaluations of external organisations despite the definition adopted by Wilson and Game (2006). This approach reflected two considerations. First, many
scholars did not apply such a rigid distinction (see Cole 2001a; Stoker et al., 2002). Second, the term scrutiny had a greater resonance with the prospective respondents; in contrast the concept of overview was not used in some local authorities, might have confused some potential respondents and thus lowered the response rate.

The first stage of the project involved a scoping study of the external scrutiny undertaken by county councils, district councils, unitary authorities, London boroughs, metropolitan boroughs and the Isles of Scilly Council. The survey covered top and second-tier authorities in England, Scotland and Wales; a total of 441 councils. First, each respondent was asked to specify whether the 'scrutiny side' of the authority had completed an inquiry into an external organisation between 1st January 2003 and 31st December 2004. Quangos, other local authorities; voluntary and community bodies; privatised utilities; private companies; professional associations; national government; and regional government were all incorporated within the definition of an 'external organisation'.

Second, respondents was asked whether their authority had a scrutiny committee dedicated completely to external scrutiny; health scrutiny committees were specifically excluded to avoid duplication with a contemporary research project funded by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and directed from the University of Manchester. Third, the questionnaire sought information about the external scrutinies finished in 2003 and 2004. The information requested covered the theme of the inquiry; the committee undertaking the inquiry; the organization(s) scrutinised; the name of the committee chair; and which party(ies) controlled the authority during the course of the inquiry.
The questionnaires were emailed to a relevant officer in member/democratic services in December 2004. Email addresses were acquired from websites and *The Municipal Yearbook 2005*. Officers were invited to respond either via email or by post to the LGC Elections Centre freepost address. Non-respondents received several follow-up emails, one of which was sent by the Centre for Public Scrutiny through their newsletter. In spring 2005, 80 local authorities received at least one telephone call from the author. After a slow start, by mid-January only 26% had been returned, the response rate soared to an impressive 90% by the end of this phase of the project in July 2005. The decision to finish the audit at this stage reflected the conclusion that it had reached a natural end and that attempts to obtain more returns might generate open hostility and perhaps jeopardise future relations with some councils. Four authorities (Broxbourne, Harlow, Mole Valley and Selby) replied but refused to complete a return.

Overall, the process was relatively straightforward. The questionnaire was succinct and the only substantive problem concerned producing a definition of external scrutiny that incorporated all the intended organisations. The most skilful task was telephoning the authorities that had not replied in respect of all their inquiries and persuading a relevant officer that the survey was important and should be completed. An approach that combined tact, sensitivity and charm with the phrase ‘major national survey’ was usually sufficient, although inevitably a few people were difficult or charming but ineffective. Failures were, however, occasional and overshadowed by triumphs elsewhere. For example, a telephone call to Carlisle generated a reply despite the contemporary flooding crisis in the city, which was imposing a substantial
additional workload on the scrutiny officer. In total, the scoping study identified 381 inquiries about external organisations.

In March 2005, a second questionnaire was dispatched to the committee chair of each external inquiry identified in the scoping exercise asking them to evaluate their study. The questionnaire incorporated questions grouped into six main areas: the decision to undertake the inquiry; support for scrutiny; the attitude of the scrutinised agency; the scrutiny process; scrutiny and the media; and the impact of the inquiry. One questionnaire was sent in relation to each inquiry, each mailing specified which organisation(s) had been scrutinised. Where more than one external agency had been assessed, the authority was asked to select one of those bodies and use the experience of scrutinising that organisation to answer the questions.

This phase of the project used a print questionnaire and the postal service; it was thought that sending an electronic copy of such a complex document to politicians would have generated an insufficient level of response. Similarly, questionnaires were not dispatched during the local and general election campaigns for the same reason. Late respondents to the scoping study were sent second stage questionnaires between May and July 2005.

The response to the initial request was, however, disappointing. By mid-July 2005 only 70 completed replies had been received. A follow-up copy of the questionnaire sent via email in late September and early October 2005 raised the response level to 100; the exercise was repeated in November and by the end of the year the total had climbed to 140. In early January, a print questionnaire was dispatched to officers in democratic/member services in the 103 local authorities that
had failed to provide a completed response for all their inquiries. It was thought that politicians who had ignored three requests were unlikely to reply. This trawl increased the total to 185 returns. Another email in late March and early April to officers in the remaining 73 authorities that had not supplied a comprehensive return raised the number of completed responses to 220. Subsequent chase-up emails to May 2006 (51 local authorities) and November/December 2006 (45 local authorities) generated a final total of 238 relevant responses.

Replies to the second questionnaire led to the removal of 11 of the inquiries in the scoping study from the analysis. Some had not been completed or concerned organisations that were not genuinely external; others related to agencies as witnesses not subjects; while the relevant local authority claimed to be unable to identify a few. The responses also revealed that many of the questionnaires concerned inquiries finished outside the specified time-period, typically ending in 2005. It was, however, decided to retain these examples in the study. The time limit was intended as a guide to ensure that the analysis concerned recent inquiries and to reduce non-response due to the scope of the request and the difficulty of identifying earlier inquiries. The substantial loss of data involved in adhering rigidly to the time-period was not viewed as worthwhile.

The data collection was concluded in February 2007 and the quantitative data was entered into two SPSS files, each relating to one stage of the project. The information in both files was also linked to authority type; the subject of the inquiry; the authority's political management arrangements; and political control of the authority. Once the data had been inputted and checked a statistical analysis was undertaken. The first stage involved the calculation of frequencies in relation to each
issue. The analysis was then deepened through the identification of cross-tabulations in relation to a range of issues.

3.4: Consultations

This study formed the second part of the analysis of the impact of the modernisation agenda at Devon County Council. The project started in September 2000 and the research report was submitted to the council in April 2001. The initial idea was to send a questionnaire to every manager that had undertaken a consultation on behalf of the authority and was constructed on the naïve assumption that a list of such people existed. The author was assured that sufficient information was held by Policy Unit research staff to make such a strategy feasible. Unfortunately, nobody at the centre had realised that few officers bothered to comply with policy and register their consultations with County Hall. The list of consultations held in the Policy Unit was, therefore, very short and identified few of the relevant people. Such problems were exacerbated by the imprecise notion of 'consultation'; people were uncertain about whether their activity should be incorporated in the list or this study. The lack of information held at the corporate centre raised fundamental issues about the capacity of senior managers to implement the modernisation agenda and served as a warning to scholars. Studies that attempt to obtain information about the activities of middle and junior management by sending a letter or questionnaire to the corporate centre are likely to generate partial and or inaccurate results.

The lack of an accurate and extensive list of officers that had undertaken a consultation meant that the study was forced to send the questionnaire to 600 officers, whose details appeared on a more general list of managers constructed for training.
purposes. The process produced information about 85 consultations submitted by 81 officers, a substantial improvement on the 30 consultations recorded in the research section's allegedly definitive list. The wide scope of mailing list meant, however, that it was impossible to identify a meaningful response rate, thus the focus of the research was shifted towards interviews. Forty-four officers responding to the questionnaire were questioned about the consultation(s) they oversaw. Conclusions were based on this interview data and supplemented with evidence from the relevant questionnaire returns.

The choice of managers rather than consultees reflected the requirement to obtain subjects capable of supplying information about the process and evaluate the outcome(s). Interviewees were selected to represent a cross-section of areas of responsibility, gender and type of consultation. The survey was restricted to local authority projects and excluded community-generated initiatives such as petitions. The sample of selected consultations, however, incorporated a wide range of methods including customer surveys, staff surveys, public meetings, exhibitions and displays, private discussions with partners/interest groups or stakeholders, one-to-one interviews, complaints systems, satisfaction surveys, consultation documents, focus groups and long-term advisory groups. All of these activities encouraged 'participation in local affairs beyond the traditional processes of political engagement' (Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker, 2001a: 207). There was, however, no evidence of some of the most innovative techniques identified by Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker (2001a: 207). For example, none of these consultations used an interactive website or a citizens' panel.
Each manager had a detailed knowledge of the procedures used and the outcome(s) of the consultation(s) they discussed. Fifty-one consultations that had been held between 1997 and early 2001 were incorporated into the analysis. This evidence was supplemented by the study of documentation from the local authority. The survey covered consultations on a wide range of topics including the historic environment strategy, the transport plan, the structure plan, skips, the special educational needs plan, library use, foster care, the economic development plan, residents' parking, the Barnstaple Western By-Pass, a IT helpline, registration and inspection of care homes, respite care, staff attitudes towards IT, Devon Youth Council and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB).

The interviews were held in the winter and early spring of 2001. It was decided to rely on written notes rather than take sound recordings and transcribe them. The relatively short length of most interviews combined with often extensive supplementary material from the questionnaire and other documentation meant that the substantial effort in transcribing the text could not be justified. This decision was also influenced by the need to generate a first draft of the research report within a couple of weeks of the final interview.

These interviews were shorter than those held with councillors and seldom lasted beyond 30 minutes. There was also less need for tact and diplomacy because the issues discussed seldom had the capacity to generate tension between the interviewer and the interviewee. The lower profile of most officers, compared to most councillors, also meant that the author was seldom able to obtain insights into the actions and personality of prospective interviewees prior to meeting them. The interview programme benefited, however, from the disaffection of some interviewees.
from senior management and or politicians and their willingness to criticise important aspects of the process. The existence of personal agendas and bureaucratic alliances or grudges between the interviewees and other officers and or politicians was a potential concern because such considerations might have affected the answers. This factor was not, however, a major problem. First, competent interviewing, in particular asking several similar but slightly different questions, can encourage the interviewee to refer to such agendas and or office politics. Second, interviewees were promised that sensitive comments would not be linked to a specific project unless they consented.

The interviews had a semi-structured format and encompassed the following issues:

- Relationship with consultees.
- Methodological expertise.
- Co-ordination and the corporate centre.
- Results and their impact.

The interview agenda was constructed from studying the academic literature, reading the questionnaire returns and knowledge about the bureaucratic and corporate structure of the authority.

3.5: Community appraisals

This evaluation comprised the third and final part of the study of the impact of the modernisation agenda on Devon County Council. The research focused on the community appraisal process, which was supported through the Community Council of Devon and sought to identify opinions about public service provision in a range of primarily rural communities.
Initial support was supplied through the Community Council of Devon, which supplied the full text of a wide range of community appraisal reports on their website. Assistance was also given by Sarah Taragon, an employee of the Community Council, who had completed a dissertation on the appraisal process in 1996 as part of a masters degree at the University of Exeter. A copy of the dissertation and the relevant questionnaire was supplied and provided an important starting point for the project. In return, the author agreed not to write to the communities that had participated in this study on the basis that they had already contributed to an evaluation of their appraisal and might not welcome a request to repeat the exercise. In any case, incorporating these areas in the study would have threatened the response rate because the significant time lapse and resistance to duplicating the original return might have meant that few of them would have responded.

Sarah Taragon’s questionnaire was used as the basis for the first phase of the project. However, whereas her questionnaire asked communities to specify the progress that had been made in implementing recommendations, this evaluation decided to ask about the progress made in meeting the concerns raised in the appraisal process. This approach ensured that the analysis was concentrated on responses from the wider community. Focusing on the recommendations would have made the project an evaluation of the extent to which the agenda of the appraisal steering group was implemented. This strategy also ensured that each question covered a significant issue. Focusing on recommendations would have meant that many questions would have asked whether the authorities had been informed about opinions or problems, not whether they had responded to reflect concerns voiced by the community.
Each questionnaire was constructed on the basis of the relevant appraisal report. This approach caused difficulties for comparing appraisals. A standard format would have facilitated comparisons; however there were two substantial problems with this strategy. First, a standard format would have ignored the distinctive local identity of each exercise. Second, there was a significant risk that splitting the structure of the questionnaire from that of the appraisal report would have confused the respondents and diminished the volume and accuracy of the responses. The main section of the questionnaire asked whether concerns raised in each category of the report had been met in full; met in part; investigated but not met; or whether no action had been taken. Respondents were also invited to specify what had occurred in relation to each of these topics, to indicate which of a selection of statements described the outcome of the appraisal and evaluate the extent to which the process had been successful. The questionnaire also asked whether the process had obtained views from all sections of the community.

The questionnaires were sent with a covering letter, a pre-paid envelope and notes on the interpretation of some of the terms to the clerks of the relevant parish or town councils. The clerks were instructed to send the details to a local resident capable of answering the questions. In some communities, the forms were completed at a meeting of the parish council. In one case, these documents were sent to the chair of the relevant steering group because neither the Community Council of Devon nor Devon County Council was able to supply the name and address of the clerk. Elsewhere it was, however, decided not to approach the steering group chair direct because many steering groups had disbanded and some chairs had moved away from the locality. The questionnaires were sent to 58 communities in Devon that had
experienced an appraisal between 1996 and 2001. Although the notion of ‘rural’ is almost impossible to define, the vast majority of the Devon communities participating in the appraisal process would be normally considered as rural. The study did, however, incorporate some urban communities such as Totnes, Sunningmead and Whiddon Valley.

The initial mailing occurred in January 2001; and throughout the first nine months of the year questionnaires were dispatched to non-respondents. Letters, emails and phone calls were also directed to the clerk and other key individuals throughout the summer and autumn of 2001. Several responses were delayed by the outbreak of Foot and Mouth, which meant that some parish councils did not meet for many months. Forty-six questionnaires were returned by the end of the project in mid-October; a response rate of 79%.

The questionnaire evidence was supplemented by ten focus groups/interviews with representatives from the appraisal steering groups, which were held between late June and early September 2001. The communities were selected to cover a cross-section of examples both in terms of geographic spread and type of settlement, although East Devon was not represented because its appraisals had, in general, occurred before 1996. This sample incorporated one market town (Totnes), a fast-growing commuter settlement (Exminster), a small town (Moretonhampstead) and seven villages (Westleigh, Willand, Instow, Horrabridge, Cornworthy, Bradworthy and Tedburn St Mary). The discussions at Exminster and Instow took the form of a one-to-one interview, while at Bradworthy two local activists participated. Elsewhere, the debate involved at least three appraisal participants.
The interview process required the author to establish a good rapport and empathy with the participants, however this objective was relatively easy to achieve. Most interviewees had a substantial commitment to the appraisals and discussed them with enthusiasm. Conducting group discussions was, however, more challenging than holding one-to-one interviews because of the requirement to hold the attention of all the participants for, at least, most of time. It was also necessary to obtain a contribution from everyone with the capacity to advance the discussion rather than merely those with the loudest voices and most forceful personalities. There were also small difficulties such as the dog at Tedburn St Mary and the proud owner who was unable to accept hints, through body language, that when conducting a discussion with six or seven people an interviewer does not want to contend with a dog attempting to overturn the briefcase, which, in the absence of a table, the notes of the discussion were balanced on!

The Tedburn St Mary discussion, which was staged at the home of one of the appraisal organisers, raised the issue of location. Holding appraisals in the house of an interviewee is often combined with problem-free and successful deliberations (Totnes, Willand, Westleigh, Instow and Bradworthy). There is, however, an inevitable reduction of the capacity of the researcher to guide the discussion because s/he has the de facto status of a guest. The ideal location for a discussion is a town or community hall (Mortonhampstead and Exminster) – a neutral location without distractions. Other venues such as a meeting room in a pub (Horrabridge) can also be effective; however staging the discussion in a social and noisy environment such as a bar (Cornworthy) is not ideal. The absence of local knowledge and dependence on the goodwill of the interviewees means that a researcher can usually exert little influence over such
venues. Apart from Bradworthy (which lasted about 45 minutes) the length ranged from between 1 hour and 30 minutes to 3 hours, although the longer sessions, such as that at Totnes, often benefited from a mid-session interval.

The interviews used a semi-structured format and covered the following issues:

- Subsequent progress in addressing the specific concerns raised in the appraisal report.
- Subsequent development of the community and the link to the appraisal process.
- Impact of the appraisal process on relations with the external agencies.

3.6: Local boundary reviews

The research considered changes to divisional and ward boundaries and the impact on local councillors. It drew on the resources and research agenda of the LGC Local Elections Centre, which had already undertaken a major study of electoral redistricting in English local government (Rallings et al., 2002). The key element of the analysis was a questionnaire, which was sent to councillors affected by changes to their wards or divisions. The evaluation covered the decision to review local boundaries; community issues; the process of change; the impact on electioneering; and how the changes affected their work as a councillor. In addition, respondents were also asked to supply personal information about gender, age, occupation, educational qualifications, the length of time served as a councillor; and ethnicity.

The questionnaire was dispatched to 2965 councillors who had experienced a change to their ward or divisional boundaries. The study incorporated councillors for county councils, unitary authorities, metropolitan boroughs and London boroughs and
was restricted to England. The list represented a sample from the LGC Elections Centre's database that incorporated over 12,000 names and had been used for the Centre's previous study of electoral redistricting in English local government (Rallings, et al., 2002). The decision to use a sample rather than the entire database reflected cost and time constraints.

The study used a print questionnaire accompanied with a covering letter and a pre-paid envelope. Print was preferred over an email attachment because a judgment was made that an electronic version of such a complex questionnaire would generate few replies. A 24th March 2006 deadline was specified in order to ensure that a large number of responses were obtained before the start of the local election campaign.

By the deadline over 800 replies had been acquired, returns trickled in throughout the summer. It became apparent that some ex-councillors had been incorporated in the study and that those individuals seldom replied. In late May, with a response level of 920 questionnaires or 31%, it was, therefore, decided that the credibility of the study would be strengthened by removing questionnaires sent to the 115 individuals who were not sitting councillors in mid-March from the analysis. Evidence was obtained from local authority correspondence and the web. The main source was, however, *The Municipal Yearbook 2006*. The list of councillors was compared with the mailing list and names not listed in the book deleted. The methodology was imperfect because the list in the *Municipal Yearbook 2006* was published in November 2005 and compiled in late summer or early autumn 2005. The use of that data, therefore, probably meant that a few people who had ceased to be councillors between autumn 2005 and spring 2006 were retained in the analysis. However, it was likely that the number of such ex-councillors was low because most
politicians depart at election time rather than resign or die mid-term. Data from Railings and Thrasher’s regular analysis of by-elections supports this assumption by showing that the number of local authority by-elections is quite low in relation to the total number of councillors (see Cole and Jones, 2007).

The next stage of the project involved the codification of the questionnaire data and its input onto a SPSS spreadsheet. The quantitative answers were codified primarily between late-April and mid-June 2006. The qualitative answers were subjected to the same process in autumn 2006. This latter exercise added little quantitative data because comments in few of those sections were capable of being quantified to generate useful evidence, although qualitative responses were coded to strengthen the data obtained in response to question seven, which asked councillors to specify how they expressed an opinion about changes to their ward or divisional boundaries.

From mid-October to mid-December 2006 a succession of emails was sent to non-respondents with an identifiable and functioning email address. This correspondence incorporated an electronic copy of the questionnaire and a request to respond. Such persistence generated another 85 responses, increasing the number of returns from 957 to 1042 or from approximately 34% to approximately 37%. There were no hostile or angry replies although the response rate on each email was very low; in the one to five percent range. Whilst valuable, the email follow-up was time consuming and also emphasised the problems of electronic communication with councillors. The experience of this thesis suggests that while sending questionnaires through email attachment is a sensible strategy in relation to local authority officers, in general councillors are best surveyed through more traditional methods and emails.
should only be deployed in a follow-up capacity when resource constraints will not allow another postal questionnaire.

The final work on codifying the data was undertaken in winter 2006/2007 and involved checking the accuracy of the entries, inputting data from the later responses and filling gaps that had been left empty in the initial process, primarily as a consequence of typing errors. A complete data set was compiled in March 2007 and the data evaluated using a range of univariate and bivariate methods.

3.7: Case studies

This analysis has made a substantial use of case studies. The term ‘case study’ is fraught with difficulties and there is no consensus on a precise definition (see Lijphart, 1971; Platt, 1988; Yin 1994). However, a useful working definition can be constructed around the notion that this concept relates to ‘the idea of having cases as the building blocks for data collection and analysis’ (Burton, 2000: 215). Many scholars have regarded case studies as ‘an inferior method of inquiry, being of little use and of minimal significance, since they allowed very little quantification and no generalisations’ (Sarantakos, 1997: 192). The key criticism concerned the issue of representativeness and the ‘extent to which the research findings can be generalised to a wider population beyond the case study’ (Burton, 2000: 224). Evidence from multiple-case studies was, therefore, regarded as ‘more compelling and more robust’ (Burton, 2000: 224). In this thesis, such criticisms are handled through the selection of an authority likely to generate findings with a widespread application.

Case studies have been advocated as “the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events
and when this focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context" (Yin, 1994: 1). Descriptive case studies can be deployed if there is little published research on the topic. If there is a substantial literature on the subject, selective case studies can be used to focus on particular aspects and enrich knowledge (see Hakim, 1992; Burton, 2000).

The selection of a Devon setting for three of the five sections of the thesis and the exclusive focus on the County Council for two of them arose directly from the two-year research project funded by Devon County Council. The focus on Devon can be, however, justified in terms of a number of factors. First, the evaluations of the role(s) of councillors and the consultation agenda were conducted within the context of the local government modernisation agenda and were, therefore, best evaluated through an authority such as Devon County Council, which had embraced key aspects of that agenda with enthusiasm (Cole, 2001a). Second, the county covered a substantial geographic area, had a population of about two thirds of a million and possessed an interesting mixture of urban, suburban and rural areas, although the loss of Plymouth and Torbay in 1998 had reduced the urban influence. Third, this selection helped to counteract the urban and suburban focus of much of the academic literature on British local governance (see Newton, 1976; Alexander, 1985; Hill, 1994).

3.8: Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the work undertaken for this thesis has used a variety of methods, which included an extensive deployment of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study illustrates a wide range of difficulties, which included the challenge of creating two substantial datasets within a specified
timescale; designing questionnaires that were both user-friendly and would generate sufficient and useful data; and persuading non-respondents to return the questionnaire(s) that had been sent to them. This project involved a range of competencies from technical expertise to people skills, which usually meant combining assertiveness with much charm and tact. The achievements of this thesis reflect success in deploying this wide mix of techniques.

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1 Questionnaire responses from the interviewees.

2 Innovative at that time.
CHAPTER 4
THE ROLE(S) OF LOCAL COUNCILLORS

4.1: Introduction

This analysis evaluates the role(s) undertaken by Devon county councillors. The chapter incorporates representation of their division or wider sub-area of the county; voluntary organisations; specific sections of the community; district, town and parish authorities; and individual constituents in relation to their personal problems (Ombudsman role). The evaluation also covers the impact of their party group; their interest in policy matters; the balance between representation and policy; and the time they devoted to their activities as a councillor. These issues are linked to the themes of democracy, accountability and the local government modernisation agenda.

4.2: Divisional representation

Councillors were asked about their role in representing their electoral division. In particular, the questioning considered whether members had a role in defending controversial county policies in their division or whether they would just explain those decisions and the legal and external constraints on the authority’s action. Similarly, interviewees were also asked whether they had a strong focus on the impact of policy across the whole county. The results are outlined in table 4.1.
Table 4.1: Electoral division representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Group</th>
<th>Defend</th>
<th>Explain</th>
<th>Strong Devon Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Aligned</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some councillors had a strong divisional focus. For example, an Independent member observed that obtaining resources from Devon County Council for his electoral division was ‘the most important role of a councillor’. Similarly, a Liberal Democrat commented that obtaining resources for his division was a ‘crucial’ aspect of a councillor’s job. A Conservative stressed the importance of representing his division and commented that he could not recall an example of a Devon-wide agenda ‘where he felt sufficiently strongly’ to support county interests against those of his electoral division. An Independent from East Devon also had a strong focus on local representation and commented that she could not ‘get any closer to the people I represent without causing a scandal......I could only get into bed with them to get any closer’. In contrast, a Liberal Democrat said he did not have a role in winning resources for his relatively prosperous division. This member fought for education and campaigned for resources for specific schools that required extra funds regardless of where they were situated.

Many councillors spoke about campaigns they had waged on behalf of the broad interests of their electoral division. For example, a Conservative member discussed his support for the construction of a Sidford relief road, while a Liberal Democrat mentioned her activities in campaigning against the possible closure of the Exeter to Barnstaple rail link, which served her division. A Conservative from south
Devon discussed his opposition to the Western Valley road scheme that would have meant damaging a unique valley, while a Liberal Democrat from the north of county recalled his participation in a lobby against the construction of a primary school on a flight path. Another Liberal Democrat reported her actions to combat a perceived neglected of one west Devon town in favour of a near neighbour. Similarly, a councillor from the north of the county alleged that his division had been ‘undervalued by Devon County Council for 100 years’. One senior Liberal Democrat commented that initially he focused on his division and only acquired a genuine understanding of the Devon-wide context when the Liberal Democrats formed an administration.

In general, however, there was little evidence to suggest that a significant number of councillors ignored the countywide perspective. These results implied that there was a stronger dual focus on the division and the whole authority than some other surveys had concluded (see Newton, 1976), although these findings were closer to those obtained by Budge et al. (1972). Almost 90% of the interviewees acknowledged a strong attachment to the whole county (see table 4.1). Some members took pride in their wider perspective and drew a favourable comparison with district councillors, who were viewed as ‘parochial’. One Liberal Democrat criticised colleagues who focused excessively on their division for being ‘upgraded parish councillors’. There was also evidence that members acquired a loyalty towards the council. A Liberal Democrat spoke about how she had acquired ‘maternal feelings’ towards the authority. A senior Liberal Democrat observed that councillors ‘have to be reasonable and understand that your priorities are not always the highest in the county’. In contrast, another Liberal Democrat warned against the seductive impact of
County Hall and argued that councillors could become too close to the political establishment and neglect the interests of their electorate.

Although concern with the interests of Devon was widespread there was, however, a distinction between those councillors willing to defend unpopular County Council policies in their division and those restricting this role to explaining policies and outlining the external constraints. Attitudes towards this aspect of their role divided most members along party lines. For example, a Liberal Democrat recalled that he supported the council over its unpopular decision to close the rural skips. In contrast, a Conservative commented that he would support his division rather than the County Council ‘unless their case was daft’.

The response of some councillors could not, however, have been predicted through knowledge of their party affiliation. Two Liberal Democrats expressed a pronounced reluctance to defend unpopular County Council policies. In contrast, some opposition members acknowledged that they had defended unpopular policies of the Liberal Democrat county administration. For example, a Conservative from Ivybridge recalled that he had supported the authority’s decision to reduce the number of teachers at Shaugh Prior primary school. There was also substantial evidence to support the view that councillors had a strong loyalty to a sub-area wider than their division (see Leach et al., 1986). In particular, many opposition councillors suggested that the Liberal Democrat administration was directing resources disproportionately towards its heartlands in the north and west of the county. For example, an Independent who placed considerable emphasis on representing his/her division argued that ‘they are all as parochial as I am’. These allegations were re-enforced by responses from some Liberal Democrats. These members argued that the
disproportionate allocation of funds to those areas was justified by social and economic deprivation and historic neglect by Conservative administrations.

A senior Liberal Democrat challenged the view that the geographic distribution of funds was determined by need. This member claimed that a recent committee chair had channelled a disproportionate amount of funding towards his division. He noted that members with service responsibilities could spend more money in their division because they had a detailed knowledge of 'need' in their locality. In contrast, another senior Liberal Democrat asserted that the sole advantage, as a local representative, obtained by a senior councillor lay in the speed of the decision. Senior councillors from the majority group usually received quicker replies from officers than other members. This conclusion was supported by an executive member, who said that senior councillors from the ruling group had better access and obtained results faster than other members. For example, he observed that when a wall in his division collapsed he was able to persuade a senior officer to sanction a loan to pay for the damage quickly.

Most opposition councillors adopted a more overt and robust attitude towards campaigning for divisional resources. Similarly, there was evidence that Labour members had acquired the role of lobbyists for Exeter. For example, one Labour councillor from the city claimed that resources were being diverted from Exeter to subsidise rural areas. In contrast, a Liberal Democrat councillor from the city commented that he had 'no sympathy with the view that the city doesn't have sufficient resources'.
Some members discussed the problems of balancing interests within their division; the Conservative member for Dartmouth mentioned the difficulties he faced representing a town with a distinct geographic and social division. A Liberal Democrat councillor commented that he focused on the larger villages in his division and admitted that this choice reflected, in part at least, electoral considerations.

Similarly, a Conservative who represented a village and part of a major town discussed his role in balancing the interests of town residents that wanted a by-pass and the residents of the village who campaigned to stop the road being constructed through their valley. He tried to reconcile these differences by arguing that an existing road should be upgraded rather than a new one built. This solution was, however, rejected by the Environment Directorate because the cost was estimated at £300,000 higher. He then supported a new road and argued his case locally. Similarly, a Liberal Democrat from south Devon mentioned his role in balancing the quarrying and anti-quarrying perspective, while a Liberal Democrat colleague backed the creation of a local park and ride scheme despite NIMBY type opposition.

Other interviewees raised the problems of balancing vocal and often small lobbies against wider interests. For example, a Labour councillor from Exeter recalled his support for traffic calming measures on a council estate despite the presence of a small local opposition. Councillors had also been obliged to place opinion in their division ahead of personal views. For example, one Conservative supported the provision of an incinerator in a village, but the strength of local opposition obliged him to present the strength of opinion to the council. He commented that 'there was a surge of opinion that it was wrong, so I had to go along with it'.
This analysis suggested a strong focus on the notion of the democratic representation of a small locality. In terms of Newton's (1976) distinction between delegates, trustees and politicos, Devon county councillors tended towards the delegate orientation. There was little evidence to imply that any councillor could be termed a 'trustee'. The idea that councillors were elected to represent their personal opinions almost irrespective of ward/divisional interests did not reflect the behaviour of county councillors in Devon. There was, however, an important tension between the democratic representation of their locality and a wider county interest. The strength of allegiance to countywide interests meant, however, that the use of the term 'delegate' in relation to divisional representation was misleading in the Devon context. This conclusion also implied that the downward accountability of most councillors to grassroots concerns was ameliorated through a wider accountability to the whole county.

The concern to balance the democratic representation of divisional and county interests also suggested that the government's view, expressed as part of its local government modernisation agenda, that councillors should emphasise 'bringing the views of their community to bear on the council's decision' (DETR, 1998: 25) was only partly reflected in the attitudes of councillors in Devon. There was no evidence to suggest that the introduction of the executive and scrutiny reforms had altered members' attitudes towards representing their division or the balance between divisional and county interests. In this respect, at least, the modernisation agenda had not affected the character of local democratic representation and the downward accountability of councillors.
Opponents of the changes, however, asserted that the abolition of the service committees had reduced their ability to represent their divisions because they were no longer able to place local problems directly onto the agenda of a decision-making committee.\(^1\) Similarly, the initial restriction of confidential information to Liberal Democrats denied some councillors information about important decisions affecting their division, thus weakening downward accountability. For example, the Labour Group Leader was initially denied access to information about plans to sell county-owned land in her Exeter division (Cole, 2001a: 29). It should, however, also be noted that this research was conducted when the new political management system had been in place for six to nine months and before many other local authorities had introduced similar changes.

4.3: Voluntary bodies

Responses were analysed in terms of a modified version of Newton’s (1976) classification system. The notions of resistors and facilitators were retained but the ‘neutrals’ category was dropped in favour of ‘occasional facilitator’, which incorporated those members who acknowledged an occasional role in representing voluntary groups. This change reflected the problem of categorising members who had assisted a few voluntary groups as ‘neutral’. The idea of them being occasional facilitators was a better reflection of the approach of these members. The interviews were also used to identify councillors having a deeper participatory role in local voluntary bodies. The results are outlined in table 4.2.
Table 4.2 Attitudes towards voluntary groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Group</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
<th>Occasional</th>
<th>Resistor</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Aligned</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey indicated that most councillors possessed a positive attitude towards the role of voluntary groups and thus contrasted with findings identified by Dearlove (1973) but was closer to conclusions generated by Hampton (1970), Newton (1976) and Barron et al. (1991). All the members interviewed said that they lobbied the County Council on behalf of voluntary groups and acknowledged a role in obtaining funding from the County Council for voluntary bodies. For example, a Conservative mentioned his work in securing grants for Age Concern, while a Liberal Democrat provided information about his activities lobbying the County Council and Teignbridge District Council for money to repair the roof of a community centre.

Councillors also emphasised their role in supporting wider campaigns launched by local voluntary bodies. For example, an Independent councillor identified a role in supporting the Ramblers’ Association. Similarly, a Liberal Democrat mentioned her work in lobbying on behalf of Dartmoor Access Group, which championed disabled access to the National Park. Most councillors restricted their role to assisting voluntary bodies. Twenty-one councillors were, however, regular participants in one or more voluntary bodies. For example, several councillors were active in residents’ associations and community centres. One facilitator expressed misgivings about councillors assuming a direct role in the day-to-day affairs of voluntary bodies. This member relinquished some existing commitments soon after he
was elected. He argued that he was more useful as a lobbyist if he did not have an obvious interest in the organisation(s) he was trying to assist.

The eight occasional facilitators expressed positive attitudes towards the role of voluntary bodies but emphasised that they seldom represented them. Two members expressed resistance towards the notion of representing voluntary groups. A Conservative said that he tried ‘to keep away from single-issue groups’. He asserted that single-issue groups had too narrow a political agenda and often failed to appreciate the wider community benefit of proposals they were campaigning against. In particular, he mentioned his clash of opinion with opponents of a plan to relocate a local school. Another Conservative expressed a more fundamental objection to voluntary bodies. He commented that he ‘was not a great one for receiving lobbies’. He worried that he might become involved with ‘unworthy causes’ and argued that many voluntary bodies were duplicating the work of the County Council or other voluntary organisations. He also expressed scepticism about the origins of many bodies and claimed that sometimes ‘people with nothing much to do set things up and then ask for grants of money to keep them going’.

This survey suggested that the representation of voluntary groups had evolved, despite some scepticism, into an integral and regular component of the local democratic process, although a minority of councillors showed reluctance to embrace fully this concept of local representation. This characteristic of democratic representation can also be seen as an expression of the horizontal and downward accountability of elected local politicians. The role evolved before the emergence of the local government modernisation agenda, although the increasing use of partnerships between local authorities and the voluntary sector might have contributed to this trend.
and strengthened this form of local accountability since winter 1999/2000 when these interviews were held. The evidence from these interviews showed, nevertheless, that the attitude of most Devon county councillors towards voluntary organisations reflected the approach promoted by the local government modernisation agenda.

4.4: Representing sections of the community

Most members said that they represented everybody in their division and were reluctant to specify a priority group. In total, five councillors mentioned a role in representing a distinctive group of constituents and thus reflected conclusions reached by academics, such as Jones (1973) and Leach et al. (1986), that some councillors focused on the representation of distinctive groups of constituents. For example, an executive member mentioned her role in representing the large-number of low-income retired constituents in her division. She emphasised the role of a councillor as 'a tool of social inclusion'. Similarly, another Liberal Democrat said that he had a focus on representing the interests of long-standing residents, many of whom were elderly, and expressed an implicit scepticism bordering on hostility towards the influence of recent incomers. A Conservative admitted that he sought to champion the countryman’s viewpoint. He argued that a crucial part of his job was the promotion of the countryside as a living and economically viable community. This emphasis led him to oppose the authority’s decision to import Irish beef to use in school meals.

These findings suggested that, for some councillors, the notion of democratic local representation incorporated an emphasis on, or even bias towards, the representation of specific types of constituents and an enhanced focus on the issues/problems that had the greatest resonance with them. The downward
accountability of these members was, therefore, strongest in relation to certain
favoured groups. This issue did not relate directly to the local government
modernisation agenda, although it is doubtful whether a disproportionate focus on
certain types of constituent was within the spirit of the government’s aim that
councillors should become ‘a champion of their community’ (DETR, 1998: 34).

4.5: Representing other local authorities

In Devon most councillors representing divisions outside Exeter, which did
not possess a third-tier of elected local governance, had close links with their town
councils, parish councils and parish meetings. Many councillors tried to attend every
one of these gatherings, although meetings of different third-tier authorities often
clashed. In the most sparsely populated areas there were over 20 third-tier authorities
in each division. For those county councillors, attendance at such meetings and the
representation of third-tier local authorities involved a substantial time commitment.

Many county councillors presented a county report to these gatherings. County
councillors used these occasions to keep in touch with grassroots’ opinion on
community issues and acquire personal casework. In addition, county councillors were
used as a source of expert advice about county responsibilities. For example, a former
chair of planning noted that she had given a parish council advice about its response to
the County Council’s structure plan.

Members serving as county representatives on joint authorities also had a role
in representing the views of those authorities to the County Council. One member
who had served on the Flood Authority recalled how personal experience of flooding
led her to vote against county policy and support an increase in the authority’s budget.
That defiance of the county mandate led to her prompt replacement as a county representative on that organisation.

There was a more substantial division of attitudes over the extent to which county councillors represented the views of their district authority to the County Council. In particular, attitudes were affected by the significant number of councillors serving on both county and district authorities. Councillors were asked whether they lobbied on behalf of their district council. Table 4.3 records the number of councillors that acknowledged a role in representing their district authority at County Hall.

Table 4.3: Role in representing the views of their district council to the county

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Represent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lib Dem</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Aligned</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
<td><strong>67.3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis showed that over two-thirds of county councillors acknowledged a role in representing the views of their district authority at County Hall. Predictably, the proportion of sitting district councillors in this category was higher than the percentage of county members without a dual mandate. Whilst 20, almost three-quarters, of the 27 members with both county and district seats acknowledged a role in lobbying the County Council on behalf of their district, only 60% of those without a district seat had a similar perception of their role. These findings offered, therefore, some support to the opinions of scholars such as Lee (1961) and Jones (1973), who identified this form of representation. The implied focus on community inherent in this notion of representation implied a link with the local government modernisation agenda. Similarly, co-operation with other local authorities can also be linked to the
partnership approach (see Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002), which has been advocated as part of local government modernisation.

The study also revealed variations in the manner in which district council views were promoted at county level and five distinct models of behaviour were identified: geographic; political; community; single-decision; and campaign.

4.5.1: Geographic model

County councillors and the district council have the common aim of fighting for their area of the county. This model is dependent on county councillors possessing a strong sense of loyalty to their division, their district or a wider sub-unit of the county and having a relatively weak attachment to countywide interests. Often this agenda can arise from a perception that the County Council has diverted resources to more favoured areas.

4.5.2: Political model

Campaigning arose substantially as a consequence of the political affiliations of the county councillor and the district authority and a more politically partisan agenda. Loyalty towards the Conservative administration and a natural convergence of views often led the Conservative county councillors from East Devon to support the district against the Liberal Democrat administration at County Hall. In particular, Conservative county councillors from that area were concerned to protect the finances of the district council from incursions by the Liberal Democrat county administration, which they regarded as extravagant and incapable of controlling its expenditure. This model was re-enforced where county councillors belonged to the ruling district party
group(s). For example, in East Devon five of the six Conservative county councillors also held office as district councillors.

4.5.3: Community model

County councillors lobbied with the districts on specific matters important to their community. This approach stressed a natural convergence of views and interests rather than a conscious decision to promote the views of the district council. For example, one councillor noted a convergence of views with the district authority over local flood defence provision. This approach differed from the geographic model because the agenda was usually smaller scale and arose through a relatively narrow and specific set of grievances. The objective was to solve a problem relevant to a relatively small geographic area rather than assist a more substantial campaign to win resources for the district.

4.5.4: Single-decision model

County councillors supported districts over specific decisions or policies. This approach contrasted with the community model because the issues were relevant to a wider geographic area and with the geographic model because the campaign was based on a convergence of opinion on one issue and was not part of a wider agenda. These alliances also resulted from a conscious decision to agree rather than emerged as a consequence of the obligation to respond directly to constituents' grievances. The decision of a senior Liberal Democrat county councillor to support his Conservative controlled district authority over borrowing provisions was an example of this type of relationship.
4.5.5: Campaign model

County members were involved directly in a district led or district supported campaign. County members were more active participants and collaborators than under the other models. This approach was recommended by a member who argued that attracting funds into an area often depended on establishing a team of campaigners representing a variety of interests. In addition, these campaigns were relevant to the whole district rather than a smaller geographic area. The campaign model also concerned collaboration on one campaign and did not assume that the county councillors had a primarily ‘parochial’ focus. This approach was, therefore, compatible with the retention of a strong interest in the wider concerns of the whole county.

The analysis also, however, revealed substantial tensions between some county and district councillors. In Exeter, frustration about the city’s failure to obtain unitary status and suspicion of County Hall led many Labour city councillors to regard even Labour county councillors from the city with suspicion. Similarly, the failure of North Devon’s attempts to acquire unitary status had strained relations between some Liberal Democrat county councillors and their district colleagues. One county councillor commented that he would never regard the leader of North Devon district council as ‘a friend again’.

4.5.6: Democracy and accountability

These findings in relation to the willingness of councillors to represent other local authorities suggested a significant institutional component in the notion of democratic representation accepted by many Devon county councillors. In practice, however, this focus was often blurred or even obscured by a convergence of opinion
which was not grounded in a desire or obligation to represent the views of a specific local authority but which emerged because both the county councillor and the local authority(ies) were representing the same geographic areas and championed the same grassroots agenda. In addition, the intensity and regularly of this institutional component was affected by political and personal relations.

The strongest institutional element lay in the relationship between most county councillors and town councils, parish councils and parish meetings in their divisions. Reflecting opinions expressed at such forums was seen by most county councillors as an integral part of their wider role in the democratic representation of their community(ies), which was, of course, a key component of the local government modernisation agenda. The role of town councils, parish councils and parish meetings in reflecting and communicating community concerns and attitudes meant that county councillors could also be seen as being accountable to them as part of their wider downward accountability to the community.

Although informal accountability to a district authority could be exerted through organisations such as local political parties, formal accountability mechanisms between county councillors and their district authorities were, however, weak and, in general, restricted to participation in joint-committees, boards or partnerships. In such instances, institutional representation would, however, be confined to a few functions and focus on the partner organisation rather than directly on the district authority. In general, a formal notion of the accountability of county councillors to district authorities was restricted to those county councillors who also sat on a district council and was often confined to their activities as a district councillor.
4.6: Ombudsman function

Quantification of the volume of individual problems handled by members was difficult. In particular, questions about the number of the letters received failed to reflect the volume of work accurately. First, some members received many requests by telephone; this method was popular with lower-income groups. Second, executive members received many letters about their service responsibilities. Third, some requests arrived through email or were acquired by attending town councils, parish councils or parish meetings. Many members also had difficulty distinguishing between personal grievances and larger issues and or quantifying the number of cases they handled. There was, however, evidence to suggest that the ombudsman workload of councillors varied substantially.

In particular, several councillors from Exeter argued that city divisions generated a relatively low volume of personal requests. For example, a Liberal Democrat from Exeter said that he had no more than four or five cases a month and advised the interviewer to treat claims from colleagues that they had substantial levels with scepticism. Another Liberal Democrat member from Exeter received about 12 cases each month and had failed in attempts to increase the volume of casework. However, although four Exeter members argued that city divisions generated little casework, the other five councillors recorded more substantial caseloads.

This contrast implied that enthusiasm towards casework could be a crucial determinant of volume. Many councillors were proactive and tried to generate casework. A Conservative from North Devon took pride in being accessible to her constituents. She advertised a contact phone number, fax and email address in every post office and received eight to ten telephone calls per day. In contrast, a Liberal
Democrat from Teignbridge placed a relatively low priority on casework. He commented that he focused on ‘major issues’, such as the provision of respite care for a disabled constituent, but was less concerned about resolving minor matters such as overhanging hedges.

The analysis did not support the views of scholars such as Newton (1976) that junior councillors had a greater involvement in casework. In contrast, there was evidence that long-standing councillors attracted more casework than more recent members. Many long-standing members had acquired a high profile and a reputation for solving problems. Several of these councillors mentioned that people approached them with personal problems whilst they shopped at weekends. Others spoke about a regular stream of telephone calls and the willingness of constituents to contact them on Sundays and Bank Holidays.

The study offered some support for the notion that Conservative councillors were, in general, less interested in the ombudsman role than their political opponents (Heclo, 1969; Barron et al., 1991). Councillors were classified according to whether they tried to contain or increase casework. For example, councillors who cultivated their reputation as a local problem-solver and advertised their services widely were classified as attempting to increase their ombudsman workload. In contrast, members who waited for constituents to contact them; had a relatively low profile in their division; and made relatively little effort to communicate with their constituents were classified as containing their ombudsman workload. The results are shown in table 4.4.
The analysis showed that almost two-thirds of the Conservative councillors did not seek to add to their ombudsman workload. In contrast, all the Independents and Liberals and over half of the Liberal Democrats adopted a more proactive approach, Labour members divided equally between the two categories and were not as proactive as the literature suggested.

Table 4.4: Attitude towards the ombudsman role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Group</th>
<th>Contain</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Aligned</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Councillors dealt with a wide range of issues. In the towns, traffic concerns were prominent. In the rural areas, appeals over school transport costs were often of key importance. Throughout the county appeals over school selection and social service issues were important. Many councillors with a combined county and district membership also had a substantial volume of housing and planning cases. Councillors could, however, deal with a wide range of problems. A Conservative commented that he had enabled a constituent to circumvent the regulations and plant flowers on a common grass area outside his house. Many members emphasised their duty to represent their constituents on personal problems regardless of the strength of their case. Attitudes varied over the extent to which they should explain to people with weak cases that they were unlikely to be successful. Some councillors stressed the importance of openness and that this approach was crucial in establishing trust and respect. In contrast, a minority of members thought that it was often easier to act as a channel and pass weak cases to officers without commenting on the probability of success.
The results of this study suggested that enthusiasm for this aspect of the job was mixed. Whilst many councillors received considerable satisfaction from casework, some members focused primarily on other aspects of their job. The government’s emphasis on councillors bringing their constituents’ ‘views, concerns and grievances’ (DETR, 1998: 34) to local authorities suggested, however, that the approach adopted by a substantial minority of councillors was not compatible with the modernising agenda. Similarly, there was no evidence to suggest that the establishment of the executive and scrutiny model had led councillors to increase their ombudsman workload, although drawing clear conclusions from this evidence was difficult because the interviews were conducted early in the modernisation process.

This section illustrated the importance attached to the democratic representation of specific individuals and their concerns/problems by many county councillors. It also, however, identified notable variations in relation to the intensity of this effort amongst councillors and showed that the application of this form of democratic representation could vary markedly between neighbouring and similar divisions. In particular, there was a split between proactive councillors who saw democratic representation in terms of locating such casework and more reactive councillors who did not think that they had an obligation to encourage constituents to raise individual problems with them and, therefore, sought to contain or minimise this aspect of their representational role.

In relation to accountability, this section identified two key themes. First, downward accountability to constituents incorporated an obligation to handle and, at least, attempt to solve or ameliorate problems and concerns specific to an individual or a small friendship or family group; an obligation that was modified in relation to
weak cases. Second, the extent and interpretation of this aspect of downward accountability could vary markedly depending on the manner in which different councillors interpreted their role(s).

### 4.7: Party groups

In general, councillors denied that the party group constrained their activities as a local representative. Some councillors commented that their party affiliation had helped them resolve divisional issues. For example, a Conservative councillor first elected as an Independent, claimed that Independents were isolated and ineffective. A Conservative from the east of the county discussed how membership of the Conservative group has assisted him, during the 1989-1993 Conservative administration, in ensuring that respite care facilities were retained after a residential home closed.

Liberal Democrats emphasised that they were able to abstain on issues of conscience and divisional matters. Public dissension from the party group position was, however, rare and often a reflection of the electoral realities of specific division(s). For example, two councillors had been allowed to oppose publicly the building of new settlements in their divisions. Such public opposition was, however, dependent on the agreement of the party whip and forbidden unless the leadership was certain that they retained majority support on the relevant issue.

Liberal Democrat opposition to their leadership’s policies was normally restricted to private meetings. Several councillors said that they combined loyalty and tough scrutiny in private meetings. One councillor described his style as that of an ‘awkward loyalist’. A colleague observed that ‘heated argument and intense
discussion do take place, but......secretly’ and said that ‘no public dissension must be seen’. Another Liberal Democrat member suggested that although backbenchers were often allowed to discuss issues they were ‘meant to agree with decisions already taken by the leadership’ and that debate in party group meetings seldom changed leadership decisions. In particular, this member argued that the group should devote more time to debating the authority’s expenditure. At present, non-executive councillors were asked to ratify the total level of expenditure but there was little discussion about the distribution of spending between different areas and projects. These comments about the political culture of the Liberal Democrat Group received support from a colleague, who observed that non-executive Liberal Democrats were ‘expected to be restrained when criticising the party leadership, even in private meetings’.

Councillors who opposed group decisions in public without the agreement of the whip indicated that colleagues had viewed such independence as unacceptable. For example, councillor Brian Berman, a Liberal Democrat member who had voted against reductions in education expenditure and the removal of external representatives from the education committee, recorded that he was subsequently sacked from a sub-committee and observed that the subsequent year was a ‘difficult year for me within the group’. Similarly, Lesley Whittaker discussed how public opposition to policy on school transport led to her resignation from the Liberal Democrat Group.

Conservative and Labour politicians also stressed the opportunities to dissent from the party whip on matters relating to their divisions. However, few councillors recalled voting against the party line or even abstaining. For example, only one Conservative discussed a specific example of voting against or abstaining on
decisions taken by his party group. However, his vote against the plans of a previous Conservative administration in relation to unitary status did not result in a formal reprimand. Overall, Labour and Conservative interviewees argued that their groups were naturally more cohesive and united than the Liberal Democrats. In particular, the small size of the Labour group and the fact that all its members represented Exeter ensured its cohesion. The Non-Aligned group (NGA) had no whip so the two Liberal and four Independent councillors were not constrained by group loyalty or discipline.

The evidence suggested that both Labour and the Conservatives had a greater culture of unity than the Liberal Democrats. The Liberal Democrat Group also contained a greater diversity of views, while many Liberal Democrat councillors had a pronounced centre-left focus; some, in particular those in leadership positions, were regarded as being on the right of the party. Political opponents considered several to be right-of-centre politicians whose association with the Liberal Democrats could be explained largely through local political circumstances. One executive member described himself as a traditionalist and acknowledged that Conservative councillors regarded him as a Conservative. A Liberal Democrat from the left of the party implied concern about the centre-right political inclinations of some in leadership positions and commented that he was motivated by the aim of ensuring that the administration operated on the centre-left of the political spectrum. A colleague asserted that ‘many policies aren’t Liberal Democrat enough’ and implied that he considered the leadership’s agenda to be too far towards the political centre-right. In particular, he criticised the selling of county-owned farms, which enabled young people with little capital to become established in agriculture. A senior Liberal Democrat councillor
from the left of the party claimed that the group was ‘centre-right in terms of the party’.

The Liberal Democrat Group was also divided in terms of a north-south split. Politicians from the north of the county dominated the leadership. Examples included the leader Brian Greenslade (Barnstaple North), the whip Mervyn Lane (Bideford) and the executive member for community development Mike Knight (Combe Martin Rural). In contrast, although eight Liberal Democrats represented south Devon seats only one of those councillors sat on the executive committee and he had a relatively junior job. The position of south Devon within the Liberal Democrat Group had been weakened by the loss of members from Torbay in 1998 when the district council acquired unitary status. These geographic divisions and the obligation to defend unpopular decisions generated tensions within group. The Liberal Democrat Group also contained more individualists with a strong focus on a small range of issues. One Liberal Democrat councillor commented that ‘there were too many mavericks with their own agendas.....if they don’t get their own way they cause trouble’. Public dissension was, however, only marginally more substantial than in the Conservative and Labour groups.

Influence within the Liberal Democrat Group also reflected informal networks of trust and there was a distinct ‘in-crowd’, which before the establishment of the executive committee in May 1999 was not necessarily related to formal positions held. When the executive was established the key members of the ‘in-crowd’ assumed the main roles. It was alleged that this clique was a reflection of the geographic location of their divisions, friendship, family links and longevity of service; and was ‘out-of-
proportion to ability'. One councillor commented that 'some people were listened to
and others rubbished'.

There was also evidence that loyalty to the Liberal Democrat Group was
constraining the scrutiny committees. First, the Liberal Democrats took all the chairs
and vice-chairs. Second, the group leadership tried to impose its own agenda on the
scrutiny committees. For example, the main inquiry undertaken by Environment
Scrutiny during its first year concerned the budget for the county's roads; an issue that
had emerged from the agenda of the relevant chief officer and executive member.
Similarly, a scrutiny chair commented that 'there is a degree of caution within the
group at the moment about how far scrutiny should go. I think they (the executive)
want to keep control of it'.

The Devon analysis confirmed some of the conclusions from the other studies.
In particular, this chapter has re-enforced conclusions about the importance of the
party group in local representative democracy generated by scholars such as Newton
(1976), Alexander (1985) and Copus (1998, 2004). Similarly, the study supported
Leach and Wilson's (2000) conclusions about the cohesion of Liberal Democrat party
groups. The analysis also confirmed conclusions about the relationship between
loyalty towards the party group and loyalty towards divisional interests; and behaviour
in different theatres of representation (Copus, 1998). This model implied that
accountability towards party colleagues, which could be interpreted in terms of
vertical or horizontal directions, was usually the prime focus of a councillor's
accountability obligation and would normally prevail over the need to be accountable
to other groups such as community organisations, voluntary associations, town
councils or widespread local opinions. Exceptions were rare, often sanctioned by the
whips and generated typically through fear of the electoral consequences in that division if the member was held to the party line.

The evaluation also, however, showed that the power of the party group could be deployed to strengthen the capacity of some councillors in leadership positions to represent their division, district or wider sub-area of the county. In Devon, the party group acted to strengthen the position of Liberal Democrats from the north of the country who were, therefore, able to draw on this notion of representative democracy to shift resources towards their areas. In effect, the party group operated to promote the democratic representation of some localities at the expense of areas whose democratic representatives had much less political clout.

4.8: Policy

Councillors were asked whether they were interested in a broad range of policy areas or specialised in a few aspects of policy. The findings are outlined in table 4.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Group</th>
<th>Specialised</th>
<th></th>
<th>Broad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Aligned</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost two-thirds of members maintained a broad range of policy interests.

There was no evidence of councillors in the process of deciding on specialist agendas. However, this conclusion might have been affected by the timing of the interviews, which were held late in the electoral cycle. Only one councillor had served for substantially less than two years. Overall, the analysis implied that since the earlier
studies quoted in this thesis (see Heclo, 1969; Dearlove, 1973; Newton, 1976; Jennings, 1982) there had been a shift in emphasis from a specialist to a wide-ranging policy focus.

The notion that senior councillors in the majority political group needed to acquire broad interests `to keep a watching brief over the full range of committee activities' (Newton, 1976: 131) was an important factor in determining the focus of one very senior councillor and probably affected the attitude of another member with a leadership role. There was, however, little evidence to suggest that seniority was a crucial factor. For example, the Executive Committee contained six members with broad interests and four who stressed a narrow focus: a split that reflected closely the proportions on the whole council.

Councillors with broad policy interests cited two key reasons. First, some members argued that they had to obtain knowledge of a wide range of subjects to be effective local representatives. For example, a member of the Non-Aligned Group emphasised that his/her parochial style of representation depended on having broad policy interests. Some councillors viewed specialisation as breaking faith with their constituents and as incompatible with a genuine commitment to divisional representation. One Non-Aligned Group councillor commented that `specialisation brings the risk that you won’t be sufficiently briefed to help constituents'. Second, Independent and Liberal councillors said that they had to acquire broad policy interests because they did not belong to a political group with spokespeople for specific areas. Similarly, Labour councillors claimed that the small size of their group meant that they had to take an interest in a wide range of policy issues.
Councillors emphasising narrow areas of policy were concentrated in the ruling Liberal Democrat Group. It was asserted that the only way to make an effective contribution was to specialise and that too many councillors focused on too wide a remit. There was also some evidence of individuals standing for election to further a specific set of policy objectives. For example, a Liberal Democrat observed that he had stood to further his environmentalist agenda. Specialists also argued that concentrating on a narrow range of policy issues did not impair the service given to their constituents because they could consult specialist colleagues or council officers on other issues. For example, a Liberal Democrat without expertise in social services commented that he passed divisional inquiries in this area direct to senior officers.

Councillors were also asked whether their main interest lay in representing their division, considering wider policy issues or if they had a dual focus on policy and representation. The results are shown in table 4.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Group</th>
<th>Represent %</th>
<th>Policy %</th>
<th>Dual %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>67.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Aligned</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>61.5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to earlier studies (see, for example, Jones, 1973; Newton, 1976), most councillors were reluctant to specify a preference for policy or representation. Although several members said that representing their electoral division was their first priority, this statement was often a reflection of the order in which they performed their duties rather than an appraisal of the relative value they placed on them. In
general, councillors thought that local representation and focusing on a wider policy agenda were both important aspects of their job.

Many members argued that representing constituents and influencing wider policy issues were dependent not on competitive roles and that effective representation depended on involvement with wider policy issues. For example, a Liberal Democrat councillor argued that the grievances of individual constituents often had policy implications. Solutions to individual problems might, therefore, lead members to campaign against specific council policies. Similarly, a Conservative argued that councillors used their constituents to assess support for, and the effectiveness of, policies. Another Liberal Democrat claimed that he represented his constituents within the context of his party policies. He used party policies to promote the interests of his division. Some councillors stressed the impact of county-wide policies on their locality and argued that focusing on small-scale local grievances to the exclusion of wider issues did not constitute effective local representation.

Less than a quarter of the sample emphasised their role as local representatives. This group was composed primarily of councillors excluded from a significant policy role. Nine of these councillors were opposition members, including three Independent councillors. Without the support of a party machine to deliver a Devon-wide policy programme or co-ordinate local election campaigns, Independents depended on establishing a reputation as champions of local concerns and grievances. Labour and Conservative councillors also highlighted the importance of local representation to electoral success. A Conservative representing a division without typical Conservative social and economic characteristics said that his emphasis on the representational role reflected electoral reality. Conservative and Labour members
also recognised that the Liberal Democrat administration had the main role in
determining policy and argued that, at present, they could have more impact as
divisional representatives.

Three Liberal Democrats indicated that their focus was concentrated primarily
on their division. Two of these members were backbench councillors with little
influence over policy decisions. For example, one Liberal Democrat commented that
she 'prefers others to make policy'. This councillor observed that it was not her
'intention to have a prominent role' her 'motivation is more to solve people's
problems'. Eight councillors selected a preference for policy matters. This group
included one member of the Executive Committee, two scrutiny chairs and one
councillor with a leadership role in another authority. Two of the other members in
this category had strong environmental agendas.

The study suggested, therefore, that, in general, county councillors in Devon
had a relatively wide-ranging attitude towards their input into the local democratic
process, which incorporated interest and participation in a substantial number of
policy areas, rather than specialisation in a few issues, and a focus on the democratic
representation of issues and grievances from their division without marginalising a
wider policy focus.

These results also implied that specific accountability obligations might be
ameliorated by concern with policy considerations. Such a tendency could be observed
in relation to possible tensions between divisional interests and attitudes towards
specific council functions, while strong opinions about policy issues and the allocation
of expenditure between functions could cause tensions with accountability towards the
party group. Brian Berman’s clash with Liberal Democrat Group over education spending is an example of this phenomenon (see above).

4.9: Time

Interviewees were asked about the number of hours they worked each week as a councillor. The results are shown in table 4.7, which records the time spent on council activities by male councillors, female councillors, county councillors who had a dual mandate and also sat on a district authority and county councillors without a district seat. The 27 members who served on their district council did not, in general, distinguish between the time allocated to both roles. These councillors were, therefore, asked about the time spent on their combined roles as members of both authorities.

Table 4.7: Hours per week worked as a councillor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Dual</th>
<th>County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses showed that most members worked as full-time elected representatives. One recently retired member who had served as a police inspector observed that he now worked longer hours than when in full-time paid employment. Many councillors had a passionate commitment to their role(s) as elected representatives. The results also suggested that dual membership of both district and county councils had some impact on the number of hours worked. On average,
councillors with a dual mandate worked over seven hours per week longer than colleagues who were not sitting district councillors.

These results implied that the estimates supplied in the other studies did not reflect the time commitment of contemporary county councillors (see, for example, Hampton, 1970; Newton, 1976; Rao, 2000). For example, the Devon study suggested that councillors were working over 30 hours a month more than Barron et al.’s (1991) estimate, which was also constructed exclusively on replies from county councillors. These findings suggested, therefore, that many of Devon’s county councillors were committed to an intensive and time-consuming style of local democratic representation. There was also a pronounced difference between the hours worked by men and women. On average women spent over 46 hours per week on council business, over ten hours longer than the average male councillor. This finding confirmed Barron et al.’s (1991) conclusion that women councillors work longer on their council duties than their male colleagues but also implied that the female-male work-rate gap was greater than the previous survey suggested.

The introduction of the executive and scrutiny model, which was a component of the modernisation agenda, had an important impact on workloads. The burden on senior members had increased, under the new system it was thought to be impractical to combine full-time employment with a leadership role in the majority group. Full-time employment commitments led the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats under the traditional committee system to eschew an executive position in favour of a scrutiny chair. In contrast, many councillors on the scrutiny committees thought that the loss of service committee seats had reduced the time they spent on their council duties. Some Conservatives commented that they were ‘now paid twice as much for
doing half as much'. There was also little evidence to suggest that councillors were spending more time as community representatives to compensate for the loss of time in committees (Cole, 2001a: 31-33).

4.10: New councillors

These responses implied a distinction between councillors with a community politics based approach and those with a more traditional style. The interview transcripts were assessed in terms of two factors. First, members were categorised according to whether their style of representation encouraged or contained their ombudsman workload. Second, respondents were assessed in terms of whether their activities were restricted primarily to ‘channelling’ the concerns of their divisions/wards to county or district councils or whether they had a more regular and proactive role in their community (see table 4.8).

Table 4.8: Style of working

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contain</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>87.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These criteria provided a model to distinguish new from traditional members. Councillors classified in the top left-hand corner had a more traditional concept of their role. Those in the bottom right-hand corner had a much greater focus on community involvement. This classification should not, however, be used to distinguish between active and inactive councillors, some members classified in the most traditional category had substantial workloads.

4.11: Conclusion

The results from Devon suggested that some assumptions of the academic literature should be revised. In particular, these councillors were giving a time commitment substantially in excess of anything recorded in previous studies. This sample contained few policy specialists and suggested that many of the traditional distinctions between different interpretations of the role(s) might not be relevant. The analysis also implied that there was a substantial recognition of the need to balance division and authority-wide interests. Similarly, most councillors had a dual focus on policy and representation. Finally, only a small minority of councillors expressed even mild scepticism about the input from voluntary groups. The evaluation also had implications for an understanding of local democracy and accountability. The principle issues were the role of elected councillors as a channel of democratic communication between the grassroots and the political and administrative elite; and the constraints of multiple accountabilities.

The chapter contained an evaluation of the role(s) of county councillors in enhancing local democracy by feeding opinion from their division into the decision-making process. This function encompassed the representation of attitudes of a variety
of specialised entities such as voluntary organisations and district authorities as well as widespread opinions, attitudes and assumptions. The study of their ombudsman role strengthened the literature in relation to that crucial element of representative democracy, which is central to the job description of politicians at all levels (see Searing, 1994). Overall, the lessons from Devon suggested that the seriousness of many county councillors towards the representational role(s) could be interpreted to claim that the elitist nature of the representative model had been modified by a vigorous adherence to these traditional role(s).

The strong focus of many members on divisional representation also illustrated their commitment to downward notions of accountability to their division, although accountability to the wider interests of Devon acted as a notable counterweight to such parochialism. A horizontal or vertical concept of accountability to party groups also operated as an important constraint on councillors. Despite a degree of freedom in relation to their electoral divisions, it was clear that accountability to their party group affected other accountability relationships and could restrict the capacity of members to promote the interests of their localities. The analysis was marginal to an assessment of the effectiveness of accountability in relation to specific decisions because this research did not focus directly on the extent to which councillors were able to redress grievances and or influence the policy agenda. In contrast, this chapter was restricted to assessing accountability in relation to forms, processes, constraints and directions. Issues of effectiveness are explored in much more depth later in this thesis.

The study also had implications for the modernising agenda. In some respects the approach adopted by many members was in sympathy with this agenda. For example, most councillors devoted a substantial amount of energy towards their
divisional representation role, although a notable minority of members tried to contain their ombudsman workload. Most councillors were, however, sceptical about the new executive and scrutiny model (Cole, 2001a: 26). First, many councillors argued that removal from decision-making committees weakened their capacity to represent their division. Second, the reforms had not led to an increased focus on work in the community. Most members already spent a significant amount of time on divisional representation. The substantial community involvement of these councillors meant, therefore, that the new political management structures could not be justified in terms of greater community involvement. Third, the interest in policy matters shown by many members meant that there was considerable resentment about the substantial reduction of their direct role in making countywide policies. Fourth, the strength of the ruling Liberal Democrat Group restricted the capacity of scrutiny to influence executive decisions or hold the leadership accountable for them.

1 With the exception of full council.
CHAPTER 5
EXTERNAL SCRUTINY

5.1: Introduction

The chapter considers external scrutiny inquiries undertaken by a wide range of local authorities. The analysis incorporates a scoping study to identify the inquiries that have been performed. The second stage of the evaluation involves an analysis of the decision to undertake the scrutiny; support for scrutiny; attitudes of the scrutinised agencies; the scrutiny process; media coverage; and the impact of the inquiries, including an assessment of the implementation of the recommendations. The evidence is also discussed in relation to democracy, accountability and the local government modernisation agenda.

The chapter relates primarily to representative notions of democracy because it is concerned exclusively with the activities of scrutiny committees, which have a membership comprised almost completely of elected local politicians\(^1\), although there is also some discussion about the contribution of more direct forms of democracy to the scrutiny process. Accountability concerns substantially the capacity of representative structures to make external organisations accountable to them in a vertical direction. In essence, this chapter considers democratic institutions in the role of regulators, monitors and questioners rather than as the subject of accountability and scrutiny from the wider community.\(^2\) The theme of local government modernisation is central to every aspect of this chapter because the establishment of scrutiny committees has been a crucial component of that reform process.
5.2: Inquiry topics

The scoping survey questionnaires, which were sent to 441 principle local authorities in Britain, generated 399 replies, a response rate of 90%, and identified 370 external scrutiny inquiries. Second stage questionnaires were dispatched with regard to each of those external scrutinies and a completed form was returned in relation to 238 of those inquiries, a response rate of 64% (see table 5.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Scoping</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing and Community Action</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, Planning, Regulation and Regeneration</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Partnerships</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and Recycling</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Service</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>370</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In relation to the total identified in the scoping study, the most popular area was transport, which incorporated studies on issues such as the railways, buses, taxis and roads; followed by policing and community action, which covered policing, anti-social behaviour and community safety issues. The next most popular specific groups were inquiries on the utilities, which covered evaluations of the electricity, telephone, gas and water industries; and those about economic, planning, regulation and regeneration issues. The miscellaneous category covered a wide variety of subjects including IT, fireworks, the census in Southend, voluntary organisations, older people and sunbeds. Of the 14 categories only transport; and policing and community action
were the subject of over 50 inquiries or had more than 30 inquiries incorporated in the second stage of the evaluation. This spread of topics implied that the institutional manifestation of local representative democracy attempted to hold external organisations accountable in relation to a wide range of issues, although the absolute number of such inquiries was quite low. This finding supported conclusions reached by Ashworth and Snape (2004: 550), that external scrutiny was a ‘marginal activity’ for local authorities. It could, therefore, be argued that the contribution of external scrutiny to holding other elected authorities as well as the New Magistracy of appointed local governance, the private sector and voluntary organisations accountable to individuals and institutions with a locally derived democratic mandate was small. This finding could be interpreted as indicative of the capacity constraints of representative democracy at the local level.

However, although external scrutiny did not appear to have been undertaken in an extensive manner, this evidence suggested that it had become established in the politico-administrative culture of many local authorities. This development meant that external agencies now had to contend with the possibility that their actions might become the subject of perhaps intensive analysis from local politicians and it was reasonable to assume that this constraint might be affecting their performance. This subject was, however, outside the scope of this thesis so it was not possible to take this discussion further, although it was important to raise the potential of the threat of scrutiny as a counterweight to the theory that external scrutiny was marginal because a relatively small number of such inquiries had been held.
5.3: Type of authority

The response rate was high amongst all categories of local authority, while above average percentages were obtained in relation to authorities in non-metropolitan England. The lowest response rate occurred amongst the Scottish unitary authorities, where the percentage return was more than 12% below the national average (see table 5.2).

Overall, 38% of the local authorities replying to scoping questionnaire had held at least one inquiry into an external organisation (see table 5.2). External scrutiny was confined substantially to English local government; less than 18% of the 45 Scottish and Welsh local authorities that replied to the scoping study acknowledged holding such an inquiry. External scrutiny was also a relatively rare phenomenon amongst the districts, less than 35% of the districts replying to the scoping survey said that they had staged an external inquiry. In contrast, the larger English local authorities were more likely to have undertaken an external scrutiny; the comparable figures for the counties, London boroughs, English unitaries and metropolitan boroughs were 47%, 46%, 51% and 63% respectively (see table 5.2).

The analysis suggested that, therefore, there were marked variations across different types of local authority in the frequency with which democratically-elected local politicians sought to hold external organisations accountable. The relatively large number of district authorities meant that inquiries undertaken by district authorities comprised 43% of the inquiries identified in the scoping survey (see table 5.2). This total represented, however, only 0.7 external scrutinies per district authority; in contrast the comparable figures for county, London borough, metropolitan borough and English unitary authorities were 1.4; 1.5; 1.9; and 1.2 respectively. These findings bore some similarities with data compiled by Stoker et al. (2002: 54). For example,
those scholars found that an external scrutiny had been held in 32% of the districts against 34% in this study. Similarly, that previous analysis showed that 59% of the Metropolitan boroughs and 54% of the counties had held such inquiries (Stoker et al., 2002: 54) compared with 63% and 47% respectively in this survey. However, Stoker et al.’s (2002: 54) finding that three-quarters of the London boroughs had staged an external inquiry was in contrast to this survey, which identified an external scrutiny from less than half.

Table 5.2: External scrutiny inquiries: local authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Councils replying to Scoping Study</th>
<th>Scoping Councils holding inquiries</th>
<th>Councils replying to the 2nd Stage</th>
<th>Scoping Inquiries</th>
<th>2nd Stage Inquiries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Boroughs</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitaries</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Unitaries</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Unitaries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isles of Scilly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The study implied, therefore, that the larger, urban and suburban local authorities had more interest in the vertical accountability of external organisations than their smaller and more rural counterparts. A finding that might appear surprising given that district authorities performed few functions and that, therefore, most public services were undertaken by external organisations. A plausible explanation might, however, lie in capacity constraints in terms of issues such as numbers of officers and councillors in the smaller districts and the fourth option status of many of those local authorities.

Analysis of individual inquiries confirmed the conclusion that this idea, of representative local government as the agent through which other bodies could be held to account in a vertical direction, was substantially an English activity. In Scotland, only 0.2 external scrutinies were held per local authority answering the scoping study, in Wales the corresponding statistic was 0.4 inquiries. External scrutiny appeared not to be ingrained into the political and administrative culture of local government in Scotland or Wales. This evidence suggested, therefore, a divergence between the culture of accountability present in many English local authorities and contemporary practice in Scotland and Wales. In England, many local authorities and councillors had a relatively strong outward focus on the wider notions of governance and or community; in contrast the accountability culture in Scotland and Wales was primarily inward-looking and focused on holding the local authority to account to the exclusion of external agencies. The virtual absence of external scrutiny in Scotland and Wales must have meant that the threat of the imposition of vertical accountability through this mechanism was effectively absent. The capacity of the local government modernisation agenda to exert influence over the behaviour of external agencies in
those countries, through the development of the scrutiny function, was, therefore, slight.

The returns to the second stage questionnaires were approximately in proportion to the distribution of external inquiries amongst different types of local authority (see table 5.2), although a notably higher response rate amongst the English unitary authorities meant that inquiries undertaken by those authorities were over represented by more than three percent in comparison to the scoping study data.

5.4: Decision to undertake the inquiry

An assessment of the origins and framing of the programme of external scrutiny suggested that power resided primarily with scrutiny committees. Local authority respondents were asked to specify the origins of each inquiry and what other factors were responsible for initiating the inquiry (see table 5.3). This evaluation found that almost eight-in-ten arose, in part at least, from the scrutiny side of the authority. For example, at Hounslow an inquiry into the local housing ALMO was initiated because councillors were concerned about performance in relation to maintenance of the housing stock.

Table 5.3: Origins of the inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Reason</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>A Reason</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion by Scrutiny.</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>Response to Issues raised by other local authorities or the wider community.</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to Issues raised by other local authorities or the wider community.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>Suggestion by the Executive.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion by the Executive.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Response to issues raised by the media.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to issues raised by the media.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Suggestion by Officer(s).</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestion by Officer(s).</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The media and other local authorities or the wider local community were
identified as a source in over a quarter of these evaluations (see table 5.3). For example, at Suffolk Coastal, a media report that police officers were being redeployed from three towns in the authority to another district generated a scrutiny inquiry. At Blackpool, a scrutiny of the speed camera safety partnership resulted from public and media concern about the large number of speed cameras in the borough.

The predominant role of the scrutiny committee in establishing these inquiries was reflected in answers to two other questions. First, the decision to hold these inquiries was taken primarily by the relevant scrutiny committee, which had a role in this decision in relation to over 90% of these inquires (see table 5.4). 5

Table 5.4: Decision to hold the inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main role</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>A role</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrutiny Committee</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Council</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Committee</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Council Committee</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These conclusions were strengthened when respondents were asked which committee determined the agenda of the inquiry. The relevant scrutiny committee had the most important role in more than nine-in-ten of those scrutinies and played a role in determining that agenda in respect to almost 19 out of 20 inquiries (see table 5.5). 6

Table 5.5: The agenda of the inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main role</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>A role</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrutiny Committee</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>92.4</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Council</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Committee</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Council Committee</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evidence in relation to these issues cannot be compared to the literature directly because scholars have largely eschewed these questions. These results,
however, served as a counterbalance to some of the more critical interpretations about the independence and influence of scrutiny.

These findings also generated insights into the evolution of representative democracy within local authorities and suggested that the local government modernisation agenda had achieved some success in enabling non-executive councillors to expand their influence. This extension had occurred through the development of a role in relation to holding external organisations, most of which were non-elected bodies, accountable in a vertical direction; and giving those more junior councillors substantial autonomy in relation to the framing of these processes. The capacity to develop an accountability agenda could, therefore, be seen as an important component of the compensation for the abolition of the traditional service committees and diminution of their formal role in the decision-making process. In contrast, in authorities that retained a traditional committee structure the evolution of autonomy in relation to external accountability could be viewed as a straight gain for the more junior councillors and not as a component of a compensation package with regard to wider changes.

5.5: Support for scrutiny

A census of the advice supplied to the inquiries (see table 5.6) illustrated the importance of internal sources. More than half of these inquiries received advice from a dedicated scrutiny unit, while over three-quarters received support from officers not based in a dedicated scrutiny unit. These findings suggested, therefore, that scrutiny had been accompanied by a cultural shift in many local authorities through which the bureaucracy had embraced the idea that some staff should work to hold external, and
by implication, also internal decisions accountable. This decision to devote public money to fund staff to service scrutiny implied, therefore, an acceptance by senior management of the spirit of the local government modernisation agenda which, in establishing the scrutiny function, enhanced substantially the capacity of elected local representatives to challenge and hold to account elite decision-makers. This could be interpreted as a challenge perhaps to public choice theorists who emphasised the self-interested operation of bureaucracies (see Niskanen, 1971). There was also evidence to imply that external support had an important role in some inquiries. In particular, voluntary bodies and other local authorities supplied advice to more than 37% and a quarter of these inquiries respectively. For example, an inquiry about the Inland Revenue undertaken at Telford and the Wrekin required specialist assistance from external sources to enable committee members to pose technical questions and generate an evidence base to challenge the Revenue’s assumptions.

Table 5.6: Advice for the inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Source</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>A Source</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrutiny Unit</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Council Officers</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Local Authority</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary Body</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Academic Experts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another governmental body</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public or Service Users</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive conclusions about the commitment of representative local democracy to this enhanced and modernised concept of its role as an agent of vertical accountability was emphasised through findings that there was widespread satisfaction with the support supplied to these inquiries in relation to officer-time, officer co-operation and resources. In relation to each category, support was evaluated as
adequate in relation to more than nine-in-ten of the inquiries for which an answer had been provided (see table 5.7).

Table 5.7: Support for the inquiry from the local authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Officer-Time</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer Co-operation</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some respondents lavished praise on the commitment of their authority to scrutiny. For example, the achievements of an external scrutiny at Wigan were explained in terms of the support supplied by the authority’s policy officer. These high levels of satisfaction challenged conclusions from scholars such as Cole (2001b) and Leach (2006) that were critical about the effectiveness of the support structures.

Echoes of this criticism could, however, be found in a few responses. For example, a reply from a district authority mentioned the difficulty of devoting ‘the time/capacity within increasing budget cut-backs’ to provide adequate support. Similarly, at the Isle of Wight scrutiny was undermined because the executive failed to release sufficient resources.

An analysis of support for external scrutiny in relation to different types of authority revealed some notable variations (see table 5.8). Dissatisfaction was relatively high in the districts, for example support was considered not to be adequate in relation to resources in more than an eighth of these inquiries. Similarly, dissatisfaction about the support supplied in the English unitaries was also relatively high; for example officer-time and resources were regarded as inadequate in more than seven and ten percent of the cases respectively. Variations in the adequacy of support for external scrutiny were not, however, wide enough to imply that the
scepticism expressed by scholars such as Cole (2001b) and Leach (2006) was justified in relation to any one type of authority. Furthermore, external scrutiny inquiries undertaken through county councils benefited from adequate officer-time in relation to all the inquiries; whilst more than 96% of these evaluations were judged to have received adequate support in respect of officer co-operation and resources.

Such variations might have reflected the greater capacity of larger authorities. There was a contradiction between this assumption and experience in Scotland and Wales, where all three aspects were evaluated as adequate in relation to the ten studies. This result might, however, have reflected the marginal nature of external scrutiny outside England and thus lower expectations.

Table 5.8: Support for the inquiry: local authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority Type</th>
<th>Officer-Time</th>
<th></th>
<th>Officer Co-operation</th>
<th></th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Boroughs</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met Boroughs</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitaries</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Unitaries</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Unitaries</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis also suggested that different political management structures were not associated with marked variations in the perceived adequacy of support for external scrutiny (see table 5.9). The only notable exception occurred in relation to resources where approaching a quarter of inquiries in local authorities with a traditional committee structure were evaluated as having inadequate support; a characteristic that might again reflect the limited capacity of small authorities and a result that gave modest support to the Cole (2001b)/Leach (2006) findings.

Table 5.9: Support for the inquiry: political management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mayor</th>
<th></th>
<th>Cabinet</th>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer-Time</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>94.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer Co-operation</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis also generated little evidence to imply that the effectiveness of support for external scrutiny varied markedly in relation to specific topics. With the exception of the resources devoted to inquiries about waste and recycling, support in relation to each of the issues was rated as being adequate in more than four out of every five cases. Overall, there was little evidence to support pessimistic attitudes about local authority support for external scrutiny (see table 5.10).
Table 5.10: Support for the inquiry: topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Yes N</th>
<th>Yes %</th>
<th>No N</th>
<th>No %</th>
<th>Yes N</th>
<th>Yes %</th>
<th>No N</th>
<th>No %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing and Community Safety</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, Planning, Regulation and Regeneration</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Partnership</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and Recycling</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Service</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.6: Attitude of the scrutinised agency

Analysis of the attitude of the scrutinised agency towards the process revealed an overwhelmingly positive focus. This finding suggested, therefore, that the subject agencies accepted the local government modernisation agenda in respect of the new role of local representative democracy in holding external agencies accountable. In almost three-fifths of the inquiries, for which a response was given, the scrutinised agency was characterised as ‘generally enthusiastic’ towards the inquiry, while in almost another fifth of these cases the external organisation was assessed as having been ‘supportive’. There were, however, some variations in relation to local authority type. For example, while the external agency was ‘generally enthusiastic’ in three-quarters of the inquiries held by county councils and more than seven-in-ten of the scrutinies held in the metropolitan boroughs, the corresponding figures for the English
unitary authorities and the London boroughs were less than four-in-ten (see table 5.11).

Table 5.11: Attitude of the scrutinised agency: local authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CC %</th>
<th>DC %</th>
<th>LB %</th>
<th>MB %</th>
<th>EU %</th>
<th>SU %</th>
<th>WU %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally Enthusiastic</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Tensions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Conflict</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, the percentage of agencies evaluated as enthusiastic was similar across each of the three political management arrangements, although inquiries held in authorities with a directly-mayor contained a relatively low proportion of 'genuinely enthusiastic' cases and a relatively high number of 'supportive' responses (see table 5.12).

Table 5.12: Attitude of the scrutinised agency: political management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mayor</th>
<th>Cabinet</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally enthusiastic.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive but little evidence of enthusiasm.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite and civil but viewed the process as an obligation or burden and showed some suspicion.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant tensions with the committee.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open conflict with the committee.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were more substantial variations in relation to the attitude of the agency in relation to the topics (see table 5.13). It was, however, difficult to identify many trends, although the low percentage of 'generally enthusiastic' Post Office contributions was notable; a possible consequence of the critical focus of many of those inquiries, which concerned decisions to close branches and might also have reflected an administrative culture in that organisation that was sceptical about the role of local representative democracy in enforcing a wider concept of local vertical accountability. The high percentage of housing organisations that were judged as
'generally enthusiastic' was also interesting and could be explained in terms of the fact that many of these agencies were ALMOS, not-for-profit organisations, which had sitting councillors on their boards. Those organisations were, therefore, much more clearly linked to local representative democracy because indirectly-elected local politicians participated in their governance, and their capacity to circumvent or avoid pressures to account to scrutiny committees was, thus, diminished.

Table 5.13: Attitude of the scrutinised agency: topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Generally Enthusiastic</th>
<th>Supportive</th>
<th>Obligation</th>
<th>Significant Tensions</th>
<th>Open Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing and Community Safety</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, Planning, Regulation and Regeneration</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Partnership</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and Recycling</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Service</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the attitude of the scrutinised agencies over issues such as requests for information and witnesses showed that co-operation had been widespread. Overall, scrutinised organisations in more than four-in-five inquiries were evaluated as having been totally co-operative and there were relatively small variations in relation to local authority types and political management arrangements apart from the fact that all the scrutinies undertaken in authorities with a traditional committee structure dealt with
totally co-operative subject agencies. There were, however, more substantial variations in relation to the topic of each inquiry. In particular, the scrutinised agency in approximately three-in-ten of the inquiries about postal services and youth issues was judged to have only been ‘partly’ co-operative (see tables 5.14-5.16). Such tensions might be explained by a focus on post office closures and perhaps the administrative culture within that organisation (see above); and the tendency for elected local government to marginalise and sometimes patronise youth organisations (see chapter six).

Table 5.14: Co-operation of the scrutinised agency over issues such as requests for information and witnesses: local authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>DC</th>
<th>LB</th>
<th>MB</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>SU</th>
<th>WU</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>83.9</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.15: Co-operation of the scrutinised agency over issues such as requests for information and witnesses: political management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mayor</th>
<th>Cabinet</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

131
Table 5.16: Co-operation of the scrutinised agency over issues such as requests for information and witnesses: topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Yes N</th>
<th>Yes %</th>
<th>No N</th>
<th>No %</th>
<th>Partly N</th>
<th>Partly %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing and Community Safety</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, Planning, Regulation and Regeneration</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69.2</td>
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<td>30.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Partnership</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and Recycling</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Service</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were many specific examples of enthusiastic, supportive and co-operative behaviour. For example, at Stockton-on-Tees an inquiry was facilitated through the positive attitude of Stagecoach, which ‘demonstrated considerable good will’. Similarly, at Chichester, an evaluation of a local theatre was assisted by the attitude of the theatre’s management, which was ‘frank, open and honest about their problems’, while Thames Water Utilities engaged positively with an inquiry about flooding undertaken by a London borough.

The study also, however, revealed evidence of antagonism towards the scrutiny process and strained relations between external agencies and the scrutiny committees. For example, at Bradford, an inquiry about the festival was characterised by a ‘struggle’ to obtain information and evidence had to be taken ‘in camera’.

Similarly, at Salisbury developers and landowners claimed that commercial reasons precluded their direct involvement in a scrutiny about affordable housing.

At Barnsley, a scrutiny inquiry about Berneslai Homes, a local provider of social housing, was undermined by the strained relations between the agency and the
local authority and the underlying problem of member dissatisfaction at being
excluded from having access to information regarding lettings. At Burnley, the
attitude of the police towards an external scrutiny about anti-social behaviour was
classified as being ‘constrained by their own priorities’. Similarly, at Rutland the
police were ‘reluctant to have their performance reviewed’ in relation to an inquiry
about a fire involving hazardous substances.

Such outcomes represented, however, a relatively small minority of cases. In
contrast, the scrutiny process often improved relations between the local authority and
the scrutinised organisation (see tables 5.17, 5.18 and 5.19).

Table 5.17: Impact of the inquiry on the local authority’s relations with the
scrutinised organisation: local authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority Type</th>
<th>Worsened</th>
<th>Unchanged</th>
<th>Improved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>51.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Boroughs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitaries</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Unitaries</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Unitaries</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.18: Impact of the inquiry on the local authority’s relations with the
scrutinised organisation: political management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Management</th>
<th>Worsened</th>
<th>Unchanged</th>
<th>Improved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mayor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relations were judged to have improved in relation to more than four in ten
cases. For example, at Burnley an inquiry about recycling ‘cleared the air and allowed
relationships to grow more strongly’. Similarly, at West Devon Borough Council a
scrutiny about the local bus service strengthened relations with First Bus and a formal
annual meeting between the company and the local authority was instituted to discuss matters of concern. At Suffolk Coastal, the inquiry about police deployment assisted relations between the district authority and the police because the constabulary was able to reassure local politicians that press reports about reductions in the number of officers allocated to the district were inaccurate.

Relations were identified as having worsened in four percent of these inquiries. One of these rare examples occurred in a metropolitan borough authority in relation to a scrutiny of a regional development agency. The external body was critical about many of the recommendations made by the scrutiny inquiry and it was suggested that the agency might not be willing to participate in another scrutiny undertaken by the local authority. This experience had fuelled the concern of senior officers in the authority, who were said to be 'twitchy about external inquiries' and afraid that future relationships might be jeopardised; a thought that has also been reflected in academic discussions about scrutiny (see Ashworth and Snape, 2004).

In the counties, Scottish unitaries, Welsh unitaries, districts and London boroughs relations improved with the scrutinised agency in relation to approximately half of the inquiries. Improvements in relations between the local authority and the scrutinised bodies were, however, much less common in the metropolitan and English unitary authorities, where relations had improved in less than a quarter of the inquiries. There was also evidence to suggest that this process was more successful in improving relations where the authorities had executive cabinets (see table 5.18), although it should be noted that all nine inquiries where relations worsened occurred in authorities with executive cabinets.
The analysis revealed some notable differences in relation to the impact on relations between local authorities and scrutinised organisations in the various sectors (see table 5.19).

Table 5.19: Impact of the inquiry on the local authority’s relations with the scrutinised organisation: topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Worsened</th>
<th>Unchanged</th>
<th>Improved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing and Community Safety</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, Planning, Regulation and Regeneration</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Partnership</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and Recycling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Service</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to housing relations worsened in more than a fifth of the cases, while in a majority of the areas relations did not worsen in connection to any of the inquiries. There were also substantial variations in relation to improvements in those relationships. Relations between the local authority and waste and recycling organisations improved in more than four-in-five instances but the corresponding figures in relation to leisure was less than one-in-eight inquiries. The potential for substantial variations in the state of relations between the scrutinised body and the local authorities at the commencement of the scrutiny, however, caused problems for the interpretation of this data. Furthermore, the absence of existing scholarship about these matters meant that it was not possible to compare with conclusions generated by other studies.
These findings suggested, therefore, that the vertical accountability process often improved relations between representative local democracy and a wide range of agencies operating in the same locality. Vertical accountability could, therefore, be viewed as a mechanism through which wider notions of local governance through co-operation, networks and perhaps partnership could be fostered (see Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002).

5.7: Scrutiny process

The study generated some important conclusions about the scrutiny process and potential innovations to improve performance.

5.7.1: Party groups

The analysis produced no evidence to suggest that external scrutiny inquiries were subjected to a party whip. Overall, respondents said that no party whip was used in relation to 234 of these inquiries, while no information was supplied about four of the inquiries. These findings contrasted with those from Stoker et al. (2002), who found that more than nine percent of local authorities reported that a party whip was used to control scrutiny, although they were closer to conclusions reached by Snape et al. (2002), who found that whipping or party discipline was rarely applied to scrutiny. There was, however, evidence to suggest that political groups held meetings before some of these inquiries to discuss the external scrutiny, however the survey suggested that such involvement in external scrutiny was relatively rare (see table 5.20).
Table 5.20: Party group meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least one group</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to findings from Stoker et al. (2002), less than nine percent of the external inquiries were the subject of a party group meeting held before the formal sessions. There was little variation in relation to practice amongst Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats groups, although the Liberal Democrats were slightly less inclined to adopt this procedure. Comparison with Stoker et al. (2002) in relation to whipping and party meetings was, however, difficult. These findings could be deployed to imply an evolution in the attitude of party groups towards scrutiny and the accountability role of councillors, however given the close proximity of both surveys such an interpretation was difficult to justify. A more plausible explanation might, however, lie in the lower political salience of these issues. Although external scrutiny might have related to important public policy issues, the capacity to damage the coherence and cohesion of the party groups was often much less than in relation to internal matters because these inquiries seldom concerned issues for which senior councillors had any responsibility.⁹

5.7.2: Public participation

There was some evidence that external scrutiny had been strengthened through a more direct concept of democracy. For example, a scrutiny about flooding undertaken at Chesterfield was facilitated by the decision to allow members of the public to ask the external organisation questions, while at Camden another inquiry about flooding was enhanced by co-opting a member of a local organisation that had
been flooded. The respondent suggested that this approach showed that the 'panel could empathise with what they heard, not just sympathise'. Similarly, at Hartlepool, an inquiry about the decommissioning of 'ghost ships' provided 'a local forum for the public to express their views' and, therefore, supplied 'a local layer of accountability', although the benefits for public participation were limited because the terms of reference excluded discussion about the 'key issue raised by the public....we don't want the ships here'.

These examples illustrated the capacity of external scrutiny to develop a form of downward accountability in which the role of elected representatives was supplemented by direct public participation in the process. This evidence also, however, indicated that most inquiries eschewed such an approach and that even where such innovations were deployed they were often marginal to the inquiry. It should not, therefore, be argued that this more direct form of democracy and downward notion of accountability represented a substantial challenge to the more traditional notion of representative democracy and vertical concept of accountability inherited from the Westminster select committee system. In contrast, these innovations were additions to a relatively small number of these inquiries.

5.7.3: Flexibility

Another theme was the capacity of flexible and innovative formats to strengthen some external scrutiny inquiries. For example, an inquiry about anti-social behaviour conducted at Easington benefited from the decision to interview some witnesses in 'their own environment' because this approach generated 'a more open response than...in formal hearings'. Similarly, a response from a local authority in the south east highlighted the potential contribution of one-session reviews for the less
complex issues, and where external timescales necessitated, a ‘fast-track’ response from scrutiny. At Bedford, scrutiny committee members posed as mystery shoppers to sample the demand responsive transport service they were evaluating. This evidence implied, therefore, that external scrutiny had generated and developed innovative formats to promote the accountability process.

5.8: The media

The media covered sessions relevant to more than four in ten of these inquiries and reports, recommendations or outcomes concerning more than 47% of these scrutinies (see table 5.21).

Table 5.21: Media coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report, Recommendations or Outcomes</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>110</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>136</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were marked variations in the willingness of the media to cover inquiries about different topics. The number of inquiries about the Post Office, the utilities, the fire service and education covered exceeded or at least equalled the number that received no coverage in both sections. In contrast, only one-in-six of the inquiries about governance and partnership received coverage either in respect of the sessions or reports, recommendations or outcome(s) (see tables 5.22 and 5.23). The lack of academic literature about these issues meant it was impossible to compare this data with previous research.
Table 5.22: Media coverage of the reports, recommendations and outcome(s): topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing and Community Safety</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, Planning, Regulation and Regeneration</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Partnership</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and Recycling</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.23: Media coverage of the sessions: topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing and Community Safety</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, Planning, Regulation and Regeneration</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Partnership</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and Recycling</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Service</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Occasionally, a media outlet encouraged the scrutiny process and or adopted the emergent agenda. For example, at Medway, the local newspapers adopted scrutiny’s critical conclusions about the service supplied through the local rail franchise. Similarly, an inquiry undertaken by North Lincolnshire about Humber Bridge tolls received significant and favourable coverage from the Scunthorpe Telegraph and the Grimsby Telegraph ‘as part of an ongoing campaign to waive bridge tolls for people attending hospitals in and around Hull’. Elsewhere, the media
were deployed in an overt attempt to increase public participation in the process. For example, at Chesterfield, the Derbyshire Times was used to advertise forthcoming sessions of a scrutiny about flooding and the public were invited to attend. In contrast, it was suggested that the failure of the local media to report a Breckland scrutiny about BT adequately reduced the impact of the process.

In most cases, media coverage was focused on reporting rather than advocating the emerging agenda or advertising the meetings. For example, an inquiry about the Bicard review undertaken by Buckinghamshire County Council received significant coverage from the local newspaper and two radio stations because it ‘was clearly a topic that they considered important’. The launch event for an inquiry about healthy lifestyles undertaken by Cornwall County Council was televised, while the Burnley Express carried an article about the outcome of a scrutiny on fly-tipping. Similarly, an Oxfordshire County Council scrutiny of the police in relation to domestic violence generated a short article in the local press about the inquiry’s sessions and a more substantial piece at the end of the process. A West Sussex County Council scrutiny involving Southern Water was covered in local newspapers, local radio and the BBC News website, while a Bristol City Council scrutiny about the Post Office was reported by BBC West.

At Dover, a scrutiny of Kent County Council in relation to the closure of a local primary school was allocated four pages in the Dover Express. The analysis incorporated an ‘explanation of the issue, report on the meeting and follow-up/in-depth interviews with a member of the public affected by the current policy’. At Ashfield, the local paper contained short articles at the ‘start and end’ of a scrutiny about the use of CCTV in the district. The chair of an inquiry about flooding
undertaken at Nottingham City Council was interviewed on Radio Nottingham, while the Evening Post sent a reporter to some of the sessions and, at least, one article appeared in the paper.

There were also examples of negative media coverage. In particular, some inquiries suffered from distortions. For example, the press reported that an inquiry about road safety undertaken by Camden had decided to recommend a motorbike ban when the proposal was a suggestion from one resident. Similarly, at Middlesbrough reporting about an inquiry on prostitution served to 'provoke/sensationalise the subject', while at Castle Morpeth local press reporting of an inquiry into the local strategic partnership sensationalised the threat from some councillors to resign if the issues were not addressed. Elsewhere, some coverage was hostile to the process and or the emergent agenda. At North West Leicestershire, an inquiry about the bus stop at Coalville hospital suffered from hostile coverage in the Coalville Times, which was initiated by a councillor 'who wished to consult constituents before the designs were finished and ready for publication' and complained that he had been 'gagged'.

These findings suggested that the media often acted as an important agent of downward accountability by reporting the sessions and or recommendations and thus raising the profile of these scrutinies. This interest directed attention onto the committee members and the scrutinised organisations and could serve to intensify the accountability and shift its direction through increasing the range of people likely to obtain information about the process and its outcomes. In particular, media reporting could raise awareness amongst the electorate about the activities of democratically-elected local representatives as scrutineers and had the potential to increase the pressure on the councillors undertaking the inquiry to adopt a more direct democratic
agenda reflecting concerns arising from the grassroots rather than more elitist sources, such as the local political-administrative establishment or their own specific interests and or prejudices. The potential for scrutiny to be affected by a more direct variant of democracy was, however, determined, in part at least, by the political salience of the issue, hence inquiries about topics such as the utilities and the Post Office often received coverage whilst those about governance and partnership seldom interested the media.

5.9: Impact of the inquiry

Evaluations of the success of these inquiries suggested widespread satisfaction with the scrutinies. Overall, 79% were judged as being successful, whilst slightly over five percent were classified as ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ unsuccessful (see table 5.24). These findings, therefore, supported positive conclusions about the effectiveness of scrutiny from scholars such as Snape et al., (2002), Campbell (2005) and Coleman and Glendinning (2004) rather than more sceptical evaluations (see Cole, 2001a; Leach, 2006; and Leach et al., 2003). This satisfaction was reflected across each type of political management. Inquiries held in mayoral inquiries were evaluated as successful in more than 85% of the cases, while none were considered unsuccessful. Similarly, inquiries in authorities with cabinet and traditional governance were rated as successful in almost 78% and 92% of cases respectively. Less than nine percent of the inquiries in either of these categories were assessed as unsuccessful.

Table 5.24: Success of the inquiry: political management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mayor</th>
<th></th>
<th>Cabinet</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very successful</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly successful</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither successful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unsuccessful</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were some variations in relation to the perceived success of the inquiries in different types of local authorities. In particular, in London the number of successful inquiries composed only two-thirds of the total, while almost 89% of the scrutinies held by the county councils were evaluated as successful.

Table 5.25: Success of the inquiry: local authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Successful</th>
<th>Fairly Successful</th>
<th>Neither Successful Nor Unsuccessful</th>
<th>Fairly Unsuccessful</th>
<th>Very Unsuccessful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Unitary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Unitary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notable variations also existed in relation to the percentage of inquiries about different topics that were evaluated as successful, which ranged from economic, planning, regulation and regeneration (94%) to leisure (63%). In particular, nine-in-ten of the inquiries about the utilities were judged successful, a conclusion that might imply that this process was suited to improving the performance and delivery of those important public services. The study revealed many examples of external scrutinies generating considerable achievements. For example, an inquiry undertaken by Castle Morpeth in relation to the local strategic partnership succeeded in producing ‘a significant change to the LSP partnership arrangements’, while the inquiry about the Bicard review undertaken by Buckinghamshire County Council was judged to have been ‘influential’. Similarly, a review of adult education provision in Fenland generated significant changes, the respondent commented that the inquiry ‘opened the wound and explored the issues, which led to better things’. 

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Table 5.26: Success of the inquiry: topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Successful</th>
<th>Fairly Successful</th>
<th>Neither Successful Nor Unsuccessful</th>
<th>Fairly Unsuccessful</th>
<th>Very Unsuccessful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing and Community Safety</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, Planning, Regulation and Regeneration</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Partnership</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and Recycling</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elsewhere, scrutiny was viewed as an important element of public consultation, a mechanism to improve the decision-making process and, by implication, to promote a more direct notion of local democracy and downward accountability. For example, at Blyth Valley a scrutiny about post office closures was viewed as a 'more appropriate way for the council to respond to consultation'. Questioning witnesses meant that the scrutiny commission was 'much more informed and able to respond more effectively'. At Scarborough, an inquiry about postal services gave the local manager of the Royal Mail delivery services an insight into 'specific concerns of rural villages (north of Whitby)....some local small businesses and some local areas that were puzzled that neighbouring areas were getting their mail delivered on a totally different time schedule'. Scrutiny could also be viewed as the first step in transforming local vertical accountability, strengthening the influence of
local authorities and democratising the local state. For example, an inquiry about flooding at Camden provided the basis for Thames Water and the local authority to adopt a partnership approach to tackling flooding problems.

This evidence in relation to the perceived success of external scrutiny implied that the local government modernisation agenda had made a notable contribution to making a wide range of organisations accountable to the main institutional forms of local representative democracy. The interpretation that almost eight-in-ten of these inquiries had been successful was, however, weakened when evidence about the implementation of recommendations was incorporated (see table 5.27)\(^1\). All the scrutiny committee’s recommendations were implemented in less than a quarter of the inquiries for which relevant data was supplied, while no recommendations had been implemented in relation to almost 12% of those evaluations. The evidence on the implementation of recommendations could, therefore, be interpreted as strengthening the more sceptical conclusions of scholars such as Cole (2001a) and Leach et al. (2003), rather than the more optimistic conclusions of academics like Snape et al., (2002) and Campbell (2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.27: Implementation: political management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implemented all the recommendations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented most of the recommendations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented some of the recommendations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented none of the recommendations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were also substantial differences between the implementation of recommendations in relation to variations in political management. Whilst all the recommendations were implemented in relation to half of the inquiries held in authorities with a traditional committee structure, this outcome occurred in a quarter
of the inquiries staged in authorities with a directly-elected mayor and 22% of those with cabinet governance.

Variations also occurred in relation to the implementation of recommendations across different types of local authority. There were differences in the percentage of inquiries that had all their recommendations implemented, although in relation to the counties, districts and Metropolitan boroughs they were not substantial (see table 5.28). However, in contrast, the implementation of all recommendations from external scrutiny inquiries was much less frequent in the English unitaries and non-existent in the small number of inquiries identified in Welsh unitary authorities, while the 100% success rate in Scotland was a reflection primarily of the small sample. The addition of the ‘most recommendations’ category generated a broad convergence in that the English unitaries rose to 54%, slightly more than four percent less than the counties and less than one percent higher than the districts. Similarly, the London and Metropolitan boroughs both recorded a combined total of two-thirds.

Table 5.28: Implementation: local authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>DC</th>
<th>LB</th>
<th>MB</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>SU</th>
<th>WU</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implemented all the recommendations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented most of the recommendations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented some of the recommendations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implemented none of the recommendations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extent to which recommendations were implemented also varied in relation to the subject of the inquiry. The percentage of inquiries where all the recommendations were implemented ranged from half in relation to government and
partnerships to less than one-in-ten with regard to the economy, planning, regulation and regeneration, while the percentage of inquiries which had, at least, most of their recommendations implemented ranged between more than nine-in-ten (utilities; and economy, planning, regulation and regeneration) and slightly more than two-in-ten (Post Office). There was evidence to suggest that inquiries concerning some of the major public services such as health and social care, education and policing had relatively little success in securing the implementation of their recommendations.

Table 5.29: Implementation: topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing and Community Safety</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, Planning, Regulation and Regeneration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Partnership</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste and Recycling</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relative success in influencing the utilities and failure in altering decisions taken by the Post Office suggested important lessons for the impact of external scrutiny on commercial organisations. External scrutiny had notable success persuading the utilities to implement their recommendations because many of those inquiries focused on clear failures to supply services of an adequate standard. In contrast, inquiries about the Post Office often concerned decisions to close branches and thus focused on the scale of the services to be supplied. In essence, it appeared that whilst external scrutiny might be able to raise the standard of services where the
organisation was committed to maintaining a supply, it was a much less effective mechanism to challenge decisions by a commercial organisation to withdraw from areas it did not view as being viable economically.

Scepticism about the achievements of some inquiries was amplified in the comments supplied by respondents. For example, at North Lincolnshire the inquiry about the impact of the Humber Bridge tolls on NHS patients achieved little because ‘there was little that the scrutiny panel could achieve’. It was suggested that scrutiny topics should be ‘chosen with more care’. Similarly, certain organisations ignored scrutiny recommendations with ease. For example, at Kent the rail franchise holder was able to ignore scrutiny recommendations, despite substantial local support for the scrutiny agenda. In this case, the scrutinised body was sufficiently powerful and was not obliged to make concessions to obtain local support and allies.

The impact of these inquiries was also affected by weaknesses in the arrangements of the relevant scrutiny committee. For example, at Hull an inquiry on Sure Start was affected by the long duration, which meant that there were substantial changes to the committee’s membership and ‘ownership’ of the process and the recommendations were diluted. Elsewhere, the implementation of recommendations could suffer if the committee did not develop an effective plan of action. Failure to establish a strategy had lessened the impact of an inquiry about fly-tipping undertaken at Burnley. Similarly, a respondent from London suggested that a crucial element was the provision of ‘ongoing support to the external organisation with regard to building and implementing the.....recommendations’ and that the absence of such support would jeopardise the implementation of the emergent agenda.
The evidence in relation to recommendations, therefore, challenged the positive conclusions drawn from the question about the perceived success of these inquiries and implied that the local government modernisation agenda had not, in general, enabled representative local government to enforce remedies. In the absence of formal enforcement powers, external scrutiny had often struggled to acquire the political and moral legitimacy and authority necessary to implement its agenda. The impact on holding even the New Magistracy accountable must, therefore, be regarded as relatively marginal. In effect, scrutiny committees operated as less prestigious versions of House of Commons’ departmental select committees.

The absence of formal powers to enforce their recommendations combined with the failure of many of those recommendations to be implemented might also have undermined the deterrent effect of scrutiny on the activities of external organisations and thus weakened vertical accountability to democratic representative institutions because the costs of behaviour unacceptable to local councillors were usually low.

5.10: Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the function of local authorities to hold external organisations accountable. While a notable number of external inquiries had been held, this activity remained quite marginal to local government, with over three-fifths of the authorities responding to the scoping survey claiming not to have held such a scrutiny in the specified period. External scrutiny was almost exclusively an English activity and concentrated disproportionately amongst top-tier authorities. In terms of
topics there was a relatively high degree of interest in transport and policing/community action.

The scrutiny committee that staged the inquiry drove the scrutiny process substantially. There was also much satisfaction with internal support for these inquiries, a conclusion that challenged findings from previous studies. The main sources of advice were internal, although academic experts, other local authorities and the voluntary sector supplied advice to a notable number of scrutinies.

The evaluation also indicated that most scrutinised agencies had a supportive attitude towards these inquiries. There was widespread co-operation from the external agencies over issues such as requests for information and witnesses, while the impact of the inquiries on relations between the local authority and the scrutinised organisation was often positive. There were also interesting variations in relation to the topics.

The survey found no evidence to suggest that any political group subjected external scrutiny inquiries to a whip. In addition, a relatively small number of party groups held meetings about an external scrutiny before sessions of the inquiry. There were also interesting findings about the benefits of direct public participation and the development of innovative formats. The media covered many of these inquiries, although this focus was disproportionately on some topics such as the Post Office, the fire service, the utilities and education. Respondents suggested that almost eight in ten of these inquiries had been successful, although these positive conclusions were diminished when the extent to which the scrutinised agencies had implemented recommendations was assessed.
The emergence of external scrutiny had supplied a mechanism through which the New Magistracy of the appointed state and a wide variety of other organisations could be held accountable to local representative democracy. External scrutiny considered functions such as the postal service that were never undertaken by local authorities and services such as the water supply that were separated from local government decades ago. The scrutiny role of local authorities must be seen primarily as a mechanism of vertical accountability, although media pressures and the use of some elements of a more direct concept of democracy meant that this model incorporated elements of downward accountability.

This enhanced accountability role for councillors resulting from the recent local government modernisation agenda had, however, to be qualified by two important factors. First, the limited capacity of scrutiny meant that only a small number of inquiries could be undertaken, although the institutional presence of scrutiny structures and the possibility of specific decisions being the subject of an inquiry might have affected the actions of external bodies. Second, the absence of formal enforcement powers and the variable extent to which recommendations were implemented suggested a recurrent weakness in this accountability model.

The focus on external scrutiny could also be seen through the prism of the development of a partnership notion of local governance, which stressed a more collaborative mode of working. This approach extended the influence of democratic local governance but obliged local authorities to bargain and co-operate with non-elected organisations and establish formal and often wide-ranging institutional structures with them, examples included Health Action Zones (HAZs) and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). There was, however, a potential for conflict between
these two components of the local government modernisation agenda: partnerships and scrutiny. The local accountability process inherent in external scrutiny could be viewed as a threat to the good relations required for an effective partnership approach, however the evidence presented in this study suggested that external scrutiny often strengthened and seldom worsened relations between the local authority and the external body thus enhancing this collaborative notion of democratic local governance.

1 Scrutiny can contain lay (ie non-councillor) members, although the preponderance of elected councillors meant that it was appropriate to consider them as instruments of representative democracy. In any case, many scrutiny committees had a membership composed exclusively of elected councillors.

2 The discussions on media coverage and the inclusion of elements of direct public participation also incorporated the idea of scrutiny committee councillors and or scrutinised agencies being downwardly accountable to a grassroots agenda.

3 For the first three columns percentages relate to the total number of local authorities in each category. In the last two columns they relate to the overall number of inquiries identified. Column three gives percentages in relation to the proportion of local authorities from each category completing at least one response to the second stage questionnaire.

4 The figures in the ‘main reason’ column total 242 not 238 because some respondents listed more than one main reason.

5 The figures in the ‘main reason’ column total 243 not 238 because some respondents listed more than one committee as having the joint main role.

6 The figures in the ‘main role’ column total 241 not 238 because some respondents listed more than one committee as having the joint main role.

7 It is reasonable to suppose that if local authority staff supported external inquiries similar procedures existed in relation to internal inquiries; an assumption strengthened by the existence of dedicated scrutiny units in many authorities. In any case, in most instances, the same committee undertook both external and internal inquiries.

8 Respondents were asked to choose from five options with regard to the attitude of the scrutinised agency. The full wording of the choices was: generally enthusiastic; supportive but little evidence of enthusiasm; polite and civil but viewed the process as an obligation or burden and showed some suspicion; significant tensions with the scrutiny committee; open conflict with the scrutiny committee.

9 There were some exceptions in relation to external bodies with councillor representation in their governance such as housing ALMOs and various partnerships with participation from the local authority. Tables 5.27, 5.28 and 5.29 only recorded responses in relation to inquiries for which recommendations had been made and enough time had elapsed to evaluate implementation. No recommendations were made in relation to 34 inquiries, while insufficient time had elapsed in relation to 11. This section of the questionnaire was not answered with regard to 30 scrutinies.

10 Exceptions could occur in relation to organisations that had councillors on their boards, bodies dependent on grants from local authorities and organisations in a formal partnership with them.
CHAPTER 6
CONSULTATIONS

6.1: Introduction

In this chapter, a selection of consultations undertaken by Devon County Council between 1996 and 2001 are evaluated. The term ‘consultation’ was selected to reflect a reality that in many of these exercises the consultees had a relatively marginal role in the process of policy formulation (see Arnstein, 1971; Gyford, 1991) and because this term could also be deployed to incorporate Devon County Council initiatives allowing consultees a more direct input into the policy-making process. In contrast, using the term ‘participation’ to describe initiatives discussed in this chapter was less appropriate because it often implied a more substantial degree of involvement and influence in policy formulation than was justified by the data.

However, it should, of course, be noted that this discussion and these distinctions are clouded with theoretical subtleties and problems (see chapter two). The approach used here has similarities with that adopted by Gyford (1991), has echoes in Arnstein’s (1971) analysis but contrasts with Lowndes et al. (2001a; 2001b) who deployed the concept of ‘participation’ to address the full range of initiatives in this area. Although this conceptual debate is fascinating, it is not central to the research discussed in this chapter because whether ‘consultation’ or ‘participation’ was used the practical findings would remain unaltered, differences would be restricted to linguistic nuance and how the debate linked to the academic literature (see chapter two).
The survey of consultations conducted by Devon County Council incorporates examples from a wide-range of functions and covers the use of mechanisms such as questionnaires, interviews and group discussions. These consultations are assessed in terms of the relationship between the authority and the consultees; the methodological expertise of the officer(s) undertaking each consultation; co-ordination with the corporate centre of the authority; and the results and impact of the process. A series of factors affecting the impact of consultations are identified and discussed. The analysis is undertaken within a three-group classification, which reflected differences in the characteristics of the consultees. User surveys incorporate consultations about service responsibilities that are restricted to existing service users. Consultations classified in the ‘responsibilities’ section also involve the participation of a wider range of individuals, while the ‘organisational’ category contains consultations concerned exclusively with the management of the authority, such as staff training. The analysis is also linked with the themes of democracy, accountability and the local government modernisation agenda.

6.2: Devon County Council and the consultation agenda

In 2001 Devon County Council had just developed a corporate approach to consultations. At corporate and senior management level there was broad acceptance of the extension of consultation envisaged by central government as part of the modernisation agenda. Two groups had, therefore, been established to co-ordinate and facilitate consultations. The Consultation Co-ordination Group was responsible for linking consultations undertaken in different areas of the authority, while the Devon Consultation Group co-ordinated consultations performed by the council with those undertaken by other public bodies in Devon. A key aim was the elimination of
multiple requests for similar information so as to reduce the burden placed on specific individuals and institutions. The authority had also established a registration procedure for all its consultations. There was an obligation to register each consultation with a senior manager in each directorate, who was required to inform the corporate centre, which kept a list of consultations. The council had also adopted a code of practice and framework of ethics for conducting consultations, which arose out of good practice in the Social Services Directorate. This code incorporated guidance on a wide range of issues such as confidentiality and supplying feedback to the consultees.

6.3: Relationship with the consultees

The authority's consultation strategy identified good practice in relation to consultees. In particular, this agenda emphasised the importance of explaining the purpose and process of each consultation, supplying information about the relationship to the decision-making process and the giving feedback (DCC, 2000b: 1-2). The evidence identified in this study suggested, however, that a substantial number of consultations did not reflect this best practice adequately. The survey evaluated information supplied to consultees. Managers were asked whether they explained policy on a wide range of issues to the consultees (see table 6.1).

The survey showed that in most of these consultations important information was withheld. Policy about confidentiality and anonymity was not disclosed in almost 57% of the consultations. Similarly, consultees were not informed about the methods for providing feedback or about the timetable for the consultation in 41% and 22% of the consultations respectively. Twenty-two percent of consultations also failed to
supply consultees with feedback either during the process or after the consultation had
been finished. An officer from social services highlighted the importance of supplying
feedback about the basis of decisions. She suggested that this approach was necessary
in order to prevent consultees becoming angry when decisions did not reflect their
attitudes.

Table 6.1: Relationship with the consultees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Supplied</th>
<th>User Surveys</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Organisational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was inside and outside the remit of the consultation.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would be done with the responses.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy on confidentiality and anonymity.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetable for the consultation.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods for providing feedback to the consultees.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent to which the council was committed to consider, act on or be bound by the results.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings suggested that many officers in the authority had a restrictive
notion of their obligations in respect of downward accountability to consultees.

Furthermore, commitment was typically weaker when the survey was restricted to
service users. For example, only 59% of those consultations informed participants
about the extent to which the authority was committed to consider, act on or be bound
by the results, a total that was almost 20% lower than that generated by the complete
sample. Similarly, policy on confidentiality and anonymity was not disclosed to
consultees in more than seven-in-ten of the cases where the process was restricted to
service users, compared with almost 57% for the entire sample. These findings also
suggested that many consultations were constructed on a restrictive view of direct
democratic participation, which implied the 'illusion of wide-scale political
involvement' (Copus, 2006: 101) and was situated firmly in the tradition of representative rather than direct democracy.

6.4: Methodological expertise

The authority had developed mechanisms to support the consultation process. Advice and practical assistance was available from Corporate Information Services (CIS), which claimed to have ‘expertise in compiling and analysing questionnaires and in undertaking survey work’ (DCC, 2000a: 19). The existence of this unit was intended to provide the assistance necessary to maintain rigorous methodological standards. Indeed, in 2000 the council decided to oblige officers undertaking a consultation to approach CIS before hiring external companies or performing the work themselves (DCC, 2000a: 19). The CIS was, however, an inadequate mechanism. In particular, the unit lacked the capacity to assist more than a small percentage of the consultations undertaken on behalf of the local authority.

Some consultations used external agencies to ensure that they were undertaken in a rigorous manner. For example, the University of Exeter designed the questionnaire used in a consultation on Help Desks. There was also evidence that some consultations used in-house expertise. Some officers in social services drew on the methodological skills of colleagues, while an officer in the Education Directorate used the Education Psychology Service to design questionnaires. In some other cases, such as the PLUS (library users survey) and the Best Value customer satisfaction survey, the authority used forms designed at a national level.

Most consultations using in-house teams, however, lacked rigour. One supporter of hiring external consultants argued that if the authority undertook
consultations alone there was 'a danger that we could make them more positive' than was justified and suggested that the authority could hear the message 'we want to hear'. Similarly, an officer from social services commented that there was a risk that officers conducting consultations instinctively encouraged people to confirm the existing agenda and 'help people to the view that you want them to get'. Another manager from social services argued that 'in terms of formal consultations, we are not very good at it'. Most consultations in his directorate were 'amateurish' and much in-house sampling performed by his directorate was suspect. Similarly, a senior education officer observed that the authority's consultations 'could be more structured and professional'.

A manager with responsibility for roads said that weaknesses in consultation procedures had been used against the authority at public inquiries. This officer cited a case in which the authority had been criticised for using the colour red for its preferred route for a new road on the basis that red was the most popular colour and introduced a bias in favour of the preferred option. He thought that an expert in consultation methodologies would have been aware of this potential difficulty and would have recommended that another colour be selected for the preferred route.

Another officer in the Environment Directorate said that her directorate required advice about the phrasing of questions and how to avoid framing 'leading' questions. Phrasing weaknesses had enabled Friends of the Earth to criticise a consultation on the construction of a ring road. A third environment officer noted that difficulties could arise in relation to technical terminology and argued that 'we are inevitably insular and speak in a professional way that is inaccessible to outsiders'.
Similarly, an officer with a key role in a library service consultation observed that design faults in the questionnaire ‘made analysis difficult’.

The interviews also revealed widespread resistance to the notion that methodological rigour was important. Indeed, some managers took pride in the idea that they were busy practitioners with little time or enthusiasm for methodological issues. For example, a social services manager dismissed methodological concerns and commented that she 'did it (the consultation) on my feet'. Another officer from social services observed that pressures of cost and time meant that consultations were often performed ‘on the hoof’ and that speed was usually more important than producing a study that would conform to ‘rigorous academic standards’. Similarly, an Environment Directorate officer asserted that it was easy ‘to spend a disproportionate amount of money consulting on a small scheme’.

Overall, there was little concern about methodological weaknesses or the lack of research skills amongst council employees. In particular, concerns about the extent to which consultees were statistically representative of the whole population were typically dismissed. Claims that the sample was statistically representative were made for only two consultations. In some instances, particular characteristics of the service meant that such an objective was impossible to obtain. An officer responsible for a consultation about the registration service said that surveys in this area could not be statistically representative because statutory confidentiality requirements meant that they could not ask for the names and addresses of service users. Furthermore, this consultation suffered from a pronounced problem of non-response because many people were resistant to the idea of participating in a survey at what was often a very stressful time.
A consultation with carers was also unable to locate a statistically representative sample because there was no obligation to register as a carer. The survey circumvented these difficulties by focusing on people who had contacted their GP in relation to their role as a carer. The interviewee admitted, however, that this methodology created a sample bias in favour of people who had asked for support. An officer with responsibility for a consultation on breaks for carers of children with disabilities also admitted sample bias because her team targeted people they knew. She asserted that trying to establish a statistically representative sample that incorporated people not yet closely involved with social services would have consumed too much officer-time. Similarly, an officer with responsibility for the consultation on the Devon Early Years Development and Childcare Plan acknowledged that the consultation had ‘a lot of theoretical weaknesses’ and that her sample was biased against the unemployed, the socially excluded and teenage mothers.

For many managers, the extent to which the sample represented a wider relevant population was unimportant. In contrast, it was suggested that the key issue was the need to allow people to participate and that if people did not participate they had no right to complain if unrepresentative results emerged. An officer involved in consulting about residents’ parking and traffic calming in Exeter argued that ‘everyone gets a letter so everyone gets an opportunity to be involved in consultation’. However, colleagues who worked on a similar consultation in Okehampton said that with questionnaires there was a significant risk that the sample would be biased in favour of the scheme because opponents would not reply. Many officers, however,
justified their consultation in terms of a high response rate or positive outcomes and implied that the rigour of the methodology was a relatively minor matter.

There was also resistance to innovative techniques and faith in the accumulated experience of individual directorates and/or managers. This position was acknowledged by a senior manager in the Environment Directorate who commented that ‘we are rather traditional....maybe we have not been challenged enough about whether the way we are consulting is effective’. He further observed that the effectiveness of consultations on minor road schemes was reduced by the use of wall plans because some people had difficulty in understanding the implications. In contrast, he suggested that 3D models would communicate the impact of such schemes more successfully.

These problems supported conclusions about weaknesses in the research capacity of local authorities (see Percy-Smith and Sanderson, 2000: Sanderson et al., 2001) and also implied an institutional malaise or, at minimum, carelessness with regard to injecting an element of direct democracy into policy formulation and establishing strong lines of downward accountability in respect of the decision-making process. These methodological weaknesses and the lack of an institutional commitment to address such problems implied that consultation was often viewed more as a formal process that needed to be completed than a mechanism to extend meaningful involvement in the policy process. Furthermore, these findings also questioned the capacity of local government to deliver on this important aspect of the modernisation agenda and suggested that training, funding and a cultural shift in relation to research methods might be required for a cultural shift in relation to consultation.
6.5: Co-ordination and the corporate centre

Although the benefits of co-ordinating the council’s consultation activities were recognised there was, however, significant reluctance to engage with this agenda. First, some managers assumed that it was inappropriate to apply this agenda to their work. This focus was emphasised by an officer from social services who viewed ‘joined-up’ consultation in terms of establishing co-operation between the local arms of social services and the NHS.

Second, there was some clear resistance to this approach. For example, a manager in the Environment Directorate argued that the logic behind the ‘joined-up’ agenda was suspect because the authority’s service responsibilities were the result of ‘a historic accident’. Concern was also expressed that the ‘joined-up’ agenda could constrain their capacity to consult and deny them some of the required information. For example, an interviewee argued that ‘with joined-up consultation there is a danger of losing focus and not asking the questions in the way we want to ask them’. Other respondents commented that the ‘joined-up’ agenda was not relevant to their work because the conduct of their consultation(s) was determined by legislation.

The corporate consultation agenda was implemented in the context of an entrenched culture of departmentalism within the authority. This characteristic had been identified by the Local Government Improvement Team, which had observed that departmentalism needed to be ‘complemented by an equal measure of cross-service working’ (LGIT, 1999: 1) and commented that such working should be viewed as ‘mainstream activity and not an added chore’ (LGIT, 1999: 1). The culture of departmentalism helped to explain the low priority given to ‘joining-up’
consultations across the authority and the preference for co-ordination with external organisations operating in similar areas.

Departmentalism blunted the effectiveness of attempts to co-ordinate consultations. Nineteen interviewees (43%) were not aware of this agenda, a total that included some senior officers. Furthermore, only seven (16%) of the interviewees knew about the establishment of the Consultation Co-ordination Group. These findings were strengthened by evidence that few consultations were registered. In total, only six consultations out of the 51 covered in this study had been unambiguously registered at the corporate centre. In addition, the register contained 14 vague references to ‘all aspects of social care’ that could have been relevant to several consultations incorporated in this study.

The corporate centre had, therefore, little appreciation of the scale and diversity of consultations undertaken by the authority and devised policies founded on a substantial underestimate. For example, the establishment of an obligation to approach CIS before proceeding was credible in the context of the registration of 25 to 30 consultations per year but less feasible if the substantial volume of unregistered exercises were taken into account. This weakness of the corporate centre chimed with conclusions reached by Lowndes et al. (2001a: 206) who wrote to chief executives to construct a census of the participation methods used by local authorities and subsequently observed that ‘the complex operational structures of most local authorities...make it difficult for one individual to have complete knowledge of all the organizations’ initiatives’. The Devon study complemented the earlier analysis and showed that this ignorance can extend to the information specialists at the corporate centre and can be substantial.
These findings suggested that extending democratic involvement and downward accountability through consultations was hampered through managerial weaknesses which could only be resolved at the most senior level and supported the previous conclusions about an institutional malaise surrounding factors crucial to implementing the local government modernisation agenda in this area. In a politico-administrative culture with a strong focus on matters such as strengthening downward accountability and increasing the direct democracy element in decision-making it would, for example, be expected that senior managers, and or the research staff with an interest in these issues, would have addressed questions such as the low number of registrations and the evident non-registration of most exercises.

6.6: Results and impact

There was evidence that senior management recognised, in theory at least, the potential of the consultation agenda to engage the wider community. A senior officer in the Environment Directorate commented that 'consultation raised awareness....and established better working channels with people we would only normally see when there was a problem'. The key question was, however, whether this rhetoric reflected the impact of specific consultations on the policy-making process. This question was addressed by asking managers whether their consultation(s) had produced unexpected results and or had a substantial impact, this aspect of the evaluation excluded cases where it was too soon to make an assessment. The results are shown in table 6.2.
Table 6.2: Results and impact of the consultations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unexpected results</th>
<th>A substantial impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes % N</td>
<td>No % N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Surveys</td>
<td>4 26.7</td>
<td>11 73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td>11 36.7</td>
<td>19 63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational</td>
<td>2 50.0</td>
<td>2 50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17 34.7</td>
<td>32 65.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This analysis can be adapted to produce an assessment of the effect of these consultations on the policy agenda in terms of a threefold classification.

Consultations that transformed the agenda were those generating unexpected results and having a substantial impact. Consultations that confirmed the agenda had a substantial impact and produced predictable results. Marginal consultations did not have a substantial impact. This evaluation is outlined in table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Classification of the consultations by effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Transform</th>
<th>Confirm</th>
<th>Marginal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N %</td>
<td>N %</td>
<td>N %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Surveys</td>
<td>2 13.3</td>
<td>9 60.0</td>
<td>4 26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td>8 27.6</td>
<td>12 41.4</td>
<td>9 31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational</td>
<td>1 25.0</td>
<td>0 0.0</td>
<td>3 75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11 22.9</td>
<td>21 43.8</td>
<td>16 33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples with a marginal impact included a consultation on the historic environment strategy, which resulted in ‘tweaking’ rather than significant alterations. The only changes derived from tensions between the County Council and Dartmoor National Park in relation to the management of monument registers. The alterations affected a few sentences about the current position and did not alter future strategy. Similarly, a consultation on the county structure plan had a limited impact because the debate was restricted by the imposition of regional planning guidance. There was, therefore a ‘limited’ opportunity for consultees to alter the plan. A consultation on the provision of skips had no impact on the authority’s decisions. Despite evidence that
skips were valued throughout the county, budgetary pressures led the authority to
decide to reduce the number of skips from 63 to ten and force many people living in
rural communities to undertake significant journeys to dispose of their rubbish. As the
relevant office commented ‘the consultation did not change the decision’.

Two-thirds of these consultations had a substantial impact, however most of
them also produced predictable results. These consultations, therefore, confirmed
existing assumptions, attitudes and agendas rather than challenged or changed them.
For example, a consultation on the potential use of digitalised information produced
the predictable conclusion that the relevant organisations valued the materials and
supported the move towards digitalisation, while results from the PLUS library users’
survey confirmed criticism of specific buildings.

A consultation about public access to computers in libraries also served
primarily to re-enforce staff observations. This evidence did, however, assist in
justifying important changes such as a movement away from purchasing CD-Roms for
branches, enhancing staff training to enable them to help users, increasing the
provision of computers, linking all libraries onto the computer network and catering
for disadvantaged members of the community. There was, however, also evidence to
suggest that some consultations that gave support to the status quo had been designed,
either implicitly or explicitly, to achieve such an aim. Similarly, support for the
current agenda could be justified by the selective interpretation of the survey evidence.
For example, a readership survey conducted on behalf of Link, a local authority
published magazine for people with disabilities, was interpreted as vindicating the
current editorial strategy and praised for generating some improvements. This
interpretation, however, ignored evidence that the magazine offered little for young readers and overlooked the failure to survey disabled non-readers.

Only 17 (35%) of these consultations were evaluated as having produced unexpected results. For example, a survey of users of the Devon Record Office generated the unexpected finding that only 36% of the users lived in Exeter. Only 11 (23%) consultations both produced unexpected results and had a substantial impact and were thus classified in the transform category. Some of these consultations, however, produced notable policy changes. The consultation on the Barnstaple Western By-Pass led the County Council to raise the height of an important bridge and remove the link road from the scheme, while a consultation on respite care led to the introduction of a voucher scheme for carers. A consultation on the Devon Early Years Development and Childcare Plan produced the unexpected conclusion that the anticipated demand for childcare, in general, and breakfast clubs, in particular, did not exist. This finding had a substantial impact because the team concluded that the lack of demand for childcare reflected the low aspirations of the mothers and their reluctance to re-engage with employment and education. The focus was, therefore, shifted to place greater emphasis on lifelong learning.

A consultation on staff attitudes towards IT undermined many traditional assumptions and helped to shift the agenda within the authority. This exercise dispelled the myth that most employees were hostile towards IT and served to counteract an anti-IT agenda that had been promoted by a vocal minority of staff who thought that IT issues were 'beneath them'. The results of the survey were used to assist in shaping the training and implementation of the new IT system for care management. A proposal to establish a new unit in Exeter for people with learning
disabilities was abandoned after evidence from a consultation found that clients were opposed to the scheme. Similarly, most of a proposed scheme for residents’ parking in the Heavitree and Poleshoe area of Exeter was abandoned after a consultation suggested that a majority of local people opposed the plan.

Some consultations had an impact on the budget for the relevant service. Indeed, consultation results were used routinely to expand or defend budgets. For example, expenditure on respite care was increased when a consultation disclosed the extent to which carers valued the scheme. Consultation evidence from a user survey was also deployed to stop planned cuts to the budget for libraries. The survey results served to raise the profile of an unglamorous department within the authority and highlighted its value. As an officer proudly observed, survey results were published in the bulletin sent to all councillors.

The relatively small number of consultations in the transform category could be interpreted to suggest that downward accountability mechanisms were ineffective in relation to their impact on policy formulation and that the impact of a more direct concept of democracy was marginal. However, some of those consultations in the transform category were associated with important policy changes. Furthermore, the interpretation of this evidence was accompanied by methodological problems in relation to consultations that were judged to have made a substantial impact but also generated predictable results. Arguing that they contributed very little to direct democracy or the effectiveness of downward accountability risked overlooking the possibility that confirmation of the status quo might have played a key role in policy formulation in relation to some of these issues and could have persuaded the authority to abandon more radical options. Furthermore, results that supported the
bureaucratic/politico consensus might reflect the fact that the earlier stages of the policy-making process had been responsive to popular opinion rather than confirm theories about an undemocratic and unaccountable bureaucracy.

It could, however, be deduced that direct democracy and downward accountability facilitated through consultations seldom altered the agenda (see table 6.3). The study also identified several factors that affected the impact of consultations.

6.6.1: Timing

The impact of consultations on many of the key countywide plans was diminished because consultees were incorporated into the decision-making process at a late stage. Public consultation occurred primarily on complex proposals and was not used to devise them. The officer with responsibility for the consultation on the historic environment strategy commented that the consultation should have occurred earlier in the process and implied that there was 'institutional reluctance' to allow consultees into the process at a stage where they could affect major changes.

A senior officer in the Education Directorate, with responsibility for a major education plan, raised this problem and argued that the council should 'involve more people at an earlier stage, before they get into the detail'. This interviewee suggested that public consultation on his plan would have been improved by establishing a representative panel at the start of the process to identify priorities used to write the draft plan. Public consultation had been confined to asking for opinions on the draft plan.

In contrast, an officer in the Environment Directorate highlighted the advantages of giving the public a coherent set of alternatives. A consultation on a road
scheme at Moretonhampstead failed because the authority asked the public to devise routes and obtained 30 different alternatives, many of which could not be justified in terms of cost. This interviewee implied that the public had been incorporated into the process at too early a stage and that the authority should have devised three or four viable alternatives and then consulted the public. An extreme example of the restrictions imposed by timing was provided by the consultation on the economic development plan, which occurred two months after the annual budget had been agreed. The consultation could, therefore, have had little impact in that financial year although it might have affected subsequent decisions.

6.6.2: Attitude towards the consultees

The impact of a consultation can be affected by the perceived importance of the consultees. The value social services placed on obtaining opinions from clients with learning disabilities was reflected in their response to evidence from the Exeter Learning Disabilities Review and the deployment of an advocacy worker, who used signing and symbols to translate the proposals into a form that could be understood by individuals of limited intelligence.

Elsewhere, the analysis showed that the opinions of some groups were treated with much less respect. In particular, recommendations resulting from consultations about facilities for travellers were ignored on a regular basis. The manager responsible observed that the council lacked the political will to spend money in this area and commented that the politico-administrative leadership regarded him with suspicion. The key problem was that money spent in this area could attract adverse publicity and lose politicians votes. Failure to improve their facilities had bred a cynicism amongst
this client group and they expected consultations to be followed by long periods of inaction.

The council also lacked the will to treat consultation with the county's young people in a serious manner. Devon Youth Council (DYC) had been established with the objective of supplying 'a two-way link between the young people of Devon and Devon County Council' (DYC Constitution: 1). However, DYC suffered from two fundamental weaknesses that undermined the effectiveness of consultation with the county's young people. First, the budget of £10,000 per year was inadequate for a large county with a substantial rural population and a relatively low population density. Second, there had been no attempt to integrate DYC into the decision-making structures of the local authority (Goldsworthy, 2001: 2). Clare Goldsworthy, the Youth Co-ordinator, commented that in her first six months in office 'apart from the Youth Service, no one had ever come to see me about anything'. Furthermore, DYC had not been invited to participate in any county consultation affecting young people. The County Council's determination to secure the autonomy of DYC had 'effectively meant neglect and a lack of support' (Goldsworthy, 2001: 2). The ineffectiveness of DYC meant that few young people were willing to serve as youth councillors. Clare Goldsworthy commented that 'we don't have a Youth Council. I have three or four young people who come into the office to help me.'

Ms Goldsworthy had developed a coherent reform agenda. First, youth councillors should be paid a basic allowance. This funding might free them from the need to have part-time jobs, enable them to travel around their district, meet a wide range of young people and convey a wide diversity of views to the County Council. Second, she suggested that the youth councillors could feed this information into the
district level youth strategy groups. This approach would have created a formal mechanism through which DYC's consultations could be channelled into the decision-making process. The County Council recognised that DYC was in need of reform and instituted a review in winter 2000/2001, which was published in March 2001. Unfortunately, the review was complacent, did not address the often-strident criticisms of DYC from young people and youth workers and failed to frame a coherent reform agenda that dealt with DYC's problems.

The problems of DYC reflected the marginal position of young people in the authority. The Youth Service was a relatively minor and small section of the Education, Arts and Libraries Directorate, while the executive member with responsibility for youth issues had a relatively junior position on the Executive Committee. DYC also suffered from the fact that almost half of its age group had no vote and that turnout amongst the remainder was low (see Bartle, 2002: 200). The high average age of councillors also militated against the interests of youth. The low position on the political agenda meant that officers outside the Youth Service ignored DYC.

The evidence suggested, therefore, a form of social exclusion in the capacity of certain groups to have a direct input into the decision-making process or assert the validity and importance of downward accountability. The study implied that the reasons might lie in the attitudes of senior managers and councillors who have, therefore, created or affirmed a politico-administrative culture which failed to recognise the legitimacy of the contribution of such groups to the democratic process or acknowledge the importance of accountability to them. There was a contrast with the legitimacy attached to the direct input into policy formulation of certain user groups, such as those with learning disabilities (see above), and the consequent
strength of downward lines of accountability in respect of the services they used, although, in relation to the issues discussed in table 6.1, downward accountability was relatively weak in consultations restricted to user groups.

6.6.3: Public relations

This survey also revealed evidence to suggest that despite the modernising agenda, some consultations were motivated by cynical objectives. These consultations were designed as a mechanism for persuading consultees to accept the agenda selected by the local authority and were not genuine attempts to allow a wider range of people to influence decision-making. One manager from the Social Services Directorate thought that consultation was primarily a device to explain difficult decisions to clients and reduce their opposition. Similarly, an officer involved in a consultation on intelligent transport systems in Exeter observed that the key role of the consultation was to make the plans acceptable to local politicians and stakeholders.

An officer conducting a consultation amongst the council’s staff commented that the process was intended to ‘create the illusion that people are involved’. The consultation was primarily a public relations exercise designed to reduce staff resistance to change. An officer based in the Chief Executive’s Directorate observed that his consultation was designed primarily to inform rather than consult and commented that the consultation was a ‘charade’ because there was little capacity for the consultees to exert influence. Similarly, the manager conducting a consultation on the design of facilities for travellers commented that ‘we have to implement a basic design......this consultation is primarily PR’. It was also suggested that the responsibility of DYC to consult young people could be explained through public
relations and that DYC had been established to enable 'Devon County Council to say it is consulting young people'. This public relations orientation suggested that some consultations lacked any meaningful focus on enhancing direct democracy or a commitment to genuine downward accountability.

6.6.4: High expectations and cost constraints

The impact of some consultations was reduced because consultees had high expectations of service delivery that the local authority could not or was unwilling to fund. For example, the consultation on the provision of skips had little impact because it produced the predictable conclusion that the public wanted 'facilities within reasonable driving distances and reacted badly when a reduction was suggested'. The council was unwilling to sustain the existing level of provision and closed most of the rural skips despite strong opposition within the ruling political group (see chapter 4). Similar problems were experienced in relation to consultations about bus services, which invariably generated demands for additional services regardless of probable use. This evidence was, therefore, often discounted and decisions taken on the basis of separate assessments.

6.6.5: Professional expertise

The impact of a consultation could be constrained by the professionalism and skill of managers. Several managers commented that if they were performing their jobs effectively consultations would produce predictable results and the consequent changes would be minor. For example, a senior manager in the Environment Directorate commented that 'we don't get many public responses that make us take
notice' and that 'it would be a substantial failing if we received many unexpected results'.

6.6.6: Choice of consultees

Consultations concerned with technical matters were often restricted to a select group of institutional partners. For example, consultation on the historic environment strategy was confined to specialist organisations. It was thought inappropriate to incorporate a wider range of people on the grounds that nobody else would 'know whether the statements were true or not'.

Some consultations had to resolve problems in relation to how to handle the involvement of parishes. Parishes were too numerous and important to ignore but they had a limited administrative capacity and were targeted by a significant number of consultations. In consequence, the response rate from them was often very low and not statistically representative of the total. It was, however, possible to engage the parishes. In a study of community appraisals (see chapter seven) the author achieved a 79% response rate from parishes. This success was, however, obtained through extreme perseverance and allowing them nine months to respond. Local authority officers usually work to more restrictive timescales and have too many commitments to devote the necessary energy to contacting non-respondents.

Where focus group type exercises were used the decision on whether to consult different types of consultees separately could have a significant impact. For example, an officer with responsibility for a consultation on respite care commented that her decision to combine professionals and carers in the same group had been mistaken. The carers felt intimidated by the expertise of the professionals and obliged
to agree with their comments. She observed that ‘the professionals damp down the enthusiasm of the users’.

6.6.7: Organisational culture

The strong departmentalism at Devon County Council (LGIT, 1999: 1) had lead to the evolution of different attitudes towards consultation in the different directorates. In social services the senior management had a positive attitude towards the consultation agenda and a commitment to ‘open dialogue’ with their clients, although a significant number of the middle and junior level staff that had to implement this agenda were less enthusiastic. Such individuals regarded consultation as a marginal activity and a burden. One officer suggested that consultation was regarded by many in the directorate as a ‘bolt-on’ and a ‘rock they have to carry round with them’.

In the Environment Directorate scepticism was widespread at all levels of management. One officer commented that the directorate had a ‘patronising attitude towards consultation’, considered the process as a requirement but often paid little attention to the results. In general, the directorate regarded consultations as ‘a hoop you have to jump through’. This impression was re-enforced by a senior officer in the same directorate who commented that ‘you can’t pander to people’s wishes’. Similarly, an officer with responsibility for the consultation on skips commented that ‘people don’t understand waste issues’. These conclusions again stressed the importance of the politico-administrative culture to the impact of consultations and hence the capacity of such initiatives to foster a more direct form of democracy, strengthen downward accountability and promote the local government modernisation agenda.
6.6.8: National government and statutory limits

The impact of consultations could also be affected by statue and non-statutory regulations. The Best Value satisfaction survey primarily represented the local implementation of a national agenda because the questions were determined at national level. In particular, the questionnaire lacked specific questions on schools or residential care because national government had determined that these areas should not be incorporated in the survey. These omissions meant that the Best Value consultation 'gave an unbalanced view of the...performance of the County Council'. A senior officer described this position as 'unbelievable'. The effectiveness of the Best Value survey was also constrained by the government's decision that the survey should focus on the general public and thus marginalise the experience of service users, who possessed genuine knowledge about performance. In consequence, a senior officer described this survey as 'a blunt instrument'.

The impact of consultations on road safety was often reduced because consultees asked for the installation of 20mph speed limits and sleeping policemen on main roads, which were prohibited by statue. A consultation on the registration and inspection of care homes was constrained by statutory guidance about how inspections should be conducted. The consultation, therefore, covered the narrow range of issues over which national regulations gave local authorities some discretion. Similarly, an officer noted that the consultation on the design of facilities for travellers was restricted by health and safety regulations.
6.7: Conclusion

This chapter raised a range of important issues. First, there were significant gaps in the information given to consultees. For example, the provision of feedback was far from universal. Second, the analysis suggested that the authority lacked the research skills to conduct methodologically rigorous consultations. Few of the managers interviewed had any training in basic research techniques, while some were proud of their practical focus and, by implication, methodological ignorance.

Third, the study identified the weakness of the corporate centre. This problem undermined attempts to 'join-up' the consultations performed by the different directorates and the implementation of common standards or guidelines covering consultations undertaken throughout the authority. The corporate centre was also starved of information about consultations and, therefore, underestimated the number undertaken by its employees. Fourth, while the study found that a relatively high number of consultations had a substantial impact; several factors that reduced their impact were identified. In particular, most of this group of consultations generated predictable results that strengthened the existing agenda rather than challenged and or altered policy.

The analysis produced evidence to support the claim that some consultations were undertaken for cynical purposes (Arnstein, 1971) and reflected a public relations agenda. Some consultations were, therefore, held to mobilise consent rather than affect the decision. These consultations concerned image and lacked the substance of genuine consultation aimed at strengthening democratic participation in decisions. This approach implied what the political marketing literature coined a 'sales
orientation', through which there was a pronounced emphasis on presenting these activities in 'the most positive light' and on 'communicating the benefits' (Lees-Marchment, 2001: 24). The scepticism about the authority's commitment to more participative and direct concepts of democracy suggested an inclination towards a more elitist and representative notion of democracy in which power was more firmly located with senior officials and councillors, although some consultations were associated with notable changes and the interpretation of those in the confirm category was beset with methodological problems.

The evaluation could also be interpreted as implying that consultations were seldom an effective agent of downward accountability in respect to influencing specific decisions. However, once again the presence of a large number of consultations that were evaluated as having a substantial impact while generating predictable results meant that immense care had to be taken when deducing such conclusions from this evidence.

The findings presented in this chapter also suggested limited progress with the aim of the local government modernisation agenda to alter the attitudes of local authorities and embed consultation and participation 'into the culture of all councils' (DETR, 1998: 39). The analysis implied that there existed a substantial number of attitudinal and practical obstacles towards the achievement of this agenda. It must, however, be noted that the research was undertaken before the end of the Labour government's first term and evaluated events that occurred relatively early in the modernisation process or before it had started. The research might, therefore, have been undertaken before such a shift in the politico-administrative culture of the authority could have been expected to occur.
This term is, however, used in other contexts.

A few consultations such as those on the economic development plan and the historic environment strategy incorporated horizontal accountability to peer groups. There was, however, insufficient data about this accountability direction to draw conclusions about consultation with peer groups.

It was not possible to estimate the number of consultations undertaken by the council. In particular, the definition was imprecise. Although the evidence from this study suggested that only a small percentage were registered.

The effect could only be evaluated in relation to 48 out of the 51 consultations.

Thirty two of the 48 consultations where a judgement could be made.

Seventeen out of the 49 consultations that had generated a final result.

Eleven out of the 48 consultations that could be evaluated in terms of their impact.

DYC represented young people aged between 14 and 24.

Immediately before the June 2001 elections the authority had only one councillor under 40 years old. There were five directorates (Education, Arts and Libraries; Social Services; Environment; Chief Executive's; and Resources).
CHAPTER 7
COMMUNITY APPRAISALS

7.1: Introduction

In this chapter, community appraisals undertaken in a wide range of overwhelmingly rural communities in Devon are evaluated. There is a focus on two distinctive themes. First, the responsiveness of various agencies to concerns expressed by those communities is assessed. Second, the capacity of these appraisals to promote community development and enhance the stock of social capital is analysed. This research is discussed in the context of the modernisation agenda both in relation to central government's aim of making local authorities more responsive to the communities they serve and the wider focus on community, which has incorporated debate on topics such as social capital. The evidence from the appraisals is also related to democracy and accountability.

7.2: Community appraisals in Devon

The 1990s saw an increased interest in community appraisals and an enhanced capacity to conduct them. The number of appraisals supported by the Community Council of Devon increased from approximately five a year in the 1980s to around ten a year between 1990 and 1995. In the mid-1990s funding was obtained to enable the Community Council to employ two full-time appraisal workers (Taragon, 1998: 27).

The existence of this level of support for the appraisal process was unusual but not unique. Appraisals in Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Somerset had benefited from substantial finance from the Training and Enterprise Council, the relevant county council and LEADER II (European) respectively. In Devon, the presence of external
funding altered the role of the Community Council. As Taragon (1998: 28) observed, the Community Council became more 'proactive in encouraging appraisals'.

The appraisals evaluated in this study resulted either from the initiative of the Community Council of Devon or the locality, the latter usually through the parish council(s). The process was organised through a steering group appointed by the relevant parish council(s) and guided by a fieldworker appointed by the Community Council. The steering group produced the questionnaire, in collaboration with the Community Council, and arranged delivery to every household in the area. Each questionnaire contained two sections. The first part requested information about issues such as household members and car ownership, and required a response from one individual. In the second section, each resident over the age of ten was asked to answer a wide range of questions about local issues, facilities and services. Each appraisal incorporated questions on topics such as adult education and health to satisfy the funders. Steering groups had the discretion to select additional questions to reflect local circumstances.

Completed questionnaires were collected by a representative(s) of the steering group, sent to County Hall and analysed by researchers employed by Devon County Council. The steering groups interpreted the results and wrote a report, which incorporated recommendations based on the questionnaire responses. Devon County Council printed the publication and the completed document was often presented to the community at a public meeting. Electronic copies of these reports were placed on the Community Council's website. The results have been used for a variety of purposes such as assisting funding applications for specific projects, influencing the local planning process and developing the agenda of parish councils.
7.3: Issues arising from the appraisals

There were replies from 46 communities, a response rate of 79%. Eighty-five percent (39) of these appraisals were evaluated as having enabled the community to identify local needs. However, only half (23) of those communities agreed with the broad proposition that they had ‘improved their facilities as a result of the appraisal’, although evidence from elsewhere on those questionnaires suggested that in the communities not agreeing with that proposition progress had been made in addressing some concerns raised in the appraisal report. Eleven communities (24%) said that funding had been acquired as a result of their appraisal. Progress in addressing concerns expressed in 48 areas was evaluated. Each topic was assessed in relation to whether the concerns had been met in full; met in part; investigated but not met; or whether no action had been taken (see table 7.1).

The analysis suggested that there had been modest progress in addressing the concerns raised in the appraisal reports. Some progress had been made to address problems outlined in almost 46% of these areas. Furthermore, concerns about issues raised in almost nine percent of the areas had been met in full. This analysis had, however, to be placed in a wider context. Appraisals did not occur in a vacuum and it was, therefore, seldom possible to identify a pure cause and effect link between an appraisal and the resolution of a specific problem unsullied by an external factor. In this study, it was, therefore, decided to focus on whether the concerns had been met and eschew language such as ‘the appraisal produced’ or an ‘appraisal generated’ unless respondents had used such terms. Statements about cause and effects were confined, in general, to discussions that did not relate to the resolution of a narrow topic, analysis of the obstacles to implementation and cases where there had been a clear failure to respond. Given that
appraisal evidence was, in general, sent to the relevant authorities it was, however, legitimate to view appraisals as part of the public policy debate and as a potential catalyst for change.

Table 7.1: Progress in addressing concerns expressed by the communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Provision of social housing and or anti-development.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>Conservation of buildings and the character of the community.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Safety</td>
<td>Traffic calming, road signs and speeding.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Management</td>
<td>Road Safety matters and a more substantial focus on issues such as traffic flows and pedestrian access. Includes the provision of new (road(s).</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>Parking facilities.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Sharing</td>
<td>Establish or extend car sharing schemes.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Improve locality, clean-up and tree planting.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Activities</td>
<td>More community events/non-sports clubs.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Facilities</td>
<td>Improve sports facilities.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennium</td>
<td>Organise millennium celebrations.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Improve/establish parish newsletter/notice-board/general communication.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycling</td>
<td>Establish/improve recycling scheme.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refuse</td>
<td>Refuse Collection.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litter</td>
<td>Reduce litter and or supply bins.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogs</td>
<td>Primarily dog mess.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood</td>
<td>Create or expand a Neighbourhood Watch.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch</td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>Retain, improve or establish a police presence.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus Service</td>
<td>Retain, improve or establish a bus service.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Transport</td>
<td>Provision of school transport.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>Establish or improve a playground.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>In</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trains</strong></td>
<td>Establish or improve a railway service.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Facilities</strong></td>
<td>Improve facilities and/or establish a Youth Club.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gas</strong></td>
<td>Improve the gas supply.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water</strong></td>
<td>Improve the water/sewage system and/or prevent flooding.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electricity</strong></td>
<td>Improve the electricity supply.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telephone</strong></td>
<td>Improve the telephone service.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cables</strong></td>
<td>Put overhead cables underground.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Toilet</strong></td>
<td>Improve the provision of public toilets.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arts Provision</strong></td>
<td>Improve the provision of arts facilities.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cycleway</strong></td>
<td>Improve or establish cycle routes.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LETs</strong></td>
<td>Establish a LETs scheme.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post Office</strong></td>
<td>Improve, retain or establish a Post Office.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post Boxes</strong></td>
<td>Establish or retain post boxes.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td>Improve, retain or build a new school.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-School</strong></td>
<td>Provision of education for the under-fives.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shops</strong></td>
<td>Retain or improve local shops.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Economy</strong></td>
<td>Improve the local economy/local employment opportunities.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health and Social Services</strong></td>
<td>Improve health, dental and social care provision.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Footpaths</strong></td>
<td>Improve local footpaths and bridleways.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Street Lighting</strong></td>
<td>Improve street lighting.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Road Maintenance</strong></td>
<td>Improve the condition of the roads and pavements.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Church</strong></td>
<td>Improve facilities.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult Education</strong></td>
<td>Improve provision of adult education and vocational training.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Library Service</strong></td>
<td>Improve library provision.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hall</strong></td>
<td>Improve village/community hall and build a new hall.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Trust</strong></td>
<td>Relationship with the National Trust.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parish Division</strong></td>
<td>Splitting the parish into two separate parishes.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Village Office</strong></td>
<td>Provision of an office for the village.</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% 8.9 37.0 27.6 26.5
7.3.1: Overall impact

There was significant evidence of improvements in some of the 'smaller-scale' issues that were dependent substantially or totally on the local community. For example, concerns about millennium celebrations; local information; social activities; the environment; and footpaths were met in full or met in part in relation to more than six in ten of the appraisals that raised such issues. At Holbeton, the appraisal was evaluated as having 'led to more communication through the newsletter and other local organisations'. At Dartington, concern about the smaller-scale village facilities had been met through improvements such as the provision of a new bench and the renewal of footpaths. This process culminated in the award of Best Kept Village. Litter and dog bins had been increased at Willand, while at Instow more dog bins were installed and the litter bins were being emptied more frequently in summer. At Tedburn St Mary, the community produced a map of local footpaths. At Bigbury-on-Sea, the establishment of a parish website by the local community improved communications. The study also identified evidence of community activists explicitly rejecting appraisal recommendations. Holbeton Parish Council noted but dismissed calls for a village design statement, while at Plymtree those responsible for the parish newsletter rejected the suggestions made through the appraisal.

There was evidence that some of the more complex and substantial issues such as housing; health and social services; parking; and the local economy, which were dependent primarily on action by external agencies, had been addressed. At Mary Tavy, appraisal concerns about the lack of affordable housing had been met through the involvement of the parish council on the Southern Link Committee. This
participation enabled the community to establish connections with West Devon Homes and secured eventual agreement for the construction of a ‘small estate with a good affordable housing element’.

At Bere Ferrers, concerns about rail links had been met through the establishment of a Sunday service. Furthermore, the village had been chosen as a pilot area for Devon County Council’s rural transport initiative. At Spreyton, concerns about the bus service were met, in part, through the establishment of one more weekly service to Exeter, Crediton and Okehampton. At Bigbury-on-Sea, South Hams District Council constructed a new car park complete with a café and new toilet block, while South Western Electricity Board (SWEB) replaced overhead cables with underground ones.

Overall, however, the analysis suggested that concerns about many of the more complex and ‘large-scale’ issues were less likely to have been resolved than those that related to the topics susceptible to community resolution. Concerns about housing; parking; the trains; the electricity supply; and health and social services had been met in full or part in less than a third of the cases. Similarly, concerns about housing; road safety; traffic management; parking; the bus service; trains; the Post Office; the local economy; and health and social services had been met in full in less than ten percent of the appraisals where such concerns had been acknowledged (see table 7.1).

For example, criticism about the absence of a daily bus service at Dittisham was met initially by the running of a service four times daily in summer and twice daily in winter, but in 2001 the winter service was axed and the bus company was unresponsive to comments that low usage had reflected the inappropriate timing of the service. At Westleigh, requests to improve the appearance of the village by placing
overhead cables underground have not resulted in action. Similarly, although the Cornworthy appraisal identified a need for new housing, South Hams District Council opposed planning permission to build new homes in the village, while at Salcombe, parking problems raised in the appraisal were not resolved. It was observed that ‘Devon County Council officers protest they have little or no money and we are cast aside’. Evidence from the Whidden Valley appraisal about the desire for a sub-post office was met with a refusal from the Post Office on the basis that such facilities existed in Newport, which was not in walking distance for most residents. At Halwell and Moreleigh, appraisal evidence about the need for more low-cost housing had not generated any response.

The difficulty in establishing a definitive casual link between appraisal reports and agency action, from the evidence presented in this section, limited the capacity to identify conclusions about the impact of the appraisals on the downward accountability of the agencies or the extent to which these appraisals injected an element of democracy, in the case of the non-elected bodies, or direct democracy, in the case of elected local governance, into the decision-making process. However, the failure to address concerns about many of the more substantial matters suggested that appraisals were not an effective mechanism to enhance the democratic or direct democratic elements of decision-making or downward accountability in respect of many of the larger agencies controlled by individuals who were based outside the local community.

7.3.2: Type of community

The capacity of the appraisal process to resolve specific local problems was also affected by the type of community(ies) covered. Appraisals were relatively
ineffective mechanisms in two types of settlement: towns and collections of several distinctive parishes. Appraisals incorporating several diverse communities/sub-communities risked producing aggregate results that either exaggerated or obscured key issues. Substantial concern about an issue in one sub-area could be obscured by satisfaction in another, while there might be too wide a variation in the type of problems across the appraisal area. For example, the response from Bigbury questioned whether 'such a diverse parish with three distinct separate entities...can....benefit from this type of exercise because their individual expectations are quite different'. Similarly, the Bampton return observed that the appraisal would have been strengthened if the questionnaire had included one or two questions specific to the distinctive community based around Shillingford and Petton.

In the larger settlements, the high cost of undertaking appraisals could impose a substantial burden on steering groups and act as a constraint. In Totnes, fund-raising was a critical issue. Conflict over the lack of finance led the Totnes appraisal group to vote on whether to disband, and although the vote supported continuing the appraisal four members, a third of the group, resigned in protest. The suggestion by the support worker that the steering group should seek funds from other organisations was rejected and several people had to subsidise the process from their own resources. For example, one member bore the cost of phoning Ireland about the design of the cover of the report, while others failed to claim postage costs. Despite the commitment of the steering group, cost constraints meant that the number of questions had to be restricted. The key problem being that the scale of the community meant that the appraisal was expensive. Such problems led some steering group members to question whether the appraisal was an appropriate mechanism for such a large community.
This evidence implied, therefore, that the capacity for the appraisal process to enhance democracy and or direct democracy in the decision-making process and or encourage the agencies to be more accountable in a downward direction was likely to be weakest with regard to towns and collections of several distinct parishes.

7.3.3: The appraisal process

The impact of the appraisals, and thus their potential for enhancing local democracy and downward accountability, was also constrained by methodological weaknesses. The use of a single form to record the attitudes of all household members meant that there was no confidentiality within each household and increased the possibility that one individual might pose as several respondents. Confidentiality was also compromised through the use of door-to-door collectors. As one questionnaire noted, 'it was felt that had the appraisal forms been returned by post, anonymity would have offered a chance of somewhat more honest replies'. Door-to-door collection did not comply with best practice as identified by participants and scholars (Horton, 1996: 43).

The amateur status of most steering group members meant that communities struggled with important aspects of the process. In particular, steering group members lacked expertise in writing questions. At Moretonhampstead, one key participant observed that the greatest problem was to write 'unbiased questions....without emotion'. Similarly, a participant at Tedburn St Mary acknowledged weaknesses in the wording of some questions.

Steering groups also struggled to involve the wider public. At Moretonhampstead, the initial public meeting was a disaster because it was
unstructured and resulted in 'chaos'. Some appraisals were weakened because the
time commitment led to the resignation of steering group members before the process
had been completed. Despite initial enthusiasm, the appraisal at Mary Tavy 'defeated
many of those who supported it because of the hard work involved'.

There were also problems with the data analysis undertaken at County Hall –
some reports contained elementary statistical errors. For example, an interviewee from
Westleigh observed that the first page of their report contained elementary
arithmetical mistakes. Similarly, another community observed that the analysis was
'superficial'.

7.3.4: Implementation of the agenda

The extent to which the steering group remained active after the report had
been disseminated also affected the impact of the appraisal agenda and the
implications for democracy and accountability. Where active steering groups or
successor sub-groups survived, the agenda benefited from the presence of a cohesive
team of activists with a personal commitment to the process. In most communities,
however, steering groups ceased to exist after the report had been published. In
general, steering groups possessed the enthusiasm and commitment to administer the
appraisal but lacked the capacity to promote the emergent agenda. At Mary Tavy, it
was observed that the steering group 'failed to construct a mechanism to bring its
findings to those authorities.....in a position to help'.

In such communities, the implementation of the appraisal agenda suffered
because ownership was unclear. For example, in Totnes uncertainty about ownership
meant that it was difficult to hold elected representatives to account in relation to the
progress of the appraisal agenda, so 'apart from a couple of things' the recommendations emerging from the appraisal had 'fallen into a vacuum'. Assurances from the fieldworker that the appraisal agenda would influence policy were viewed with scepticism. The appraisal at Hennock and Teign Village also suffered from confusion about its ownership. It was suggested that 'if it were clear to everyone that the parish council was responsible for the appraisal', then complaints about the 'lack of progress would be directed at those with the power to change things'. In contrast, although it was clearly stated at the start of the process that the steering group would disband after the publication of the report, the steering group was viewed by some as an active group and thus blamed for the lack of progress on implementing the recommendations.

The long-term effectiveness of the steering groups was weakened because their democratic legitimacy arose from the appraisal process alone. Once the agenda on any issue extended beyond that covered by the appraisal report it was, therefore, difficult to justify their mandate. Their long or medium-term effectiveness was, therefore, undermined by reliance on an agenda based on a variant of direct democracy and the absence of any or, at least, sufficient credibility in relation to representative democracy. This issue explained the disappointing climax to the process in Tedburn St Mary - the appraisal 'fizzled-out' because the parish council declined to pursue the emergent agenda.

Elsewhere, parish and town councils often acquired responsibility for the implementation of the appraisal reports. These authorities did use evidence from appraisals to support long-standing campaigns, obtain additional resources and stimulate community activity; however few town or parish councillors had a
substantial attachment to the appraisal process. First, few councillors served on a steering group, a position which reflected a best practice consensus that steering groups should involve a wide range of community members and was based, in part at least, on the aim to use appraisals to empower local people. Second, some councillors thought that their involvement would have precipitated the departure of many volunteers. Given the involvement of councillors others might have been much less inclined to assume a significant administrative role and tempted to take comfort in the thought that quasi-professional activists would ensure the project’s success.

Third, some town and parish councillors feared that the process might raise public expectations of their council ‘without a parallel appreciation being in place of the need for the necessary executive powers and corresponding financial resources’.

Fourth, significant tensions existed between some town and parish councils and their local steering group. Some councillors felt threatened by the appraisal process because it drew into public life potential competitors for their seats. In Devon, at least one county councillor became involved in public life through participation in a steering group. Success in developing the capacity of more local people to participate in community affairs could be viewed by existing local political elites as a challenge to their authority and an unwelcome development. In one community, it was suggested that parish councillors ‘feared the development of a parallel group threatening their authority’ and that ‘they slowed the process down’. The implementation of the appraisal agenda could, therefore, be undermined by a clash between grassroots institutional manifestations of representative and direct democracy. Such tensions were not, however, universal. One respondent commented that the appraisal was an ‘excellent PR exercise for the parish council’.
The successful implementation of an appraisal agenda also raised problems. The key difficulty was that appraisals had been undertaken in a limited number of communities. In highlighting the needs of those communities the process could, therefore, generate a geographic shift in the allocation of resources that could not be justified in terms of a universal and accurate evaluation of need. Communities that had undertaken an appraisal might, therefore, benefit at the expense of areas that had not participated solely because their need had been made explicit. The small number of urban appraisals also meant that this process had the potential to transfer resources from urban to rural communities that would be difficult to justify in terms of a universal and accurate evaluation of need. There was, therefore, a potential conflict between an agenda emerging from the appraisal process and the fair and transparent spatial allocation of resources.

This latter effect could become important because there was an existing issue about the fairness of the spatial allocation of resources across the county. The main concern was the widespread feeling in Exeter that the city subsidised rural Devon and should have been given unitary status, a mood also fuelled by wounded civic pride that Torbay became a unitary authority in the same review that refused to grant Exeter this status. In 2007, this agenda was endorsed by central government, which recommended that the city become a unitary authority, although the proposal is currently the subject of a legal challenge. There was also concern, primarily amongst the most politically knowledgeable element of the population, that the Liberal Democrat leadership of Devon County Council was biased in favour of the north and north-west of the county and pushed as much discretionary expenditure as possible into those areas (see chapter four).
The evidence presented in this chapter also suggested that appraisals undertaken in Devon had not contributed to the implementation of the local government modernisation agenda with respect to generating an atmospheric shift in which consultation and participation would become ‘embedded into the culture of councils’ (DETR, 1998: 39). There was a central tension between the traditional notion of representative democracy and a more participative or direct alternative that also embraced a substantial strengthening of downward accountability. This characteristic could be seen in the reluctance of county and district authorities to implement the emergent agenda and the negativity expressed by some parish councillors towards the appraisals. Although some of the evidence suggested that appraisals could enhance the responsiveness of parish and town councils to this more direct idea of democracy.

The reluctance to engage with this more direct notion of democracy and enhanced notion of downward accountability was shared by the non-elected agencies, which, in general, preferred to deal with elected politicians rather than local activists. These organisations were, therefore, inclined to favour representative democracy rather than more participative alternatives or meaningful downward accountability. The limited impact of the appraisals should, however, be placed in the context of budgetary constraints and national government policies which limited severely the autonomy of local elected and non-elected public sector agencies. Given that the appraisal process occurred independently of any obligation on participants to specify priorities it was perhaps not surprising that these initiatives often generated numerous demands for improved public services that the agencies could not justify. Similarly,
private companies might struggle to justify implementing this agenda to their shareholders in the absence of imposition from government appointed regulators.

7.4: Community development and social capital

The focus on community was strengthened through an assessment of the impact of these appraisals on community development and social capital.

7.4.1: Participation and voluntary activity

The analysis produced some evidence to suggest that appraisals in Devon had enhanced the trust and networks crucial to the development and maintenance of social capital. This effect could be seen in answers to the questionnaire. Twenty-three or half of the communities agreed with the proposition that the appraisal process had ‘brought many people in the community together and enhanced the feeling of the community’. For example, Inwardleigh observed that there was an ‘enhanced community spirit....particularly on the sports side’. The findings implied, therefore, that the appraisal process had increased the capacity of these communities to function collectively and ‘break the chain of dependency’ (Wright, 1990: 59), which was an essential prerequisite for community development.

The focus group discussions identified several examples of the benefits generated for community development and social capital. In Willand, the positive impact on community development was illustrated by the actions of the appraisal steering group, which increased local provision of social housing by negotiating the sale of some new properties to the local housing association. The initiative occurred independently of elected local government, which had told local people to solve their own social housing shortfall. Similarly, this exercise led to an increase in social
capital as a consequence of the strengthening of local associational structures and the enhanced degree of trust and co-operation within the community.

In Totnes, enhanced community development was expressed through the creation of a group charged with considering traffic management in the centre of the town, a problem that had existed for over 30 years. This strengthening of local associational structures and the emergence of trust amongst individuals with contrasting attitudes and who (in some cases) had not previously been on speaking terms, generated additional social capital. The appraisal process could, therefore, be seen as the catalyst to empower local people to solve or, at least, tackle problems that traditional institutions were unwilling to address.

In most of these cases, the impact of the appraisal on associational structures was, however, more modest and confined to activities such as the establishment of social or sporting clubs, improving the local environment, the publication of a parish newsletter or the organisation of a successful social event. For example, at Dittisham a group of volunteers had been assembled to maintain the footpaths and was operating successfully. At Holne, an Agenda 21 Group was established, while at Ugborough ‘a very successful walking group was created’. At Westleigh, volunteers restored the memorial gardens and thus improved the appearance of the village.

However, most promises to undertake voluntary work in response to survey questions evaporated quickly. An important problem arose because the Community Council of Devon stipulated that responses had to be anonymous. Steering groups were unable to ask respondents directly to identify themselves or code the forms and were, therefore, unable to determine which residents had expressed interest in
voluntary work. In consequence, few people became community activists through the appraisals and the increase in overall associational activity was marginal. The failure of the appraisals to increase markedly the number of local activists limited the impact of the exercise. For example, Whiddon Valley concluded that there were ‘not enough people with time available and a co-operative willing spirit to do the work’ on the issues emerging from the appraisal.

This issue of anonymity highlighted wider problems about the ownership of the process, which reduced the value of appraisals for community development and the possible benefits for social capital. Tensions arose because the discretion of steering groups was curtailed through restrictions on the number of questions and the wide range of compulsory questions necessary to satisfy the funders. The Dittisham steering group sought but failed to drop some of the compulsory questions. One interviewee from Westleigh commented that his group was ‘asked to co-operate within a prearranged parameter’ and observed that the appraisal was ‘quite a top-down process, although it was marketed as the reverse’. The Horrabridge steering group had a less contentious relationship with the Community Council, although a leading participant commented that they were ‘steered along a particular route’ because the Community Council told the steering group which questions to omit in order to reduce the questionnaire to the required length. In contrast, steering group members from Tedburn St Mary reported that the Community Council merely gave guidance, did not attempt to impose an external agenda on the community and emphasised that the appraisal had been tailored to the requirements of the locality.

A representative from Instow observed that the steering group had to justify departures from the model question about Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
(ANOB) to match local requirements. The steering group wanted to ask a question about the designation of AONBs but the Community Council decreed that respondents would not understand the term and attempted to block the question. The interviewee observed that the steering group had to 'justify why we wanted to divert from the model we were given'. Another community had specific problems with the prescriptive approach adopted by their fieldworker and 'had to put our foot down' to cajole that individual to accept a local agenda.

Relations between the fieldworker and the steering group at Moretonhampstead were described as 'strained' and disagreement with the Community Council over which questions to ask was noted. At Westleigh, there was criticism that the steering group was excluded from the process of publishing the report. In particular, one interviewee commented that, despite his professional background in art and design, his suggestions about graphics had been ignored. At Instow, 'ownership' issues were raised through the refusal of the Community Council to return the questionnaires to the steering group. The Community Council of Devon, therefore, claimed de facto ownership of the questionnaires.

In contrast, some communities praised the role of their fieldworker in assisting the steering group and enhancing their capacity to undertake the appraisal. In particular, several communities appreciated the role of the fieldworker in supplying advice about phrasing questions and resolving conflict between steering group members. For example, Slapton observed that the 'support and suggestions from the Community Council were excellent'. The evidence suggested, therefore, that the relationship between the fieldworker and the steering group varied markedly. The study identified three explanations of
the fieldworker's role. One stressed the importance of acting primarily as a facilitator, whilst the other emphasised a more prescriptive approach.

Second, there was evidence that the involvement or association of a prominent local politician affected the relationship between the fieldworker and the steering group. The two communities with relatively close links to prominent county councillors had good relations with a fieldworker who was found to be too prescriptive elsewhere. This effect resulted from the close relationship between the County Council and the Community Council. Both organisations shared the County Hall site at Topsham Road, the County Council funded the Community Council and a member of the county's executive worked for the Community Council on community appraisals.

Third, relations tended to be strained when the appraisal steering group contained more confident and assertive middle-class participants. It could be claimed that a prescriptive agenda might assist community development and raise the level of social capital where the steering group lacked sufficient expertise. In such communities, a prescriptive style might be required so that local participants could acquire key skills (resources) to facilitate future collective action. A prescriptive approach was, however, inappropriate where the steering group possessed the basic skills, was capable of organising the appraisal and required less guidance. In such circumstances, the gains for community development and the stock of social capital were likely to be much reduced.

The holding of appraisals in a relatively small number of communities also had implications for community development and social capital. Success in this area
might increase spatial inequalities in community development and social capital because appraisals tended to be concentrated in the more vibrant localities. In general, communities that possessed sufficient cohesion and confidence to undertake an appraisal had a relatively enhanced degree of community development and a high stock of social capital. This finding challenged the assumption that community development was largely irrelevant for middle-class communities (Haughton, 1998: 876). In contrast, the analysis suggested that this tool of community development was most suitable for predominantly middle-class communities, although the process, therefore, risked widening spatial inequalities in social capital and community development between middle-class and marginalised localities. This analysis strengthened concern expressed by Mayo (1975: 140) that appraisals might assist the middle-classes to the detriment of working-class communities.

7.4.2: Communities and the service providers

The impact on community development and the stock of social capital could also be evaluated through an assessment of the relationship between the local communities and the service providers. Evidence that the appraisal process had improved the responsiveness of the key agencies towards grassroots' concerns and strengthened community participation in decision-making could be interpreted to imply that the appraisals had stimulated community development. Similarly, such an outcome would also suggest that the appraisals had created 'the potential for social capital at the interface between citizens and the state' (Maloney, et al., 2000: 811).

Evidence from the questionnaire revealed that in 14 (30%) of these communities the appraisal strengthened the links between the locality and its associations and the key agencies and stimulated expectations of enhanced support.
from those agencies. This movement towards closer ‘inclusion or integration’
(Maloney, et al., 2000: 811) created the conditions for social capital at the interface
between the local associations and the agencies, assisted community development and
stimulated the emergence of a locally determined agenda. The process can be
illustrated by events in Totnes, where the improvement of the relationship between the
community and a senior manager in the county highways department assisted the
establishment of a new association (a community traffic group) and facilitated the
influence of the new association on local traffic decisions.

Close relationships between the key agencies and the appraisal communities
resulted typically in the direct inclusion of appraisal evidence into the decision-
making process without extensive and or intensive local campaigns. Conclusions were
valued because the appraisal process was regarded as legitimate. In several
communities close relationships were expressed through the direct incorporation of
appraisal recommendations into the local land use plan. In South Hams, the district
council ‘actively tied their local plan to the appraisal process’ (Taragon, 1998: 66).
Concern expressed, about affordable housing and the allocation of additional houses
to the parish, in the Bere Ferrers appraisal was fed into the local plan. Similarly, at
Instow, the appraisal findings highlighting the need for a new village hall were fed
directly into North Devon District Council’s local plan, which identified land that
could be used for that purpose. At Moretonhampstead, appraisal evidence in favour of
housing development was used in support of Dartmoor National Park’s ten-year plan
against a vocal minority of residents who opposed the construction of more homes.

Overall, there was, however, little evidence to suggest that agencies had
dedicated mechanisms to incorporate appraisal evidence directly into the policy-
making and planning processes. There was, however, evidence to suggest that failure to make a significant impact on community development and social capital at the agency/community interface had generated social capital at community-level. For example, in Willand the failure of the district council to solve the housing problems led the community to strengthen its associational structures to enable local people to tackle the problems.

7.4.3: Democracy, accountability, community development and social capital.

The analysis presented in this chapter suggested that the appraisal process made a limited or marginal contribution towards strengthening civic society and developing a more activist and direct notion of democratic participation or a more localised form of accountability. Under such a model local responsibility for the solution of many problems would have been effectively transferred to community organisations and local activists who would, therefore, be held accountable by their neighbours. Such a position suggests horizontal rather than downward accountability.

A key problem appeared to be that some employees of the Community Council of Devon had a relatively paternalistic approach to the appraisals process and attempted to impose a ‘top-down’ model of community participation. The potential for appraisals to enhance community development was, therefore, often limited. Similarly, the variation between the capacity of respondents to express willingness to participate on a form and their inclination to act on such words was substantial. Perhaps the key constraint on the capacity of the appraisals to generate an activist notion of local democracy and accountability, therefore, lay in the priorities of most residents. In addition, the typical reluctance of the agencies to alter their relationship
with these localities also limited the capacity of the appraisals to assist community
development, generate social capital and strengthen a more grassroots or direct notion
of democracy and or downward form of accountability.

The direct connection with the modernisation agenda was quite weak. Although the notion of social capital has been championed by Giddens (2000) and was a component of the Third Way agenda that was associated with the emergence of New Labour, the connection of either concept to the local government modernisation process was at most implicit. In any case, the notion of the Third Way gradually became marginalised in the rhetoric of senior Labour politicians. In contrast, the origins of community development lay in more radical ideas of society rooted much further towards the political left and implied a much more fundamental shift in power structures than the governments’ aspiration for local authorities to embrace participation and consultation assumed.

7.5: Success of the appraisals

The appraisal process was evaluated as successful in almost 85% of the communities. Only two appraisals were classified as unsuccessful (see table 7.2). This evaluation did not, however, support the wider analysis, especially the study of progress made in addressing the concerns (see table 7.1). In contrast, these results implied that satisfaction might be primarily a function of low expectations and or cynicism. It could also reflect an attachment to the process on behalf of the respondents.
Table 7.2: Success of the appraisals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Appraisals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Successful</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly Successful</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Successful or Unsuccessful</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly Unsuccessful</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Unsuccessful</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four appraisals (Bradworthy; Tedburn St Mary; Moretonhampstead; and Halwell and Moreleigh) were assessed as not having obtained the views of members of all sections of the community. Suspicion of the process amongst older residents was assessed as having reduced the input from that group at Tedburn St Mary, while Moretonhampstead failed to involve young people adequately. The process at Halwell and Moreleigh suffered from the fact that residents on the western edge of the parish identified with neighbouring parishes such as Cornworthy, Blackawton and Harbertonford and were thus disproportionately disinclined to participate in the appraisal.

The satisfaction with the spread of participation elsewhere might be viewed as surprising given that the process was based on a household survey – how did respondents know which individuals had actually completed the questions? In addition, evidence from the focus groups suggested that membership of the steering groups, in general, was concentrated amongst the middle-aged and the middle-class. This satisfaction was based substantially on reasonable overall response rates and the presence of a good spread of people types in the houses that had replied. For example, responses from residences containing young people were deployed to conclude that the survey had acquired an input from those specific young people. The responses to this question might imply, therefore, as much about the methodological skills of the respondents as the success of the appraisal process. Such conclusions might also
indicate a lack of concern with the inclusion or exclusion of specific groups or satisfaction arising from close involvement in the appraisal and a consequent tendency to defend the process of delivery and collection, which was the responsibility of the steering group.

7.6: Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the problems of improving the responsiveness of public services, developing social capital and empowering a collection of predominantly rural communities. The analysis of the questionnaires suggested that concerns raised in these reports were more likely to have been addressed if they concerned relatively simple matters that could be resolved through the parish or town council or as a consequence of actions of the steering group, other community group(s) or more informal structures of the local community. In contrast, concerns about relatively complex and substantial issues that were the responsibility of statutory agencies or private companies were much less likely to have been resolved satisfactorily. Furthermore, the fact that appraisals had been undertaken in a minority of communities raised an important problem in relation to the impact of the process. If agencies responded to the appraisal agenda there was a danger that resources would be skewed towards communities on the basis that they had held an appraisal and that their needs/concerns had been expressed, while more substantial needs/concerns could be ignored elsewhere because they had not been made explicit through an appraisal.

The study also identified how the characteristics of the communities influenced and constrained the capacity of the appraisal process to address local issues. In general, appraisals were less effective in market towns and rural areas
defined in terms of two or more small parishes. In both types of appraisal the diversity of the geographic area weakened the strength of the conclusions and the impact of the process. In addition, the analysis also identified tensions in some communities between representative and participative forms of local democracy. First, many local politicians were wary of appraisals and felt threatened by them. Second, the implementation of an appraisal agenda often suffered because steering groups lacked legitimacy once the debate shifted beyond a narrow agenda that could be justified through reference to the appraisal report.

The analysis suggested that the staging of an appraisal could generate some benefits in relation to community development and the local stock of social capital. In particular, the study implied that community appraisals often strengthened trust and associational networks. However, in general, such gains were modest and limited by the framework within which the steering groups operated. In particular, the anonymity of the questionnaire responses reduced the capacity of the process to promote associational activity, while, in some communities; the adoption of a prescriptive style by the fieldworker limited the benefits for community development.

The process could also increase spatial inequalities in factors such as community development and social capital because success was often dependent on the existence of a vibrant community with a strong tradition of public participation and significant associational networks. Furthermore, the analysis suggested that although many appraisals had improved relations between the key agencies and the local community, this effect was marginal. In particular, agencies typically lacked dedicated mechanisms to channel evidence from appraisals into the decision-making process. Overall, the analysis implied that the impact of community appraisals on the
evolution and delivery of a coherent grassroots' agenda, community development and
the stock of social capital had been marginal.

Community appraisals could also be interpreted as a challenge to the
traditional notion of representative democracy through the creation of a mechanism to
give a wider community a direct route to participation in the development of policy
and a device to hold service providers accountable to concerns arising from the
grassroots. While democratic responsiveness might have been strengthened in relation
to many of the smaller-scale and less costly items, the record in relation to major
services such as housing and social services implied that the appraisals had a more
marginal impact. These results suggested that although parish councils might have
became more responsive to democratic pressures, the impact on higher tiers of elected
governance and non-elected agencies was much less marked. The study also implied
that the accountability gains were concentrated in relation to organisations located in
the local community.

There was a link to the modernisation agenda in relation to the government's
desire to improve the responsiveness of local government to the grassroots and the
association of social capital with the Third Way. However, appraisals pre-date this
agenda by almost 30 years, while notions such as community development draw on a
more radical political agenda considerably to the left of New Labour, which sought to
address fundamental inequalities in the distribution of political power and ultimately
wealth. The link with the current modernisation agenda was partial, combined with
the relatively modest achievements of the appraisals, this evidence suggested that the
contribution of community appraisals to the modernisation agenda was quite marginal.
The council’s principle areas of work included planning, regeneration and social inclusion. This organisation was the rural community council for Devon.

Table 7.1 records issues raised in the appraisal reports. Some reports did not discuss concerns in relation to compulsory questions and no topic was covered by all the communities.

Where appraisal steering groups contained councillors there was an element of indirect democracy, although such individuals were typically outnumbered by unelected activists.

8.1: Introduction

This chapter considers the attitudes of sitting councillors to reviewing ward and divisional boundaries and certain implications of these alterations. There are sections about the decision to review; reviews and the local community; the review process; the changes and electioneering; and the impact of the reviews on the workload of councillors. The chapter uses a range of data methods and tests of significance. The evidence is also related to democracy, accountability and the local government modernisation agenda.

8.2: Decision to review local boundaries

Overall, most councillors supported the decision to hold the most recent review of their ward or divisional boundaries (see table 8.1).

Table 8.1: Necessity of the review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Councillors</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Necessary</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, almost seven-in-ten respondents said that their review was necessary, while slightly more than three in ten argued that the review was unnecessary; a result that could be interpreted as endorsing the principle of a regular boundary review. Cross tabulations between respondents' opinions about the necessity of the changes to their ward or division and local authority type (see table 8.2) suggested that
acceptance of the necessity of this process was lowest in the counties. These attitudes might reflect the emphasis of the Local Government Commission for England on electoral equality rather than community ties, which might be less acceptable to county councillors given the often more intensive community focus of councillors representing rural areas (see Cole, 2001a).

Table 8.2: Necessity of the review and local authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unitary</th>
<th></th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th></th>
<th>London</th>
<th></th>
<th>County</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Opposition to the necessity of the last review of their ward or division was not reflected in opposition to the principle of reviewing those boundaries, which was supported by over 98% of the respondents (see table 8.3). However, more than a quarter of respondents thought that the process should be less frequent than the 15 year maximum suggested in the legislation (see Rallings et al., 2002: 37), although more than one-in-ten respondents argued that these reviews should occur more often than the lower end of the frequency guidance, which was established at ten years. Overall, these results suggested that discontent was concentrated on their locality rather than the principle that regular boundary reviews were required. There was, however, a notable minority of these councillors whose lack of enthusiasm for the process could be interpreted as approaching neglect or even hostility. For example, over seven percent of respondents commented that reviews should be staged at intervals of 25 years or more.
Table 8.3: Frequency of the reviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Counsellors</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every 5 years.</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 8 years.</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 10 years.</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 12 years.</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 15 years.</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 20 years.</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 25 years.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 30 years.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 40 years.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 50 years.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were also significant variations between local authority type and attitudes about the appropriate frequency of the reviews (see table 8.4). In London and the unitary authorities holding reviews every ten years or less was the most popular option, while in the shire and metropolitan areas the 12 to 20 year option was the most popular choice. The spread of opinion amongst county councillors was probably best explained in terms of a desire to avoid the disruption to community representation, which often accompanied boundary reviews, and concern about the time commitment required to establish a reputation in the new areas (see below). The high level of support for reviews to be staged at a maximum of every ten years amongst respondents from unitary authorities, might reflect positive attitudes towards the outcome of the last review, which in many areas had occurred as part of a process that conferred single-tier status on the authority and enhanced the authority and remuneration of sitting councillors.

Table 8.4: Local authority types and review frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review frequency</th>
<th>Unitary</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 years or less</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 12-20 years</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 years or more</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>171</td>
<td></td>
<td>346</td>
<td></td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This analysis suggested that there was overwhelming support amongst councillors for the view that for local democracy to function effectively regular boundary reviews were required. These attitudes were also consistent with a notion of representative democracy that focused on the advantages of having relative equality in the size of the wards or divisions, which usually reduced disparities in the representative burden amongst councillors. Such assumptions were often to the detriment of the idea that the downward accountability of councillors to their communities was strengthened through the maintenance of relatively stable ward or divisional boundaries and hence relative consistency in the individuals and grassroots organisations to which they were theoretically responsive. To test whether these respondents, in general, possessed a concept of local representative democracy and downward accountability that prioritised equalising the size of wards or divisions over community factors, the councillors were asked about their attitude towards the importance of local councillors representing coherent communities.

8.3: Community

The evaluation of the attitudes of councillors towards the extent to which wards and divisions should reflect natural community links showed, however, that most councillors thought that such links were very important. In contrast, less than five percent of the respondents commented that natural community links were unimportant (see table 8.5).
Table 8.5: The importance of natural community links

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural Community Links</th>
<th>Councillors</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly unimportant</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither important nor unimportant</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly important</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These conclusions were supported by data from another question, which showed that a majority of councillors thought that the capacity of wards or divisions to unite similar communities was more important than those units having a similar ratio of councillors to electors. The proportion rejecting the notion that wards or divisions should have a similar ratio regardless of community links exceeded the supporters by almost 12%. (see table 8.6). It was clear, therefore, that whilst the principle of regular reviews had widespread support, many respondents favoured a cautious approach to change with a pronounced focus on local circumstances.

Table 8.6: Similar ratio of councillors to electors regardless of community links.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Councillors</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was also a significant relationship between this issue and local authority type (see table 8.7).

Table 8.7: Wards or divisions should have a similar councillors to electors ratio regardless of natural community links and local authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unitary</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>County</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Support for the proposition was substantially lower than average amongst county councillors and relatively low amongst councillors representing wards in
unitary authorities. This result could be explained by the proportionally stronger community focus of rural wards and divisions. When asked about the priority the public attached towards equalising the size of wards or divisions or ensuring that individual councillors represented coherent communities, respondents thought that popular opinion favoured the latter consideration over the former (see table 8.8). In total, almost two-thirds of the respondents thought the public were more concerned about having electoral units that reflected natural communities.

Table 8.8: Public attitudes towards councillor ratios and natural community links.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Councillor/elector ratios should be similar between the wards.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Councillor/elector ratios are less important than natural community links.</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>65.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings should be placed in the context of the Local Government Commission for England’s approach, which assumed that electoral equality should be the main consideration and that the “definition of communities and ‘local ties’ was...subjective and likely to be contested” (Railings et al., 2002: 48). The evidence suggested, therefore, that the Commission’s approach might be at variance with public opinion, although the evidence presented in this survey is based exclusively on the estimates of politicians and thus should only be used to indicate a possible research agenda and not as the basis for firm conclusions about public opinion.

The study also suggested that more councillors thought that their old wards or divisions better reflected natural community links than the new creations (see table 8.9).
Table 8.9: New boundaries and natural community links

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Councillors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New ward better reflects natural community links.</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which their ward reflects natural community links has not altered.</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New ward does not reflect natural community as well as the former ward.</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the difference between the two categories was not substantial, this research implied, however, that the requirement of electoral equality had become such a dominant factor that in over a third of these cases the extent to which the councillor represented a coherent community or group of communities had been judged to have diminished. It also raised questions about the accumulative impact of this policy across a series of boundary revisions and issues about the long-term nature of representation under the plurality system, which is often defended on the basis that politicians represent coherent and identifiable communities. For example, Hain (1986: 23) used the fact that some parliamentary constituencies were 'formed out of distinct communities' to defend the plurality model.

A cross-tabulation between the type of authority and the responses about the impact of these boundary changes generated a significant relationship (see table 8.10). The data showed that for each type of local authority more respondents thought that these changes had generated wards or divisions that did not reflect natural community links as well as the former units than those taking the opposite view. There were, however, wide variations in the magnitude of this gap. Respondents from the unitary and metropolitan authorities claiming that the natural community links had worsened exceeded those reporting the opposite by approximately two to three percent. In contrast, the corresponding differences in relation to the London boroughs and the counties were more than 11% and 13% respectively. The evidence from the counties
might be explained through a stronger focus on distinctive communities in rural areas arising from the presence of a wide range of small parishes in many divisions, the greater focus on the locality and the more intensive commitment to divisional work and representation that characterised the role orientation of many county councillors (see Cole, 2001a). The London findings might arise from the diverse and changing social, economic, cultural and ethnic mixture, which often meant that a wide range of small and diverse groups lived close to each other and that small boundary changes could often be very disruptive to the community cohesion of a ward.

### Table 8.10: New boundaries, natural community links and types of authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unitary</th>
<th>Met</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better reflects links.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not altered links.</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not as well as former ward.</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was also a significant relationship between a respondents’ view of the necessity of the boundary changes and the importance of natural communities (see table 8.11). This question again raised the community focus of many councillors. For example, while more than 85% of those thinking that the new ward or division better reflected natural community links commented that the changes were necessary, only 53% of those thinking that the alterations had generated an electoral unit that did not reflect natural community links as well as their former ward or division also thought the redistricting was necessary.

### Table 8.11: Natural community links and the necessity of the changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Necessary</th>
<th>Unnecessary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better reflect natural community links.</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not reflect natural community links as well as the former ward.</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected natural community links.</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The impact of these boundary changes on community cohesion and democratic representation was explored further by asking respondents whether the alterations had created and or resolved dilemmas about how to balance the interests of different geographic areas of the ward or division. While a majority of councillors said that the changes had neither created nor resolved dilemmas, almost 30% replied that dilemmas had been created by the changes. In contrast, less than 16% argued that the changes had resolved dilemmas (see table 8.12). This data can be interpreted as supporting the evidence acquired about natural community links and implied that there was a tendency for boundary changes to create more diverse wards or divisions containing a wider range of competing interests. An interesting result, given the fact that rising population meant that boundary reviews often generated geographically smaller wards or divisions and was perhaps indicative of the importance attached to achieving similar councillor to elector ratios in the redistricting process.

Table 8.12: Impact on dilemmas about balancing the interests of different geographic areas of wards or divisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Councillors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created dilemmas.</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolved dilemmas.</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact on dilemmas.</td>
<td>619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolved and created dilemmas.</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These findings implied that local councillors had a notion of representative democracy and their downward accountability that was rooted firmly in the idea that their wards or divisions should comprise natural communities. Local authorities should, therefore, be composed of politicians who represented coherent and distinctive communities, which typically had similar concerns and problems. These attitudes suggested resistance to the idea of local councillors as mediators between conflicting interests in their ward or division, which arose from its diversity (see chapter four).

The community focus of many councillors could be interpreted as compatible with the local government modernisation agenda, which sought to make councillors 'a champion of their community' (DETR, 1998: 34). In contrast, the preference of the Commission for mathematical equality could be regarded as an obstacle to the development of modernised councillors because in some areas, at least, it risked diluting the community coherence of wards or divisions thus forcing elected representatives to champion one section of the community against another or develop a compromise position that threatened to deny everyone adequate democratic representation.

Such a model would also be compatible with a policy specialist orientation (see Newton, 1976) because coherent natural communities would be more likely to generate a concentration of issues and problems in a similar area. For example, a large number of socially excluded people should generate more ombudsman work in relation to issues such as social housing and social services. In such circumstances, councillors might be more inclined to specialise in specific aspects of the authority's responsibilities. The establishment of electoral units based on distinctive communities, rather than wards or divisions that better reflected the diversity of the
whole local authority area, might also encourage a parochial focus in relation to
representative democracy in which many councillors placed a relatively low priority
on the interests of the wider geographic area. This effect might arise because many
issues important to the local authority as a whole had little resonance within a
distinctive unit with atypical social-economic characteristics. The creation of such
wards or divisions, combined with the plurality electoral system, could also increase
the proportion of safe seats and thus diminish the extent of effective electoral
competition, a consequence that is viewed by some writers as a reduction in the
performance of representative democracy (see Linton and Southcott, 1998).

8.4: The process of change

Views about the outcome of the review in relation to their ward or division
varied, with opinion divided approximately six-to-four in favour (see table 8.13). This
result reflected existing evidence that decisions of the Local Government Commission
for England were often controversial and struggled to win acceptance, as ‘many
consultees feel that their concerns are dismissed for reasons that they do not consider
legitimate’ (Rallings et al., 2002: 232).

There was a significant relationship between respondents’ opinions about the
changes to their wards or divisions and the type of authority they represented (see
table 8.13).

### Table 8.13: Support for the changes and local authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unitary</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>518</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposed</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>374</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis suggested a low level enthusiasm for these changes amongst county councillors, a fact that might again be explained by the strong attachment to the view that democratic local representation should reflect natural communities (see table 8.7). In contrast, the relatively high level of enthusiasm for these changes in the unitary authorities could again be explained by the fact that many such changes occurred alongside the establishment of those authorities as single-tier local government units. Concern about any reduction of the capacity of the electoral units to link natural communities could be offset by satisfaction about the substantial transfers of power inherent in the attainment of unitary status.

There was also a significant relationship between attitudes towards the reconfiguration of their wards or divisions and age (see table 8.14). The analysis implied that support declined and opposition increased with age. Support for the outcome of redistricting fell from almost 64% amongst the under 50s to 55% amongst the 60 years and older category. In contrast, opposition rose from 36% amongst the under 50s to 45% amongst the older councillors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Up to 49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported the boundary changes.</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposed the boundary changes.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A cross-tabulation also implied a significant relationship between support or opposition to the boundary changes affecting their wards or divisions and opinions about whether those changes resolved or created dilemmas about how to balance the interests of different geographic areas. Supporters divided between a fifth arguing that dilemmas had been created and 22% saying that dilemmas had been resolved by the
boundary changes. In contrast, almost 47% of opponents said that the changes had created dilemmas, while just ten percent replied that the alterations had resolved dilemmas⁶ (see table 8.15). It was, therefore, reasonable to suggest that attitudes about the impact on representational dilemmas might explain, in part, differing opinions about the merits of the specific reconfigurations.

Table 8.15: Extent to which the boundary changes created or resolved dilemmas about how to balance the interests of different geographic areas of the ward or division and attitudes towards the boundary changes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Supported</th>
<th>Opposed</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolved</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolved and Created</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Impact</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than three-quarters of those who had expressed an opinion on the boundary changes expressed their views in public, while more nine-in-ten discussed these issues with local political and or administrative elites in private meetings (see table 16).

Table 8.16: Opinions about boundary reviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Elites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>75.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An appraisal of how these councillors expressed opinions about boundary changes to their ward or division showed a notable focus on activity in the locality beyond the narrow confines of the local authority (see table 8.17). Approximately a quarter had sent a leaflet about these issues to residents of the ward or division, while more than six-in-ten had spoken at a private ward, division or constituency party meeting. However, only two percent discussed the proposed changes with parish and or town council(s).

A large number of respondents also recorded that they had approached important individuals about these proposals: approximately four-in-ten had lobbied key leadership figures in their local political party, while a similar proportion had spoken to senior officers in their local authority. A notable minority of members had participated in a public inquiry about these issues: more than 15% had given written evidence, while more than six percent had spoken at such an inquiry. There was evidence of media interest in these issues; more than one-in-ten had given an interview to a local media outlet about the proposed alterations, while more than five percent had written a newspaper article.

Table 8.17: How councillors expressed an opinion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gave an interview to the local media.</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>89.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoke at a public inquiry.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave written evidence to a public inquiry.</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>816</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote an article for a local newspaper.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent a leaflet to residents of the ward.</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion with parish and town council(s).</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>98.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings and one-to-one discussions in the ward.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>935</td>
<td>96.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoke and or voted on a council committee.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoke at a private meeting of the ward or constituency party.</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbied key figures in the local political party.</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoke to senior officers in the local authority.</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>578</td>
<td>59.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Held private cross-party discussions.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote or spoke to another governmental organisation.</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>925</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There was a significant relationship between the attitudes of respondents to boundary changes to their wards or divisions and whether they expressed these opinions in public or confined their contribution to the debate to private forums (see table 8.18). The analysis suggested that opponents were more likely to state their opinions in public than supporters of the changes. Overall, 74% of advocates of these specific boundary changes went public, while the corresponding statistic for opponents was 84%.

Table 8.18: Opinions about boundary reviews and expression of a public opinion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expessed an opinion in public</th>
<th>Supported</th>
<th>Opposed</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings showed that there was a notable degree of transparency about the debate on these changes because more than three-quarters of the councillors discussed these alterations in a public forum (see table 8.16), thus allowing them to be scrutinised democratically and held accountable for their views. However, the fact that almost a quarter of the respondents failed to discuss the changes in public suggested that it was also common for that debate to be hidden from the wider community and thus for politicians to avoid public accountability and democratic scrutiny for their attitudes. Furthermore, the analysis also suggested that there was a greater probability of supporters avoiding public accountability and scrutiny, whilst opponents of change were more inclined to engage in a more open, accountable and democratic process. This variation might reflect the political marginalisation of opponents over this issue and the feeling that they needed to rally public opinion to
their viewpoint in order to be able to challenge proposals that might be supported by powerful elites.

8.5: Elections

Amongst this group of councillors, the survey suggested that the prospective boundary changes had led few individuals to consider abandoning their council career, in total less than six percent of the respondents had considered standing-down as a result of alterations to the boundaries of their ward or division (see table 8.19). This result reflected, of course, the fact that the survey was restricted to sitting councillors and excluded former councillors who had retired when new boundaries were introduced, a group which might have been substantial given the frequency with which sitting councillors stand-down (Rallings and Thrasher, 1997: 79).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Councillors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>978</td>
<td>94.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were asked which factors had affected their decision to contest the new ward or division and to rank them (see table 8.20). The key finding was that connections to and an affinity with the local community were of central importance to this decision.

The most important factor in deciding whether to contest their current ward or division was the fact that it contained most of their former ward or division; more than seven-in-ten cited this issue as a reason, while more than four-in-ten suggested that this factor was the main reason for their decision. In addition, almost one-in-ten said their decision to contest their current ward or division was based primarily on the
presence of part of their old ward or division in the new electoral unit, while almost a quarter said this was a factor in their decision.

These councillors were also motivated strongly by the fact that many of them lived in the new ward or division. Overall, this issue was cited as the main reason by more than 28% and as a reason by almost 57% of these politicians. Other factors of community representation were also important for a substantial number of councillors. The existence of 'strong links' with the local community was chosen as the main reason by more than one-in-five, while almost three-quarters said this issue was a reason for their decision. Similarly, one-in-five said that a 'strong affinity' with the problems and or interests of people in the ward or division was the main reason to stand in this area, while almost three-quarters said that this factor was a reason for standing in the locality. Furthermore, more than 11% cited strong links with the ward or divisional political party as the main reason for standing, while almost 54% said it was a reason for that decision. The two remaining community factors were, however, of much less importance. Strong family links with the ward or division and working in the ward or division were cited as the main reason by five percent and a reason by approximately a quarter of the respondents.

The strong influence of factors relating to community representation was brought into sharper focus when electoral issues were considered. Although more than 62% said that they were influenced by the good prospect of winning the ward or division, less than 15% cited this issue as the main reason for contesting their present seat. The two other electoral issues mentioned in the study had a relatively marginal impact. The probability of their political party controlling the local authority and the greater chance of winning the seat than an alternative candidate(s) were cited as the
main reason by approximately seven percent and as a reason by 31% and 35% of those councillors respectively.

Table 8.20: Decision to contest this ward or division

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Reason</th>
<th>Main Reason</th>
<th>A reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contained most of old ward.</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contained part of old ward.</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in the ward.</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good prospect of victory.</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political party likely to control local authority.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong links with local community.</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong family links.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong links with political party in ward.</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in ward.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong affinity with problems/interests of people in ward.</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater chance of winning than alternative candidate(s).</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuaded by local political elites.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuaded by ward party.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less than four percent mentioned persuasion by local political elites as the main factor, while less than 17% said such a consideration influenced their decision.

Similarly, persuasion by the ward or divisional political party was cited as the main reason by three percent and as a factor in their decision to stand by less than 14%. This evidence about why respondents contested their current ward or division implied, therefore, a style of democratic representation and accountability focused substantially on the concerns of specific grassroots communities and a reluctance to relocate to represent areas with which they were not familiar and with which they had little affinity.

There was also evidence that alterations in ward or divisional boundaries had a notable impact on how elections were contested. The main observation was that these changes seldom reduced the intensity of the campaign. Each of the six aspects of campaigning evaluated in the study (see table 8.21) declined for less than eight percent of these councillors. In contrast, the intensity of activity in each of the six areas increased for more than 18% of the respondents, while in relation to four factors;
the amount of canvassing; the number of leaflets and newsletters delivered; the focus on issues specific to the ward or division; and the total time spent fighting the seat more than four-in-ten councillors claimed that the intensity of their efforts had risen. The analysis showed, therefore, that these boundary changes often increased the intensity of local democratic electoral competition.

These findings are fascinating because periodic boundary reviews tend to reduce the average size of electoral units. Increases in population often lead to increases in the number of councillors while reductions in the number of councillors and consequent increases in the size of wards or divisions are much less frequent. The exception to this generalisation concerned the establishment of unitary authorities, which invariably generated a reduction in the number of councillors present in a two-tier structure. However, the impact on the size of population covered by individual councillors was more complex because this restructuring created unitary wards with a higher councillor to elector ratio than the county divisions they replaced.

Table 8.21: Impact of the boundary changes on the way elections were fought

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Increased</th>
<th>Unchanged</th>
<th>Decreased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>$N$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of canvassing</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of leaflets and newsletters sent</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of public meetings</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on issues specific to ward.</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on issues specific to the whole authority area.</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent fighting ward</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The increases in the intensity of effort combined with the contradictory impact of boundary changes on the councillor/electorate ratio suggested that these findings might arise from the requirement to reach out to areas of the ward or division they had not represented previously and focus on issues distinctive to the new areas.

8.6: Role(s) of councillors

The survey assessed the extent to which the boundary changes altered the way in which councillors performed their role(s) as democratic local representatives. The evaluation looked at the impact of the boundary revisions on the time respondents spent on their ombudsman role, representing voluntary groups, campaigning for resources for public services and their total activities as a councillor.

The boundary changes increased the time devoted to dealing the personal problems of their constituents (ombudsman role) for almost 37% of the councillors, while only six percent decreased the time devoted to this ombudsman function. (see table 8.22).
Table 8.22: Time spent dealing with personal problems of constituents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Councillors</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchanged</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study showed that for more than seven-in-ten of these councillors the boundary changes did not affect the time spent on representing voluntary groups, a statistic that incorporated those who claimed not to represent such organisations. More than 23% of the respondents said that they increased the time allocated to this aspect of their work after the boundary reorganisation, while just three percent recorded a reduction in the hours devoted to this activity (see table 8.23). Perhaps the most distinctive findings from this question related to the number of councillors saying that they did not represent voluntary groups, which suggested greater resistance to representing such organisations than found by two of the more recent surveys (Barron et al., 1991; Cole, 2001a), although the data about the number of councillors who did not represent voluntary bodies was very similar to the number of resistors identified by Newton (1976) and implied that attitudes had shifted little over more than three decades. Furthermore, the wide discrepancies with Barron et al. (1991) and Cole (2001a) might arise from the fact that those surveys were confined to county councillors, many of whom represented highly distinctive local communities.

Table 8.23: Time spent representing voluntary groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Councillors</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchanged</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn't represent them</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Almost 32% of the respondents calculated that these boundary changes had increased the time they spent on campaigning for resources for public services relevant to their ward or division, while less than two percent said that these alterations had led to a decrease in the time they spent on this activity (see table 8.24).

### Table 8.24: Time spent campaigning for resources for public services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchanged</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>66.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis also suggested that following the changes almost 44% of these councillors increased the time they devoted to their council work, while only three percent decreased their time commitment (see table 8.25).

### Table 8.25: Time worked as a councillor as a result of the boundary changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchanged</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An assessment about whether the changes in workload in relation to these four factors were permanent or temporary (less than six months in duration) is shown in table 8.26. The analysis implied that for each issue in more nine-in-ten cases the change occurred on a permanent basis.

### Table 8.26: Boundary changes altered the time worked: permanent or temporary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Permanent</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Temporary</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ombudsman role</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary groups</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigning for resources</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent as a councillor</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings in this section suggested that for most councillors boundary changes had no impact on their workload; however for a notable minority of respondents in each category the boundary revisions increased the time they spent on the relevant activity. Explanations might lie in the need to establish their reputation in new areas of the ward or division or the presence in the sample of a disproportionate number of councillors representing wards or divisions that had acquired a substantial influx of the type of areas that generated a greater workload, examples include socially and economic deprived localities and or villages. Similarly, the increase in the time spent on campaigning for resources for public services experienced by almost one-in-three members might be a consequence of those wards or divisions becoming more diverse. The most interesting finding was, however, the revelation that more than four-in-ten members increased their overall time commitment as democratic representatives following these changes despite the fact that boundary reviews typically created geographically smaller wards and divisions containing fewer people.

An evaluation of support for these changes and alterations in the time commitment for certain aspects of the representational role also suggested a plausible explanation for support or opposition to the boundary changes might lie in the workload implications. In other words, councillors experiencing workload increases following boundary changes were more likely to indicate opposition. For example, while the time spent dealing with their ombudsman role increased for 32% of the supporters it rose for more than 46% of the opponents. Similarly, while slightly more than one-in-five supporters increased the time spent on representing voluntary groups after the boundary changes, the corresponding statistic for opponents was more than 29%. A similar pattern was found in relation to the time spent on campaigning for resources for public services:
the workload of slightly more than a quarter of supporters and more than 43% of opponents increased following the boundary changes. There was a large difference between the percentage of opponents and supporters that increased the hours they worked as a councillor following these changes. Overall, while slightly less than 37% of supporters increased the hours spent on their council duties, the corresponding figure for opponents was more than 57%. (see table 8.27).

Table 8.27: Attitude to the changes and impact on council work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes to time spent</th>
<th>Supported</th>
<th>Attitude towards the changes</th>
<th>Opposed</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ombudsman work increased</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ombudsman work unchanged</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ombudsman work decreased</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing voluntary groups increased</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing voluntary groups unchanged</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>55.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing voluntary groups decreased</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t represent voluntary groups</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigning for resources increased</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigning for resources unchanged</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigning for resources decreased</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked as a councillor increased</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked as a councillor unchanged</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked as a councillor decreased</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The implications for local democracy and accountability related to the intensity of such representation, which appeared often to increase following boundary reviews. Such data suggested, therefore, that a common consequence of boundary reviews was to increase the quantity and perhaps, by implication, the quality of local democracy and accountability (especially downward) supplied through local councillors. These findings implied, therefore, that boundary revisions assisted the aim of the local government modernising agenda to intensify the activities of councillors as community representatives.
8.7: Conclusion

The survey generated some interesting data about the attitudes of, participation in and impact on local councillors of changes to the boundaries of their ward or division. There was substantial acceptance of the necessity of staging the last review impacting on their ward or division, although a notable minority of councillors thought the last review to their ward or division to have been unnecessary. In addition, many councillors disagreed with the current timescale for the process.

The survey also identified the priority attached by councillors to wards or divisions reflecting natural community links. In addition, an assessment of attitudes towards the specific changes to the ward or division held by each respondent showed notable support and opposition to the revisions and suggested that younger members were more receptive to these changes. Most councillors also expressed opinions about boundary changes relevant to their ward or division in public.

There were also notable insights about the impact of boundary changes on elections. First, the main reasons why respondents chose to fight their present ward or division was the fact that it contained most of their former ward or division or their residence. Community links and affinities were listed next and the prospects of victory cited as the fifth most important factor. There was also evidence that boundary changes increased the intensity of electioneering for many councillors and seldom generated the reverse effect, an interesting result given the frequency with which redistricting generated smaller units.

The discussion of the relationship between the boundary alterations and councillors' performance of their local authority responsibilities also showed that a
notable number of members increased their time commitment in relation to their ward or divisional work and the full range of their council duties. The analysis implied, therefore, that boundary changes often intensified both the process of electing democratic local representatives and the effort they expended on their post-election activities as democratic local representatives.

These conclusions generated some interesting findings into the responsiveness of the boundary review process to local democratic pressures. In particular, the scepticism of some councillors about the changes to their ward or division and or the timescale of the review process, their attachment to community representation and attitudes towards the impact of the changes on the extent to which their ward or division contained a natural community were notable insights. Such conclusions suggested, therefore, that attitudes of many elected representatives were at variance with the opinions of the bureaucracy responsible for revising wards and divisions. The implication of these findings was that boundary reviews were driven less by local democracy and more by a bureaucratic and nationally imposed agenda. However, such a conclusion had to be modified substantially to reflect the fact that almost seven-in-ten respondents though their review was necessary while almost six-in-ten agreed with the outcome. There were also some fascinating findings about the participation of councillors in the redistricting process which implied that there was, at least, a notable input from democratic representatives even if the framework and many of the conclusions owed more to a bureaucratic rather than a grassroots agenda.

The study implied weaknesses in the local accountability of the Local Government Commission for England, which had interpreted its remit as a requirement to implement 'electoral equality between wards' (Rallings et al., 2002: 236).
an attitude which was often in conflict with local elected representatives who typically emphasised 'the interests and identities of communities' and the 'preservation of local ties' (Railings et al., 2002: 224). The finding, however, that boundary changes led many councillors to increase the time devoted to their work as a councillor implied that, in some areas, redistricting might strengthen downward local accountability through councillors. The greater intensity of effort in relation to local representation that the changes generated with regard to a notable percentage of councillors also suggested that boundary reviews could assist local government modernisation in relation to community representation.

1 Although (in practice) reviews in many areas do not adhere to this timescale.
2 The table excluded those councillors opposed to the principle of reviewing ward or divisional boundaries.
3 Many unitary authorities incorporated wards with a notable rural element.
4 The tables use the language of the questionnaire. The term 'ward' in the tables should, however, also be interpreted as including the term 'division'. Headings have been written to incorporate both terms.
5 Last two figures incorporate respondents saying that dilemmas had been created and resolved.
6 Last four figures incorporate respondents saying that dilemmas had been created and resolved.
7 The total number of main reasons exceeds the number of respondents because some councillors failed to differentiate between all or some of the reasons they specified and ranked all or some of them as most important.
8 This activity might take longer than six months so would not be defined as temporary in this study.
9 Resources for public services.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSIONS

9.1: Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to evaluate five important aspects of the new local governance; the contemporary role(s) of local councillors; the impact of scrutiny inquiries on external agencies; consultations; the community appraisals; and changes to ward and divisional boundaries in terms of specific academic work in those narrow areas and in relation to the broader themes of democracy and accountability. The analysis has also encompassed discussion of the local government modernisation agenda.

9.2: The role(s) of local councillors

These findings represented a critical re-evaluation of the existing literature and implied that previous studies (see, for example, Moss and Parker, 1967; Hampton, 1970; Newton, 1976; Barron, et al., 1991; Bochel and Bochel, 2000) had become dated. An important conclusion concerned the time commitment given by councillors, that exceeded substantially the estimates derived from the earlier research and suggested a shift in the intensity of local representation.

This research also suggested that the traditional emphasis on identifying different interpretations of the councillor’s role might have to be reassessed (see Corina, 1974; Newton, 1976). The notion that substantial numbers of councillors specialised in narrow aspects of policy (see, for example, Heclo, 1969; Dearlove,
1973; Newton, 1976) might also have to be re-evaluated after this study. Similarly, conclusions that many councillors focused on either policy matters or local representation (see Jones, 1973; Newton, 1976) were challenged through the Devon evaluation. There was also evidence that scepticism about the activities of voluntary groups (see Dearlove, 1973; Newton, 1976) had declined to negligible levels, a result perhaps of the contemporary focus on community and the belief amongst many policy-makers that voluntary organisations could enhance the delivery of public services through factors such as greater innovation, expenditure savings, enhanced user input and more flexibility.

9.3: External scrutiny

This study strengthened the academic literature in relation to external scrutiny undertaken by local authorities in Britain, an area largely overlooked by scholars of local government scrutiny committees. The initial scoping study showed that local government scrutiny was focused primarily on internal scrutiny of that local authority and that scrutiny of external organisations was relatively marginal and confined almost exclusively to England. There was a key finding that the scrutiny committee undertaking each inquiry had a substantial level of autonomy over the scrutiny process, in particular the respondents suggested that party groups rarely attempted to control or influence the process.

Satisfaction with scrutiny, in relation to issues such as the attitude of each scrutinised agency and the overall success of the process, was weakened by the acknowledgement that recommendations made by the scrutiny committees were often not implemented by the relevant agencies. In total, all the recommendations were
implemented in relation to only one in eight of the inquiries. The study also generated new insights about the attitude of the media towards local authorities, a research agenda that has been neglected or marginalised by most scholars of local government (see, for example, Stoker, 2000; Stewart, 2003; Wilson and Game, 2006). This evaluation suggested that there was significant media interest in external scrutiny, which was concentrated with regard to certain topics such as the Post Office and education.

9.4: Consultations

The evaluation of consultations undertaken at Devon County Council drew on the legacy and weaknesses of theoretical distinctions made by scholars such as Arnstein (1971), case study analysis (see Sergeant and Steele, 1998) and the work of Lowndes et al. (2001a), who undertook a census of practice towards consultations amongst local authorities. The Devon study generated significant insights into the process, the impact of local authority consultations and sceptical and sometimes cynical conclusions about this agenda. The authority suffered from capacity problems that impeded its ability to deliver effective consultation. Key difficulties included the poor methodological skills of many of the officers undertaking specific consultations and weaknesses at the corporate centre, which meant that the authority both underestimated the scale of its consultations and struggled to implement a coherent agenda throughout the county and the different directorates.

A culture of paternalism amongst some individuals and sections of the authority, which on occasion produced exercises that were little more than public relations initiatives, also undermined the effectiveness of these consultations. There
was evidence that consultations with groups, such as travellers or young people, that were either unpopular and or possessed little political clout were often characterised by this PR driven approach. The objective of such exercises was more to give the impression that such people were involved in the ‘decision-making’ process rather than to provide a genuine channel through which outsiders could formulate or alter policies.

The survey found that quite a high number of these consultations produced a substantial impact. This conclusion had, however, to be placed in the context that most of these exercises generated predictable results which re-enforced traditional agendas, assumptions and attitudes rather than challenging or altering them. Overall, almost two-thirds of the consultations classified as having a substantial impact generated predictable results that strengthened the status quo.

9.5: Community appraisals

This evaluation concerned the responsiveness of a range of service providers, community development and social capital. It made a notable contribution to the small literature about community appraisals undertaken in Britain (see, for example, Moseley et al., 1996) by generating an empirical assessment of whether the issues raised in community appraisals undertaken in Devon had been dealt with. The analysis of 46 communities found that relatively simple issues capable of resolution through town councils, parish authorities or local community groups were more likely to have been resolved than substantial matters that were the responsibility of an external agency. Community appraisals appeared, therefore, to be more effective mechanisms through which to ‘clean-up’ the local environment or establish a local newsletter than
to strengthen the provision of key services such as health and social services; parking; and housing. These findings, therefore, strengthened the results of the consultation survey in relation to the capacity of agencies to promote and encourage consultations and then to subsequently ignore the findings if inconvenient and in opposition to contemporary policies.

The survey also suggested that the impact of appraisals was affected substantially by the type of community and that the process was relatively ineffective in market towns or communities which contained distinctive and diverse sub-communities. Problems in ownership of the appraisal agenda and tensions between local politicians and appraisal steering groups were identified. In addition, the study drew attention to dilemmas over the allocation of resources in relation to the differential identification of need if appraisals had been undertaken in some communities but not others.

There was also a consideration of the impact of appraisals on community development and the stock of social capital, which enhanced the literature on the application of these important concepts to British governance. The evaluation suggested that appraisals could produce some benefits for community development and the stock of social capital, for example trust and associational networks could be strengthened. Such gains were, however, typically modest and often constrained by prescriptive and paternalistic elements of the appraisal process.

9.6: Local boundary reviews

This research focused on an area that has been largely neglected by scholars of UK governance, the key exception being Rallings et al. (2002). The study generated a
series of interesting findings about local councillors’ participation in and attitudes towards the review process. In particular, the survey suggested that many local councillors disagreed with the status quo in relation to the frequency of these reviews and the contemporary emphasis on equality in the number of electors rather than natural community links as the prime consideration in re-drawing ward and divisional boundaries. In general, councillors debated changes to their ward or division in public forums, although a notable minority of these politicians confined their contribution to private arenas.

There were also important findings about the impact of redistricting on electioneering. First, the process increased the intensity of the campaign for many councillors and seldom produced the opposite effect, a fascinating result given the tendency of many reviews to produce geographically smaller units. Second, responses implied that connections with the local community and affinity with local matters were crucial factors in the decision about which ward or division to fight following redistricting.

The survey also supplied data on the impact of boundary alterations on the performance of these councillors. The returns suggested that boundary changes generated a permanent increase in the time commitment of a notable number of these members towards their local authority duties.

9.7: Democracy and accountability

Each chapter generated conclusions relevant to the democracy and accountability of local governance in Britain although the focus between these two themes varied. The analysis of the role(s) of councillors strengthened and updated
academic knowledge about the role(s) of elected politicians as agents and facilitators of local democracy under modernised political management structures. Similarly, the evaluation of external scrutinies undertaken by British local authorities addressed the issue of the extent to which scrutiny has been deployed to plug the democratic deficit in local governance arising from the power of the private sector, local quangos and even elements of the voluntary sector. Some positive conclusions about the contribution to making external agencies responsive to local representative democracy were, however, undermined by the relatively small scale of such scrutiny and the failure to implement many of the recommendations.

The analysis of consultations undertaken by Devon County Council concerned primarily the impact of a more direct concept of democracy on that authority's policy-making process and suggested that some consultations owed more to a public relations agenda than a genuine desire to incorporate external opinions. This chapter also considered a few internal consultations with the authority's staff and thus democratic responsiveness in relation to employees. The evaluation of community appraisals undertaken in Devon generated sceptical conclusions about the impact of a more direct form of democracy on the local authority and a diverse range of other agencies and supported conclusions generated through the evaluation of consultations. In addition, the contribution of the process towards enhancing local democracy through community development and strengthening social capital was modest.

The analysis of local boundary reviews enhanced an understanding of the connection of the process with local democracy through an evaluation of the role of local councillors in these changes. However, while the survey concluded that councillors typically participated in the process, the analysis also showed that their
desire that wards and divisions reflected natural community links had little impact on
the Local Government Commission for England, which focused on equalising
electorates, and paid little attention to grassroots concern with having units that
reflected coherent communities.

Throughout the thesis there has been a strong focus on accountability issues.
The analysis of the role(s) of councillors generated notable insights about the local
accountability of elected representatives. Public accountability formed the prime focus
of the chapter about external scrutiny, which concerned the accountability of a wide
range of agencies to local councillors and thus local governance. Downward
accountability of public sector agencies and some private companies formed a central
theme of the evaluation of community appraisals. This study also highlighted tensions
with the more traditional concept of vertical accountability to councillors in respect of
sometimes-strained relations between local councillors and appraisal steering groups.
The downward accountability of the local authority to service users or the general
public was also a central theme of the evaluation of consultations performed by Devon
County Council. This chapter also included insights into some consultations that
involved horizontal accountability to peer groups.

The analysis of the local boundary reviews was also relevant to accountability
issues in relation to the participation in and influence of local councillors over a
process undertaken by a quango and suggested that downward accountability
mechanisms\(^1\) were relatively weak and did not affect the Local Government
Commission for England’s predisposition for equality in the size of electorates. This
research also generated insights about the impact of the changes on the manner in
which councillors were accountable to their wards or divisions.
9.8: Conclusion

This thesis has tackled five distinctive areas of research relevant to the debate about the modernisation of local governance, which has been an important theme of British government over the last decade. Each area has been linked with the themes of democracy and accountability. The analysis strengthened the academic literature about British government in each of these fields, while in relation to the analysis of local boundary reviews and external scrutiny the contribution has been substantial, an outcome that reflected the relative neglect of these areas by academics.

The evaluation generated some notable insights into the impact of the local government modernisation agenda. In particular, the evidence from the studies about consultation and the community appraisals implied that progress towards making local authorities and, in the case of the appraisals, other forms of local governance more responsive to an agenda driven from the grassroots had not been substantial and that consultations tended to make a substantial impact when they reinforced the status quo. These findings suggested, therefore, that the government had failed to generate a cultural shift in local government in relation to consultation. Local authority decisions still typically represented the agenda of a narrow local elite of senior officers and councillors and or the dictates of central government.

The work on external scrutiny illustrated the limits of that aspect of the modernisation agenda because the study suggested that the focus of local government scrutiny had been overwhelmingly inward and that when external organisations were evaluated the recommendations were seldom implemented in full. The establishment of scrutiny committees appeared, therefore, to have made a marginal contribution to holding the New Magistracy of unelected local governance to account to elected
politicians. The key finding relevant to the local government modernisation agenda from the work on the changing role(s) of councillors was that the drive to strengthen the community role of county councillors was of marginal necessity because most of those elected representatives had a strong focus on community representation that predated this agenda. The research on local boundary changes supported these findings about the importance of community to local councillors. In addition, this chapter suggested a deficit of joined-up thinking in relation to local government reform. While the local government modernisation agenda contained a pronounced emphasis on the community representation role of local councillors, the process of reviewing local government boundaries eschewed the proposition that wards or divisions should reflect natural communities in favour of generating units with similar sized electorates.

The assessment in relation to democracy and accountability suggested a cynical interpretation of the operation of local governance and a reluctance to extend democratic participation in decision-making or strengthen local accountability for those decisions. These conclusions were, however, diminished by some evidence of positive attitudes towards democracy and accountability in relation to areas such as the community representational role of local councillors, the resolution of many of the smaller-scale problems raised in the community appraisals and the outcomes of some external scrutinies.

\footnote{Accountability to local councillors could also be viewed as vertical accountability.}
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