

RUNNYMEDE



Local Decision-Making and Participation
Think-piece paper on cohesion and integration

11 May 2007

Foreword

Understanding and improving local decision-making and participation is a key task in promoting cohesion and integration in our multi-ethnic society. We are pleased to be able to contribute to the commission's deliberations through this think-piece, authored by Omar Khan.

Runnymede is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic Britain. We provide evidence and analysis on key social policy issues to enable more informed debate and better policy making.

Founded in 1968 as a Charitable Educational Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in close collaboration with eminent thinkers and policy makers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships, and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. We stimulate debate and suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment, health and citizenship.

Our Staff and Trustees reflect the multi-ethnic face of modern Britain. Our policies are decided by our Board of Trustees, and the Director is responsible for developing the strategic work priorities and overseeing operations. We work to a long-established value base committed to upholding equal opportunities, striving to provide high-quality and cost effective services and continuing to listen to and learn from those we seek to serve.

Given our ongoing focus on race equality and interest in working in partnership, we were pleased to be commissioned to write a report on local government and participation. Ensuring that citizens have fair access to decision-making institutions is a fruitful response to the widely-noted increase in voter apathy. By engaging at a local level, citizens also learn how to engage with each other on terms of respect and to listen to voices they might not otherwise hear. We viewed this opportunity to support the work of the Commission as a good way to express our concerns and hopes on the future of multi-ethnic Britain. The fifteen key points at the end of the paper provide an overview of our conclusions and suggestions for further action and research. We thank the Commission for its interest and support of this work, and would be happy to discuss any of the enclosed ideas with you at a later date.

Yours sincerely,

Omar Khan
Research and Policy Analyst
o.khan@runnymedetrust.org

Rob Berkeley
Deputy Director
r.berkeley@runnymedetrust.org

Local Decision Making and Participation

Think-piece for the Commission on Integration and Cohesion

In this paper we discuss the challenges posed by ethnic diversity to renewing local governance structures and improving participation of all groups in our democratic processes at neighbourhood, local and regional levels. All major political parties have expressed their concern at the disengagement of citizens from politics, the decline in 'neighbourliness', and the importance of making public services responsive to the needs of citizens. Re-defining local decision-making structures is reliant on understanding the identities of citizens and their understandings of community and engaging with these identities to reformulate the state. If cohesion and integration are to be meaningful, the democratic spaces through which contact occurs and collective decisions made need to be relevant, accessible and robust.

1. Introduction

Democracy requires the participation of citizens. Recently there has been increasing interest in enhancing citizenship participation at the local level, in the UK and more widely. Terms such as devolution, community involvement and subsidiarity and institutions including the UN¹ and EU² all suggest that decision-making should be made at the smallest possible unit.³ But although democrats endorse the idea of greater citizen involvement, the meaning, content, scope and indeed aim of participation is not universally agreed. We need to be careful in thinking through these disagreements to ensure the inclusion of black and minority ethnic populations at all levels of citizenship participation, from the most intimate local level to the highest authority in Whitehall. Outlining the various types, scope and meaning of citizenship participation is also vital for ensuring that local governance structures contribute to community and social cohesion. By addressing the question of race equality in the context of participation in local decision-making, we can get a better handle on the barriers to and possible instruments for a cohesive and just Britain where everyone has been integrated into democratic values.

In this paper we first very briefly explain the origin of thinking on democracy to explain why citizenship participation at a local level can be valuable. The first part of the paper sets out some of the conceptual issues for thinking about participation in a democracy. We outline four concerns that must be addressed when considering the role and scope of participation: (1) opportunities for participation should be *equal*; (2) participation takes place in *institutions* which in turn shape that participation; (3) decision-making sometimes requires a level of *competence*; and (4) participation is valuable also because it promotes *justice* and human rights.

These issues shape our understanding of the big ideas of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, namely integration and cohesion. Neither integration nor cohesion is valuable in itself: societies may be cohesive but violent or unjust, and individuals may integrate into a value system or community whose practices are immoral or undesirable. While participation in local democratic institutions cannot resolve these difficulties, by foregrounding the value of social justice and human rights, we can promote a healthier notion of cohesion and explain why the participation of all members of the polity is a requirement of just government. This requires all individuals and communities in Britain to integrate into

¹ See the Lund Recommendations (1999).

² See the European Social Charter of Local Self-Government (1985). On subsidiarity, there are four criteria, one of which is that decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the citizen, and another of which is that such actions secure greater freedoms for the individual.

³ A current Early Day Motion and a recent edition of the Big Issue support this principle. See also www.localworks.org

values of justice and democracy, and not simply to participate with the aim of securing their own narrow interests. If the focus of cohesion and integration often slips into a lecturing tone towards BME groups for their separatist tendencies, it is worth highlighting how all Britons should more widely endorse the values that underpin democracy, including of course human rights and citizen participation.

Moving from these general conceptual points, we then focus on the crucial role of councils as a site or institution of democratic participation. For all the proliferation of local institutions and agreements, councils remain the most important organ for delivering public services and local people still turn to their councillors to address their needs and air their grievances. BME participation among councillors is still unacceptably low, particularly for some groups, and political parties need to be more creative in enhancing their participation if cohesion requires all citizens to contribute to democratic institutions and public debate.

The next sections raises examples of greater involvement in local decision-making in particular service provisions, namely education, health and regeneration, where the benefits of greater devolution are more contested than we originally anticipated. One reason is that devolving decisions about public service provision is justified with reference to efficacy as well as democracy and justice. The assumption is that services will be delivered *better* when local people have an input into how they are delivered. While we don't think this assumption is unwarranted, there isn't a great deal of evidence to support or reject it. Further research should be undertaken to determine what works in actually improving local service delivery and we can't assume that participation will always lead to better delivery. One reason is the differential levels of mobilization at a local level. We need evidence on who is actually participating when local decisions are devolved, especially if we want to enhance the participation of black and minority ethnic people, which is the only way to ensure that cohesion is just.

Two recent government reports address the main themes of this paper: the strategy to increase race equality and community cohesion (*Improving Opportunities, Strengthening Societies*) and the Local Government White Paper (*Strong and Prosperous Communities*). Responsibility for both reports now lies with the relatively recently-created Department for Communities and Local Government. While there have been undoubted benefits in reorganizing government such that race equality is not lost in the Home Office's inevitable focus on criminal justice, we raise some concerns about the focus on 'communities' in thinking about and indeed achieving greater participation and race equality. We conclude with some recommendations for ensuring that local decision-making – and indeed cohesion and integration – is pursued with reference to race equality. This will create a more prosperous Britain, but also a fairer Britain.

2. Concepts in Democratic Theory

To understand the inter-relationship between participation, cohesion and race equality, we first consider the concepts in a more general way. We begin with a discussion of the origins of democratic theory and practice; this, in turn, provides a springboard for thinking about how and why participation matters in a democracy, focusing of course on the UK. Connecting these insights to cohesion and integration, we then distinguish types of participation, and suggest why some forms of participation are more relevant for democratic success, cohesion and race equality than others.

Historical background: from 'direct democracy' to liberal representative democracy

Modern perceptions of democratic politics typically focus on national parliaments. As a result, our understanding of democracy is somewhat skewed towards political parties and representatives who make legislation and policy decisions in national capitals.

Historically, however, democracy was conceived in a more 'direct' way. For the Athenians, democracy required the participation of citizens in every form of decision-making. This involved very large numbers of participants, particularly in proportional terms: for some decisions in the Assembly, a quorum of 6000 was required out of a citizenship population of roughly 30,000. Even the council numbered 500 people, and was selected by lottery, which for both Plato and Aristotle was the definition of a democratic procedure. Juries typically numbered between 201 and 501 (the number that sentenced Socrates to death), but not infrequently numbered in the thousands. These features explain why Athens has been conceived as the first 'direct democracy'.

Of course Athens contained many features that are today considered unjust and undemocratic. Women were denied citizenship as were the many slaves and foreigners (and their descendants) in the society. Such blatant and unreasonable discrimination is now rightly rejected by modern liberal democracies, although the question of who is and who isn't a citizen – and what rights non-citizens are owed – is far from settled. Just as significantly, the notion of direct democracy in Athens took place amongst a much smaller citizenry of 30,000 – the size of a large town today.

Two features of modern democracies distinguish it from the Athenian and other direct variants. First, we have a *representative* democracy. Legislators 'represent' our interests in an assembly or, alternatively, focus more impartially on the common good for all. But in either case, the idea is that someone else will stand in for me in making decisions that affect my life and the life of my fellow citizens. This is deemed necessary in larger societies of many millions, where direct democracy is unfeasible. Many theorists also recommend representative democracy because those who seek political office are considered more knowledgeable or even more concerned about public issues that affect every citizen.

The second notable feature of modern democracy, especially in Britain, is its *liberal* character. Liberalism is concerned with protecting the value of individuals, and it typically does so by stipulating certain *rights* that all citizens are deemed to possess. For some, this suggests that democratic decision-making is constrained in the sense that certain types of legislation and policy cannot be allowed even if a large majority is in favour. So, for example, *liberal* democracies don't permit torturing 10% of the population even if 90% of the population is in favour of doing so. But as we argue below, human rights should not be perceived as a limitation on democratic decision-making because societies that ignore them are unlikely to support the values that make long-term democratic success necessary – values that include human rights. Furthermore, to give substance to the idea of equal participation, and to promote a sense of cohesion that we can all endorse, governments must protect everyone's rights.

Understanding the role of participation in democracy

Although this discussion may seem irrelevant to the question of local participation and cohesion in Britain today, it raises the important point that the meaning and scope of participation in a democracy is not fully agreed. In thinking through the Athenian and modern interpretations of democracy, four questions emerge regarding the role and scope of citizenship participation. First, most democrats believe that citizens should have the opportunity for *equal participation*. Second, *institutions* are necessary for collective decision-making, and some individuals will be more involved in those decisions than others. This raises a third question, namely that of *competence*: some decisions that affect a number of people may be better made by those with basic knowledge of the impact of those decisions. Finally, democracy is typically tied to other concepts such as *justice* and *rights*. This suggests that unjust decisions, even if arrived at through majority voting, may not be amenable to the long-term success of democracy.

Different democracies have responded to these requirements or modes of participation in different ways, but the emphasis on local structures should be seen as a way of advancing each of them where national or sub-national government institutions fall short of these ideals. For example, representative forms of government that focus on central decision-making may not fully meet the democratic requirement of equal participation. This partly explains why the Athenians believed that lottery was a better model institution for democracy even if modern democrats reject the idea of random selection on grounds of expertise or efficacy.

The positives of greater citizenship participation are substantial even as the meaning of that participation is contested. As we discuss below, there are beneficial effects for individuals, localities and the wider polity when citizens participate freely and equally in public institutions and public discourse. This ideal is perhaps more likely to be put into practice when citizens feel connected to the decision-making process. Given our more complex and larger societies, the most realistic way for this to happen in modern democracies is by enhancing participation at a local level.

The literature on local decision-making has not always connected to an equally vibrant area of research, namely the idea of 'deliberative democracy' associated first with Jurgen Habermas and now more widely researched at an empirical as well as normative level.⁴ Here the idea is that participants should engage on terms of equality and with relative open-mindedness with regard to the arguments of others. We cannot elaborate on this account here, but simply note that it has a potential contribution to make in terms of *how* participation can best be fostered in our democracies.

We should not be complacent that we will automatically achieve more participatory or cohesive democracy simply because more people participate. Opportunities for such participation should be equal and committed to fair procedures and outcomes, and local political actors can be as likely to violate these standards as official in central government. Especially for black and minority ethnic people, but also for other disadvantaged groups, the four points above provide a yardstick for measuring whether or not our participation is fair and democratic as well as cohesive, integrative and effective.

Types of citizenship participation

These points lead naturally to the question of the various types of citizenship participation, particularly in thinking about how the opportunities for such participation can be *equal*. Recent research distinguishes three types or forms of citizenship participation:

1. Involvement by individuals or organizations in *public policy*
2. Participation in *voluntary or community organizations*
3. Involvement in *informal support mechanisms*, such as family, friends and 'neighbourliness'⁵

The research cited above in fact refers to these as three forms of 'community involvement' but we think it is better to characterize the issue in terms of citizenship participation. All societies are defined by informal interactions between family members and friends, but what is important for a democratic society is that such interactions are supplemented by participation in a more public way.

This explains why 'informal support mechanisms' are less helpful in thinking about a meaningful form of community cohesion. Community cohesion is found in all sorts of non-democratic societies, but what makes it important for a democracy is a more publicly minded ethos that motivates citizens to interact with those *outside* of their family, friends and indeed neighbours. For cohesion to be valuable, it must be characterised by relationships of equality, tolerance and respect, and aim for a fairer society.

⁴ Habermas (1989) and Gutmann and Thomson (1996).

⁵ Goodlad (2002).

Such aims are more explicitly recognized in a recent review of 'what works' in community involvement initiatives. It summarises government's justification of greater involvement as follows:

1. it aids *social cohesion* through its developmental or educational effect on individuals and hence on society, and it fosters *social capital*;
2. planning and delivery of services is *effective* and decisions are accorded *legitimacy* since they reflect the *interests of participants*; and
3. it is a *right of citizenship* that is justified on grounds of due process, irrespective of outcome.⁶

Each of these aims is important for thinking about the participation of black and minority ethnic citizens and the contribution greater participation can make to community cohesion. Even within local governance, there are different questions and different forms of engagement in different areas: serving on a patient's forum, being a school governor, organizing youth football and volunteering as a carer are different forms of engagement that probably have different implications for community cohesion.

Finally, there is a significant question in democratic theory and practice regarding *who* gets chosen or chooses to stand as a local or 'community' representative. Questions are continually raised about the representative-ness of 'community spokesmen', but the concern that elder, more conservative male spokesmen wrongly claim to represent a whole community's views is not and should not be limited to Muslims or minority ethnic groups. At a local level, people continue to stress that the 'same old faces' are consulted and that decisions are thus made by those most mobilised or experienced in negotiating government institutions, namely those who are already relatively powerful. This obviously undermines the participatory intent of devolved government, and is a particularly difficult barrier for minority ethnic populations, especially those recent migrants with less understanding of how to access decision-making institutions.

3. Local Government in Britain: The role of the council

Having set up some of the conceptual issues surrounding democratic participation and local decision-making, it is worth overviewing the picture as it exists on the ground and to connect this discussion to issues of race equality and cohesion. The Government White Paper on Local Government rightly sees local government as providing more than merely community cohesion. The White Paper continually emphasises the 'powers and freedoms' it has devolved to various authorities, explaining that this has a crucial role to play in improving service delivery but also to give people 'more control over their lives'. Significantly, this includes the needs of disadvantaged communities, including black and minority ethnic Britons.

We already know, for example, that turnout at elections is influenced by 'race' and ethnicity among other factors. This is likely to become even more significant as democratic structures are extended. The effect of differential levels of turnout is to weaken democracy because participation is unequal. The challenge to increasing involvement goes beyond physical turnout. To ensure longer term participation, involvement will have to lead to discernible changes and improvements. Crucially, real engagement must lead to a shift in power relations. This may require more wholesale change than currently imagined and new means of engaging citizens.

Attempts to create new local decision-making structures could potentially exacerbate the inequalities that already exist in governance structures. Further, localism will produce diversity of outcome. While this may be fine in some areas of practice, are we willing to accept that services that have more impact

⁶ Burton et al (2004), p. iv.

on minority ethnic communities will be addressed in some areas and not others? We briefly address this concern in the latter sections of this paper.

A variety of mechanisms and institutions have been created and strengthened by this government in relation to local decision-making. Perhaps most significantly, decisions regarding the delivery of many public services have been devolved. We address this question in the following section, but the key institution for local decision-making remains the local council. Good intentions about ensuring wider participation and cohesion need to include the design of institutions as one of their aims. This is not because some institutions are inherently 'better' than others, but because institutions create their own logic and have particular practices that then shape how individuals interact with them. Where those institutions have a democratic role, their design becomes even more important. And in Britain, the local council is the most relevant institution for analysing to what extent race equality and cohesion are realised by devolved decision-making, especially given that the Local Government White Paper has also proposed increasing their powers.

One last point is worth mentioning because it links to a concern that has occasionally risen in the context of local government, namely corruption. For participation to be effective, institutions must be just and must be seen to be just. Where individuals use back channels or tamper with voting ballots, it is not simply the procedures of democratic government that suffer, but faith in democratic institutions. Furthermore, where groups are seen as 'vote banks' for one party or another, this can lead politicians to behave in unprincipled ways. Given that some of the greatest concerns on vote-rigging have been in Asian areas of Birmingham and in Tower Hamlets, we need to ensure that all citizens are confident in our institutions and are encouraged to participate.

Councils and Councillors

There are over 400 councils (388 in England) and roughly 25,000 councillors in Britain, and if they have recently attracted attention because the 2007 election may provide insights into party strengths at a national level, their importance stems as much from their capacity and importance in delivering significant services at a local level and in providing democratic accountability and legitimacy. Indeed, for many citizens their first port of call for ensuring that their needs are listened to is the local council. According to the DCLG website, local government employs over 2 million people and accounts for 25% of public spending. Much of this total includes teachers and social care workers, but the power of councillors to determine spending patterns and objectives means that their role will continue to be crucial.

Councils are now asked to cede more of their authority to other local partners, and to include citizens more fully in the design of policy and the monitoring of effective service delivery. At the same time, the government white paper talks of the need to ensure that there are strong executives among local councils and that decisions are accountable. Given this emphasis, it is important to understand the status of councillors in Britain today, as they remain those most likely to implement policy at a local level, whether that policy addresses race equality or cohesion.

One of the difficulties facing the government in devolving decision-making is the long-term trend of disinterest in serving on councils, especially among young people. While the average age of a council was 55 in 1997, this increased to 57 in 2001 and over 58 in 2006.⁷ Forty-five per cent of the English population is under the age of 45, but only 13.5% of councillors were under 45 in 2006, a substantial

⁷ Data in the following paragraphs derive from the Local Government Associations [LGA] 2006 Councillor's Census, with some comparisons made to the 1997, 2001 and 2004 Censuses.

decrease from the figure of 18.4% in 1997.⁸ Over 40% of councillors were retired, again a significant increase since 1997, but only 22.5% of the general population is retired.

We address the issue of BME representation on councils below, but there are also relatively few numbers of women councillors, at less than 30% of the total, and this represents only a very small improvement since 1997 when the figure was 27.8%. The trend of disinterest in becoming a councillor may also be gauged by the 29% of respondents who said they became a councillor 'because I was asked to', a figure that hasn't changed much over the last few councillor censuses.

On the other hand, there is also evidence that councillors are deeply committed to their work, and that they pursue the job on the basis of serving the local community. Although remuneration for the work was relatively low, councillors spent on average 21.9 hours per week and almost 87% cited 'serving the community' as a reason for becoming a councillor – compared to 51.5% who did so on account of political beliefs, 52.3% 'to change things' and only 1.6% on account of member allowances. Only 11.4% said they wouldn't stand again, with 20% undecided and fully 61.3% committed to standing again.

Councillors have also attained high levels of education, especially when compared to the population in general. Fully half have a qualification of NVQ level 4 and above, compared to only 22.2% in the general population. Furthermore, more than 92% reported being effective or very effective in their jobs. The censuses of 1997, 2001, 2004 and 2006 reveal a clear profile of councillors as educated and committed to their localities, but also more likely to be retired, male, and white, and having a long-term experience in local activism or volunteering. This will of course impact on how devolved decision-making functions, and how public service delivery is implemented, issues that we pick up in the final sections. To complete this picture, it is necessary to turn to the representation and experience of black and minority ethnic people as councillors and in getting their views heard at a local level. This is perhaps the best piece of evidence – especially in terms of data – for how devolved power at a local level impacts race equality and cohesion.

BME representation on local councils

Local councils provided black and minority ethnic Britons with their first opportunity to participate in democratic structures. While the first post-war BME MP was not elected until 1987, there were probably close to 200 BME councillors by that time, a trend that began in London from around 1974. According to Romain Garbaye, there were four BME councillors in London boroughs in 1974, rising to 35 in 1978, 79 in 1982 and 193 in the early 1990s.⁹ According to the most recent census of councillors, the figure was 350 or 17.7% of the London total in 2006, and up from 14% in 2004.¹⁰ While this is substantially above the national average BME population of 8%, it is still significantly short of London's BME population of 30%.

In England in general black and minority ethnic people are similarly under-represented. There are 764 BME councillors out of over 19,000 in total, a share of roughly 4.1% compared to a BME population in England of nearly 9%. If the numbers for different minority ethnic groups are examined, it becomes obvious that some groups are doing better than others.

Generally speaking, Asian groups are better represented in local government. There are 236 Indian councillors, 143 Pakistani, 55 Bangladeshi and 85 'Other Asian' councillors. Their total of 455 is over two-thirds, or 68% of the total number of BME councillors. In fact, Asian groups are *increasing* their

⁸ Interestingly, this trend was *not* as observable in Scotland, where the average age is 55 and 17% of councillors are under 44, and only 34% over 60.

⁹ Garbaye (2005), p. 7.

¹⁰ LGA (2006).

share of councillors in Britain, particularly Indians (198 in 2004) and Pakistanis (128 in 2004). This may be because Asians are now represented in the Conservative Party; whereas Labour could claim 46% of councillors compared to the Conservative's 22% in 1997, the situation had nearly reversed by 2006, when Labour held only 25% compared to the Conservative total of 42%.

Black groups are even more systematically under-represented than their Asian peers. There are only 93 Black or Black British councillors in England, comprised of 42 Caribbean, 43 African and 7 'Other Black' councillors. Although the 'mixed' category has 127 councillors, it again appears that those with Black Caribbean or Black African heritage are even more poorly represented than other 'mixed' categories. And there are only 5 Chinese councillors among the roughly 20,000 in all of England.

The number of Black Caribbean councillors is particularly striking; although they are as large in population as Pakistanis in the overall population, they have less than a third as many councillors. Indeed, their numbers have in fact *decreased* from 57 to 42 since 2004, although overall the number of Black councillors increased from 91 because of the significant increase in Black African councillors (from 26 to 43). One possible explanation of this relative stagnation is the continued support among Black Caribbeans and Black Africans of the Labour Party during a period when Labour lost 1000 councillors across England.

But whatever the cause of Black under-representation, particularly *Caribbean* under-representation, it challenges a common motif in government publications and indeed the media. This is that the more settled communities in Britain have no problems of 'cohesion' and that they have been more or less integrated into British life. Here the thesis is that Indians and Caribbeans do not pose a challenge to cohesion whereas Muslims and some other recent migrants do.

Yet the continued and systematic under-representation of Black Caribbeans in institutions of power demonstrates that their 'cohesion' has not resulted in better outcomes nor even in proportionate participation in important democratic institutions. Such findings suggest that we must continue to place social justice at the forefront of the agenda and not allow fascination with cohesion or indeed the security agenda to dominate policy that aims to address continued inequalities among BME groups. The finding that Pakistanis have increased their number of councillors by over 10% in just two years also challenges the notion that Muslims are less integrated into British life or that they participate less in public institutions and are more 'separatist'.

There is some evidence that the BME figures are not as poor as suggested above. While England has a BME proportion of roughly 9%, the numbers are in fact very unevenly spread, with the four largest metropolitan counties containing more than two-thirds of all BME people; other urban centres are also characterized by larger BME populations. In other areas, there are very few BME people indeed, and so it is hardly surprising that there are few BME councillors in many shire counties and districts throughout the country (272 out of 388 local authorities in England). Turning to non-London urban areas, Le Lohé has collected evidence suggesting that Asian groups are represented at levels that are close to their proportionate share. As he puts it: 'In the seven local authorities outside London where the Asian population exceeds 10 per cent, Asians provide 13 per cent of all councillors. This is just 1 per cent lower than the average Asian population in these authorities'.¹¹

Table 1. BME Councillors in 15 city councils

City	Asian Population	Asian Councillors	Black Population	Black Councillors
Birmingham	13.5	13.7	5.9	3.4

¹¹ Le Lohé (1998), p. 73

Blackburn	14.2	10.0	0.4	0.0
Bradford	13.6	12.2	1.1	0.0
Coventry	9.3	13.0	1.6	1.9
Kirklees	8.3	5.6	1.8	0.0
Leicester	24.7	23.2	2.4	0.0
Luton	13.6	16.7	4.9	6.3
Manchester	5.9	4.0	4.6	3.0
North Beds	5.6	5.7	2.8	0.0
Nottingham	4.8	12.7	4.6	5.5
Pendle	9.7	7.8	1.0	0.0
Preston	8.3	3.5	1.2	0.0
Sandwell	10.6	11.1	2.4	0.0
Slough	22.6	30.0	5.1	0.0
Wolverhampton	12.3	5.0	5.1	0.0

Modified from Le Lohé (1998)

However, of the 15 local authorities studied by Le Lohé, 10 had no Black councillors. In Coventry, Luton and Nottingham, there were slightly more Black councillors than the Black population of those cities, but in the larger cities of Birmingham and Manchester, there are disproportionately fewer BME councillors. Furthermore, his data is now more than ten years out of date, and it would be worth re-examining and updating these data.

But even if Le Lohé's figures are substantially correct today, and Asians are more or less proportionately represented in city councils, there is still an open question regarding the form and extent of that representation. Are Asian councillors in leadership roles? How powerful are Asian and other BME councillors relative to their white peers? BME councillors should not merely be represented on local councils, they should be able to access levers of power. We therefore suggest further research on whether or not BME councillors are in positions of power and responsibility on councils, and whether they have been able to rise in party hierarchies and so help shape local agendas.

Local Institutions and BME participation: party politics and first-past-the-post

Compared to 1997, the numbers of BME councillors in 2006 show only a slight upward swing (from 3.4 to 4.1%, or 653 to 764 councillors), and it is unlikely that elections in 2007 have made any positive impact. One reason for the lack of progress is party political, namely that BME Britons disproportionately support the Labour party. Black and minority ethnic people are far more likely to live in urban areas, particularly Britain's largest cities, and so they are also much more likely to represent local constituents in urban areas than they are in rural or semi-rural councils. The result is that whereas 8.8% of Labour councillors are black and minority ethnic, only 3.2% of Liberal Democrats and 2.1% of Conservatives are.

While we don't have recent enough national figures, there are significant differences between BME groups in terms of party-political support, with some Indians (and to a lesser degree Pakistanis and Bangladeshis) now willing to support and stand for the Conservatives, and some Pakistanis and Bangladeshis increasingly attracted to the Liberal Democrats and other parties because of their stand on the Iraq war. However, we have not really witnessed similar trends among other groups, and the general trend among BME groups, even among Muslims, is greater support for the Labour Party than the country as a whole, with support reaching nearly nine out of ten amongst Black Caribbeans.

As a result, as the Labour share of councillors plummeted from 46% to 25%, such losses have adversely impacted the numbers of BME councillors even as the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have had some success in enhancing BME participation in their parties from a base of around 1% only a decade ago. Highlighting the continued strength of Labour among BME groups, while Labour lost its

seventeen-year control on Birmingham in 2001, it still retains the vote support and indeed representation of BME residents of that city; despite further gains in 2006 elections, the Conservatives still returned no Muslim Councillor in Birmingham while Labour returned four.¹²

The above evidence points to the importance of institutions in determining participation and indeed cohesion in Britain and other democracies. As Romain Garbaye has argued, BME populations became politically active at a local area typically through issues that affected local populations.¹³ More specifically, Indians, Pakistanis and African Caribbeans were involved in broader workers' movements. This was then enhanced by their participation in the anti-racist struggle and in movements to get cultural recognition, as through the Sikh motorcycle helmet exemption.

Garbaye argues that BME participation and interest in these issues was noteworthy and long-term, particularly at a local level. Significantly, these forms of activism led black and minority ethnic Britons to join the Labour Party rather than the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. This points to how institutions determine the form and type of participation and why policies to enhance cohesion cannot ignore institutional factors, including historical factors, even at the local level. Garbaye further asserts that black-led churches played a large role in creating leaders from the community, and that this remains true today.

If the political party system in Britain made it more likely for BME activism to be channelled into the Labour Party during the 1970s and 1980s, the first-past-the-post electoral system gave the Labour Party an interest in including or co-opting such activism. To gain a majority on councils, Labour typically required the vote of BME populations, and they often supported BME candidates to facilitate this support. Whether or not the first-past-the-post system is the fairest means for determining democratic will, by understanding its effects we can appreciate further why BME participation took the form it did from the 1970s.

Three developments have complicated this interpretation of BME participation since the 1990s. First is the relative weakness of working-class movements in the Labour Party compared to the 1970s and 1980s. While unions continue to provide support for Labour, their role and influence is much reduced, particularly as more people are employed in service jobs where unionisation is relatively low. At the same time, less BME people are involved in the traditional working-class movement, thus reducing the influence of this route to political representation.

A second development is more recent, namely the Iraq war. There is substantial evidence that Muslims in particular have drifted away from the Labour Party since the 2005 General Election, though such support has not shifted to the Conservatives but rather the Liberal Democrats and other parties opposed to the war.¹⁴ The picture is, however, more mixed, with the Respect party's victory in Bethnal Green and Bow hard to assess as part of a broader trend of Labour losses.

The third development explains why it is difficult to assess the impact of the Iraq war on Muslim support for the Labour Party: Labour Party support has decreased for *all* sections of the British public. Labour vote share in the 2007 local elections was the lowest for over twenty years, and while part of this may be traced to foreign policy, much of it is also directed at the party of government for the past decade. Together these three developments have reduced the direct linkage between BME political activism and Labour Party involvement, and probably increased their participation in other parties. At the same time, however, it has led to a stagnation of the numbers of BME councillors as other parties struggle to match

¹² See www.birmingham.gov.uk

¹³ Garbaye (2005).

¹⁴ See Khan (2005).

Labour's long-term support among BME voters, support that derived from real activism at a local level. Finally, it is important to explain why BME councillors are unlikely to serve in large numbers in shire councils and districts where their numbers are extremely low (roughly 2% and below in the majority of English councils). If the benefit of devolving power to local areas is that local people are more aware of their needs, this of course makes it unlikely for BME councillors to represent areas where BME residents are few in numbers.

4. Delivering Public Services Locally

While councils and councillors are the most prominent and arguably most influential agents of local decision-making, there have been increasing efforts to devolve decision-making even further. In particular, the government has pursued a variety of institutional connections, using such terms as 'partnerships', 'intra-agency', 'local area agreements', 'area-based initiatives', 'local strategic partnerships', 'consultation' to demonstrate its commitment to including more powers and give more freedom to local communities, if not to individual citizens.

Although this paper more directly addresses the question of the impact of devolved power on social cohesion by including more voices in decision-making and responding to local interests, the justification for devolving power is not only or even principally motivated by that aim. Two additional reasons cited above are particularly relevant: local participation as enhancing the efficiency of service provision, and local participation as a right of citizenship.

All three of these justifications apply to black and minority ethnic people, but it is an open question how far devolution actually serves these purposes. That is to say, we need to examine critically whether devolving decision-making at a local level actually promotes the interests of local black and minority people (leading to social cohesion), enhances the efficiency of service delivery for these groups, and actually involves black and minority ethnic stakeholders. If local decision-making fails to achieve these ends, it will not deliver the important benefits that are outlined for it in both the Local Government White Paper and in IOSS.

Unfortunately, the evidence on this question is very limited. We are therefore led to consider the overall impact of devolved public service provision, independently of its effects on black and minority ethnic populations. Even here the evidence is poor, but we examine three different services to explain the different ways in which participation can occur and the extent to which it achieves its stipulated aims. First, however, we summarize general evidence of 'what works' in local partnerships, particularly that related to cohesion. We also briefly survey Local Area Agreements (LAAs), but reserve judgment on these institutions because they are relatively novel and have not been implemented in many councils.

What Works in Area-based Initiatives

In an important review of the literature, Burton et al. point out some general 'epistemological and methodological challenges in evaluating area-based initiatives (ABIs) and in trying to establish the contribution that community involvement might make to any positive outcomes associated with them'.¹⁵ The general difficulty is: how can we know whether any good outcomes are the result of devolved power or community decision-making when reforms in local government extend so widely? Can we pinpoint *which* reforms have led to any positive outcomes? Furthermore, any positive effects will necessarily be based on short-term evaluations and the institutions and processes of local participation are in some cases relatively novel but in other areas based on existing networks and practices. Finally, there may be substantial regional and local variation, such that what works in one area may be harmful in another,

¹⁵ Burton et al (2004), p. 7.

and where historical contingencies such as greater participation in certain areas, are likely to impact the results of devolved power.

The review, like previous research, also emphasises the existing and relatively numerous lessons for good practice. Unfortunately, these are not always built upon, such that local involvement in a particular area wastes opportunities by not examining previous attempts or efforts made in different institutional settings that may nevertheless outline particular characteristics of a local community.

This leads to a second important research finding: the efficacy of local decision-making is strongly influenced by existing local practices and capacities. In some areas there are long-standing 'processes, structures and methods for involvement'¹⁶ but these may be uneven. The attitudes and nature of a community, and indeed of the various components within that community are further factors that must be addressed for ensuring that local decision-making is effective as well as fair.

Much research also identifies what *doesn't* work in local decision-making. A key theme is that central government often establishes the aims and objectives for localities without significant input from the local community or communities. The Government seems to have recognised this, and in its White Paper has created a new 'performance framework' that identifies 35 priorities for each area and a 'single set' of 200 'outcome based indicators' that will apply to all localities. It is less clear whether this will adequately respond to the concern that central government sets the agenda and that local decision-makers have only tokenistic input.

Local Area Agreements

Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are perhaps the government's clearest and most extensive institution for devolving power to the local level. These are currently still in their early stages, but the idea is that Central Government and a local area will come to a three-year agreement on strategy and general policy goals. The local area is defined more broadly than the council, and is supposed to include 'other key partners' involved in delivering public services and engaged in a locality more generally including the private and voluntary sectors.

The most recent Guidance and review (published in 2006) establishes a 'framework of priority outcomes' that identifies four main areas for measuring outcomes: children and young people; safer and stronger communities; healthier communities and older people; and economic development.¹⁷ We have reprinted the more detailed aims in each of these priority issues in Table 2. These are then specified in even further detail in the Guidance document.

Current guidance provides a large number of indicators for ensuring important and worthwhile aims, and most of these are wholly commendable and fairly detailed. Although LAAs are still in their early stages, these are the standards by which they will be evaluated, and the aims they will seek to deliver. These are all of course worthy goals, but we would like to see a more explicit focus on *participation*, perhaps as a fifth area for measuring outcomes. We were unable to find indicators that mention equal access to public services for black and minority ethnic people or indeed refer to equal participation more generally and this is a gap that must be filled if local devolution is to have its desired effects.

Searching through the document, the term 'inequalities' appears on a number of occasions with regard to health outcomes, but the other two discussions (on pp. 10 and 39) are extremely brief and impressionistic. BME communities are in general notable for their absence. One way of addressing these gaps is by a shift in emphasis: although many of the numerous indicators and outcomes relate to

¹⁶ Burton et al (2004), pp. 30-31.

¹⁷ DCLG (2006b).

equal participation and reducing inequalities, they are not explicit in doing so. General statements about 'empowerment' and ensuring that people of different backgrounds 'are getting along' need to be more incisively directed against unjustifiable discrimination and disadvantage, including racism and racist violence. It is perhaps more surprising that discussion of 'cohesion' barely merits a mention, though this is indicative of a noted difference between the vision of community referred to in local government policy and the interpretation of community in regards to cohesion (an issue we discuss further below).

Annex G of the document is titled 'Equality and Diversity: Making Improvements Inclusive'. While it is important that such information has been included in the document, it is a very brief (half a page with four points) and underspecified. The annex's fourth point is that 'local authorities should have regard to the tackling and reducing [sic] race equalities agenda, e.g. in education, housing, health, employment and the Criminal Justice System – this is a cross cutting issue across all the LAA block'. But while the race equality agenda (and indeed all equality agendas) is in part about processes, it is also about outcomes, and the broad and underspecified nature of this annex suggests that equality and diversity have been tacked on as add-ons, especially when contrasted to the detailed and numerous measures that are suggested in the rest of the document.

Table 2. Local Area Agreement Outcome Framework Summary

Children Young People	Safer and Stronger Communities	Healthier Communities and older people	Economic Development
Stay safe	Reduce crime	Improved health and reduced health inequalities	Increased employment
Be healthy	Reassure the public and reduce the fear of crime	Improved quality of life	Increasing enterprise
Enjoy and achieve	Reduce the harm caused by illegal drugs	Making a positive contribution	Increasing competition
Achieve economic Wellbeing	Build respect in communities and reduce anti-social behaviour	Choice and control	Increasing investment
Make a positive Contribution	Empower local people to have a greater choice and influence over local decision making and a greater role in public service delivery	Freedom from discrimination	Increasing skills
Narrow the gap (for areas in receipt of NRF)	Cleaner, greener and safer public spaces	Economic wellbeing	Increasing housing
	Reduce waste to landfill and increase recycling	Personal dignity	Increasing innovation
	Tackle climate change	Reduce injuries and improve health at work	Sustainable production and consumption
	Increased access to the countryside	Narrow the gap (for areas in receipt of NRF)	Narrow the gap (for areas in receipt of NRF)
	Improve quality of life in deprived areas, and liveability		
	Improve the quality of public space and the quality of the local environment		
	Narrow the gap (for areas in receipt of NRF)		

Adapted from DGLC (2006b)

Competence through civic education and experience

One additional issue continues to arise in research on local decision-making and in discussions with those involved in actual devolution processes, namely *competence*. A standard criticism of deliberative

or more direct models of democracy is that they are ineffective because of the requirement of expertise for making complicated decisions.

In general we believe the question of expertise to be overblown. What matters more is that citizens seek to learn and listen when charged with making decisions, and that they try to adopt a relatively impartial view regarding the reasons for pursuing various courses of action. Failings in local decision-making are more likely to result from an inadequately publicly-minded citizenry than from a failure of expertise. It is of course necessary that those with medical training make decisions on what forms of clinical intervention are likely to achieve good health outcomes and that those with an engineering background ensure that bridges and buildings meet basic requirements of structural safety.

But general democratic decision-making about health or transport or infrastructure doesn't always or even usually require medical or engineering expertise. Deciding whether to place a bridge in a poorer area in need of regeneration or a relatively wealthy area with fewer commuters is a political one, even if engineers will be required to build whichever bridge is decided upon. Making such decisions does require some basic problem-solving skills and the capacity to engage and communicate in an effective and fair-minded fashion, but these are life skills that everyone can and should develop and ones that can be taught in schools and in adult education.

What these examples do show is that local decision-making requires an engaged citizenry, devoted in some way to the common good and willing to evaluate the needs of all members of their polity. If this sometimes requires the input of black and minority ethnic representatives – and indeed other under-represented groups – that is because the rest of the population has not adequately demonstrated its civic-mindedness. Instead, it has pursued projects that advantage those already best mobilised at a local level and those that shout loudest.

Part of the response to this sort of difficulty is enhanced citizenship education. The government has done much to focus our attention on this requirement, for example in the Crick Report. However, we would like to see two modifications or enhancements in current policy. First, citizenship education should not be simply a separate stand-alone subject, but mainstreamed across all areas of the curriculum, particularly history but also literature and even in extra-curricular activities (for example student volunteering in care homes).¹⁸ One way to think about this is in terms of *effective citizenship*, a concept defined in recent research as

the effective, informed engagement of individuals in their communities and in broader society around issues relating to the public domain...This is a definition of Citizenship based around participation and 'process' rather than a narrower one that refers to an individual's legal status in terms of, for instance, nationality... Critically, effective, rather than merely 'active', Citizenship is both underpinned by and develops the individual's political literacy.¹⁹

Just as important, however, is the adult population, most of whom have never received any citizenship education but who are currently placed to take advantage of greater participation. Such learning and education cannot be limited to immigrant populations or those whose grasp of English is less than fluent, but needs to extend to all. If we desire the benefits of enhanced participation, it is vital that those who actually participate are publicly-minded and do not use seats of local power to pursue their own interests without heeding the concerns of those most in need of assistance.

¹⁸ For example of suggestions see Ajegbo et al (2007).

¹⁹ Breslin et al (2006).

Having set up some of the difficulties and some possible solutions to devolving decision-making at a local level, we now turn to three public service provisions in which such decisions have already been devolved. Again, the evidence is quite patchy but such research is necessary for determining whether or not local decision-making will achieve its desired aims.

Education

The justification of reform in education has focused on the ability of parents to choose the education that best fits their child. Education reform has been perhaps the most prominent public service in which the 'choice' agenda has been extended, with the assumption being that education is a service that consumers will be able to sample and choose on the basis of qualities they desire.

There are a number of difficulties with a crude extension of the choice model in delivering public services, particularly education, but we will sidestep these concerns for the moment. The question we now address in regards to participation in education is: *does it work?* Below we consider two forms of (adult) 'participation', first that of school governors and second that of parents in choosing their children's schools. Before doing so, we first flag some worrying evidence on school exclusions that raises a broader concern we address further in the conclusion.

School exclusions only came on the agenda in the late 1980s, but there is now an established body of work studying and trying to explain the disproportionate exclusion of Black Caribbean boys. While the disproportionate exclusion of boys by ethnicity is already a cause for concern, such exclusion is substantially higher in some parts of the country than others. While nationally 26 out of every 1000 Black pupils were permanently excluded in 2004/5 (compared to 13 in every 1000 White children and 6 in every thousand Asian children), the figures were substantially higher in the West Midlands at 38 in every 1000 Black children and in outer London at 35 in every 1000.²⁰ Yet Inner London had a rate of exclusion of only 18 per 1000, a surprising contrast of less than half of Outer London. These data are more surprising when we see that Inner and Outer London have similar rates of exclusion for all non-Black groups. Here the concern is that devolving local decision-making can sometimes lead to parochialism, and to outcomes that are unfair for certain groups in a locality. This may not be because the group in question 'deserves' worse outcomes, but because certain areas are less familiar with diversity and so are less capable of responding to difference in a way that still treats all pupils fairly.

Turning to the issue of participation in education, school governors provide an important way for parents and ordinary citizens to influence important decisions about the ways schools are run. Their powers and responsibilities range from strategic aims to more pastoral roles to administrative responsibilities including managing the budget and hiring headteachers. Evidence on school governors by ethnicity is very limited. A report by Nicola Rollock revealed that

data on the percentages of governors from minority ethnic backgrounds was rarely recorded by local education authorities and where it was collected, it was often done inadequately. Among those few authorities who were able to supply governor ethnicity information...there were at least twice as many pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds as there were school governors from these backgrounds in London, metropolitan and unitary authorities.²¹

In her research, Rollock explicitly underlines the importance of participation more generally, and points to school governors as one institution for achieving that end. In interviewing Black Caribbean and Black African governors, she found that most chose to become governors based on their concern for the

²⁰ DfES (2006), p. 15.

²¹ Rollock (2006), p. 8

'educational experiences and situation affecting Black pupils'.²² Here we have good evidence that the participation of BME people in important institutions can better respond to the needs of BME pupils and so improve the education provided to all children.

At the same time, however, the views of governing bodies, and in particular their insensitivity to issues of race, were perceived as challenges by a majority of the governors interviewed. This is obviously a barrier to further recruitment, and suggests that we have some way to go before participation in school governance is equitable and contributes to social cohesion. As Rollock emphasised, one way to enhance the democratic and participatory function of school governors is to make recruitment policies more inclusive, a suggestion that some schools and LEAs seem to have pursued.

A second arena of participation in education is parental choice of their children's school. Here too the evidence of what works is incomplete, with too much focus currently placed on attainment measures. For example, it has been argued that faith schools do not contravene universal citizenship ideals because some faith schools have the highest scores in the citizenship curriculum. But civic-mindedness cannot be measured only by asking factual questions about Britain's form of government, how laws are made or what active citizenship requires. Instead, civic attitudes require a more active and engaged citizen, and need to be measured by voting behaviour, participation in local debates, volunteering and other activities as well as test scores in school. This is not to say that faith schools cannot achieve those ends, but that scores on an exam are a poor substitute for real civic engagement.

More relevantly, Runnymede has recently conducted research on school choice among black and minority ethnic parents.²³ Here the evidence does not conform to the government ideal of parents choosing the best school for their child principally because it is not always easy or straightforward for BME parents to do so. Local schools are often *more* segregated than their catchment areas, with the result that BME parents are often left with the choice of sending their child to an underperforming school with large numbers of BME pupils or to a school with better attainment standards but where their child may be isolated as one of a small number of BME students.

The choice agenda is related to the idea of devolved government because both assume that local individuals and communities will be better placed to make decisions that directly affect their interests. In the final section, we will highlight a key difficulty for this sort of agenda, but conclude this sub-section on education by noting that the evidence for BME individuals is not wholly encouraging. Choices are always made in some context, and the context for many BME parents is one where white parents have greater access to resources and more capacity to choose to send their children to better schools through residential 'choices' that BME parents may be unwilling or unable to make. Furthermore, when schools are more segregated than their catchment area, this cannot only be because BME parents are 'choosing' to send their children to an 'majority minority' school, but because white parents choose to send their children to a 'majority majority' school. If school choice has at best an ambivalent role in increasing fair and meaningful participation, it is even less clear that it will create social cohesion.

Health

Next to education, government reforms in the health sector – including social care – have been among its most discussed achievements. Most of the national focus has been on the increased spending and the extent to which it has delivered better results and reduced waiting lists. But Labour health policy has not simply increased spending; the institutions that deliver health and social care in Britain have been substantially modified over the past decade. For example, Labour abolished regional health institutions, focused more energy on local primary care trusts (PCTs), and established patient forums to feedback

²² Rollock (2006), p. 12.

²³ Weekes-Barnard (2007).

into the delivery of health and social care. This latter development fits with the theme of this paper, namely the devolution of decision-making and the greater participation of citizens in the delivery of public services.

The key national body for organising patient and public forums was the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH), set up in January 2003. Over 500 separate Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) Forums were established over the next year, one for each NHS Trust in England, and 4,000 members were recruited across the country. PPIs initially had significant powers in allowing local people to have a say in health services and to improve public accountability. All members were volunteers and were assumed to have a clear interest and understanding of the delivery of health policy in the locality.

The intent of these forums was clearly to increase participation and to include citizens in the decision-making process in the delivery of health services. We have been unable to find any data on the background of various participants, but the CPPIH has an 'Equality and Diversity Strategy' available from its website to ensure that Forum members came from a broad variety of backgrounds.²⁴

The key reason we are unable to assess the composition or indeed the impact of PPIs is because the government decided to abolish the CPPIH only eighteen months after establishing it. Somewhat strangely, a Health Minister at the time stated:

I emphasise that our decision to abolish the commission was not borne out of concerns about its performance.....The commission's performance, particularly its achievement in setting up the forums and recruiting about 5,000 members within a tight time scale, is highly commendable.²⁵

This raises the question as to *why* the CPPIH was abolished. In discussions with experts in this area, it has been suggested that PPIs were targeted for abolition because they were *too* successful in scrutinising the decisions made by PCTs. This explains why government suggestions for replacing the forums placed the responsibility for appointing similar bodies squarely in the hands of the NHS Appointments Commission. Although the government has suggested that it will replace PPIs with 'Local Involvement Networks' (LINks), it is unclear how and when these bodies will take over from PPIs, and there is substantial disagreement between the stakeholders of the CPPIH and the government on how patient involvement should be structured in the future. The question is not simply what the bodies will be called, or how they will be appointed, but what powers they will have and what decisions they will be able to make.

The case of the CPPIH indicates how the relationship between central government and local decision-making is not always harmonious. If government publications and policy statements stress their commitment to greater devolved decision-making and increased citizenship participation, it is important to remember that the government has its own policy agendas that may be challenged or undermined by decisions made by local actors. Here it is worth reminding ourselves that the current government is not alone in abolishing localised decision-making institutions. Perhaps more notably, Margaret Thatcher abolished the Greater London Council and weakened many local institutions, perhaps not so much because she was a fan of central government, but rather because she objected to the decisions being made by Labour-controlled city councils, decisions that contradicted some of her own policy aims.

²⁴ Downloadable at: www.cppih.org

²⁵ *Hansard* 22nd July 2004 col 583.

Regeneration

The final public service delivery we consider is regeneration. Local regeneration strategies typically focus on urban areas where people of minority ethnic groups are disproportionately represented. Here we might expect that involving local partners would better respond to the needs of BME groups compared to a central government policy that focused on measures that failed to take local needs into account.

However, the evidence on local regeneration strategies does not bear out this optimistic hope. Summarising the findings of Brownill and Darke (1998), Burton et al suggest:

women were often excluded or unable to participate effectively because of a combination of lack of confidence, economic discrimination and domestic responsibilities, while members of minority ethnic groups were excluded by the application of stereotypes and in some instances by language and cultural differences.²⁶

So while regeneration typically occurs in areas with large numbers of BME people, they are not properly consulted or included in designing regeneration strategies. Such findings have been repeated in later research, to the extent that the CRE has now begun a formal investigation into regeneration projects. It explains this investigation as follows:

Many millions of pounds are spent on physical regeneration, and the effects of large-scale regeneration projects on an area and its people can be dramatic and lasting. The CRE is concerned that those involved in delivering physical regeneration may not be considering fully the effects that regeneration schemes may have on different racial groups.

Our decision to focus on physical regeneration was based on our experience of working on these issues over many years, and in the light of concerns brought to our attention. We felt it was time to undertake a detailed and thorough investigation to identify whether physical regeneration is in practice contributing to race equality and good race relations.²⁷

At the same time, there are some suggestions for how regeneration bodies can take on the concerns of disadvantaged groups included BME citizens. As Burton et al explain, policies can be either 'universal' in generally tackling social exclusion or 'targeted' by focusing on particular ethnic groups. However, this typology, though of some use, is not entirely helpful. Regeneration projects necessarily 'target' a community for intervention, typically one whose area suffers on a number of economic, housing, educational or even crime indicators.

Achieving social justice by removing unjust inequalities of course requires that we create a society where fairness is widely held and universal policies protect all of us, but it also obviously demands that we target those who are on the wrong end of an inequality. We build public housing in areas where need is greatest and while we should always emphasise that public housing is a 'universal' good for all citizens, we shouldn't deny that we are 'targeting' those who currently lack it. For BME groups, the universal aim is equal participation in democratic institutions, and so they may be targeted where they lack the confidence or capacity to participate. Devolving power without targeting those who are currently disadvantaged in their access to decision-making is only universal in the sense that it universally ignores the needs of the disadvantaged, whether they be women, black and minority ethnic communities or indeed the white working class.

²⁶ Burton et al (2004), p. 24.

²⁷ For updates on this project, see: <http://www.cre.gov.uk/about/regeneration.html>

Benefits of local service delivery on race equality and cohesion

If the above summary of local service provision has been somewhat negative, this is not because examples of improved participation and better outcomes are completely lacking. Indeed, in some areas local agreements have ensured the greater participation of minority ethnic groups, particularly by enhancing their access to decision-making. In cities such as Birmingham, Leicester and London boroughs including Tower Hamlets and Lambeth, minority ethnic participation has fundamentally altered the way in which public services such as housing and health are now delivered. For example, patient engagement has ensured that customs regarding the treatment of the dead are better respected, with the result that people from different backgrounds may be more likely to participate more generally in decisions affecting health services.

Indeed, our concern is not so much on the ideals and justifications typically cited for greater citizen participation – including efficiency, cohesion, and justice. Instead, there is little evidence on whether or not various institutional devices and modes of citizenship participation are in fact *achieving* those goals. Given the experience of BME populations in a variety of local decision-making processes, we know this can be a potential avenue for greater participation and experience of decision-making, but also that BME groups are not always proportionately represented or included in making important decisions. Further research on the evidence, including what actually works, is necessary to ensure that enhanced decision-making over local decisions is in fact efficient, fair and contributes to social cohesion.

5. Three Difficulties

Before concluding, we want to highlight three difficulties for the government's strategy of increasing local participation. The first is based on contemporary trends for which the government has little responsibility and over which it has little influence. This is the growth of what has been called 'Web 2.0.' While the Internet first developed as part of an 'information revolution', many early users continued to participate and get much information from standard sources such as newspapers, libraries, television and elected officials. Now, however, there are entire 'communities' who access websites with like-minded individuals, and who have little interest in accessing traditional sources of information, including political information provided by political parties and government.

This represents an enormous challenge for the government, a challenge that is not limited only to devolving decision-making. Critics of Web 2.0 note that it can be very insular, and encourages self-serving and confrontational discourse partly because of its anonymity and partly because individuals are not required to engage those with whom they disagree. It is an open question how far web-based interactions create a 'community' or at least how far networks based on Web 2.0 connections actually develop in a more public direction. While these difficulties are not the fault or responsibility of government, the impact of Web 2.0 is particularly important for thinking about how to include younger people in decision-making processes, particularly as those who are currently involved in such decisions are getting older every year.

In fact, the issue of Web 2.0 raises a broader issue, namely that communities are not always defined by locality or by ethnicity or faith. All over the world communities of interest communicate with one another, and citizens in one country may often belong to 'communities' outside the nation-state that impact their social and political life, including participation, more than the nation-state. For example, those concerned with environmental issues or global poverty may belong to global 'communities' that seek to address these issues, and they may see this activity as highly participatory and civically minded. Furthermore, some of these groups may even meet in various locations around the world, though they rarely if ever engage politically together at a local level. Networks that connect individuals beyond their

locality based on common interests predate the Internet, but Web 2.0 brings new challenges for thinking about alternative forms of community and what impact they might have on participation, cohesion and race equality. If we only focus on the local as a level of participation, we might miss important interactions that shape our fellow citizens and that can be extremely altruistic even if they aren't directed at the local community.

The meanings of community

The other two difficulties stem from the government's various specifications for why and how local power should be devolved. First, too much of the discussion on 'cohesion' focuses explicitly on communities. At least three problems arise from viewing communities as the unit of participation. The first is the common worry over who represents 'the community'. Government is aware of this difficulty, but continues to identify particular leaders even while other members of a particular 'community' object to that leader's capacity to represent them.

Second is that the common term 'community' hides some important differences in government policy in relation to that somewhat amorphous idea. In terms of local decision-making 'communities of place' are the relevant unit whereas when it comes to community cohesion it seems as if 'communities of identity' – ethnic and faith-based groups – are the communities causing particular dilemmas. Comparing the White Paper on Local Government and the IOSS report (and studying the Guidance on LAAs), this difference becomes even clearer, especially because so much of the focus on 'community' in terms of cohesion is in fact directed at one particular group or community – Muslims.

The third and final problem is that not all those who might best benefit from increased local decision-making or indeed have the greatest needs can be accurately described as a 'community'. Those who suffer poverty may not constitute a 'community' but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be targeted by policies that aim to increase participation, reduce inequalities and enhance social cohesion. Indeed, they should one of the primary targets, whether or not they are appropriately conceived as a 'community'.

In some ways, the focus on communities as the unit of participation may create even deeper problems. If we wish to increase citizenship engagement, we should all see each other as equals contributing to and sharing in the same project. To the extent that 'community' participation encourages the notion that individuals will only pursue the interests of their own community, it will undermine rather than enhance cohesion. If this sounds an odd claim from the organisation that coined the term 'community of communities', this is because policy doesn't focus enough on the second aspect of that formulation, namely the idea of a 'community of citizens'. Communities overlap, intersect and change over time, and so the importance of defending and protecting human rights becomes vital if we want to ensure that all citizens are treated equitably by the state.

Citizens, consumers, and the status of the state

We can now address our final concern, namely the somewhat crude way the choice agenda has been formulated. We are disappointed to read again that the government thinks that choice in public services can be straightforwardly analogised from choice in purchasing goods. But public services are not 'services' in the same way as retailers on the high street or car dealers are. Instead of turning citizens into consumers, the government should recognise that citizens have a unique status that the government is obligated to protect in order to retain its legitimacy and to realise a just democratic state.

Two issues are involved here. First is that the government is a unique institution both because of its legitimacy in terms of accountability but also because it is obligated to defend the rights of citizens. We cannot simply dissolve the space between the public and private, and it is disheartening to read the

future leader of the CEHR describing the government as like any other institution, only bigger.²⁸ Government is not simply the largest consumer and provider of employment, but also an institution that has a unique public role to defend the rights of citizens, to ensure fair trials, to provide security, to protect our dignity, and generally to provide public goods equitably to all of us. One of the many ideals missing from the chair of the CEHR's vision is any notion of the importance of government as the guarantor of human rights, an unfortunate gap for the person charged with protecting them in Britain.

Let us introduce one final concept to help think through the difference between publicly participating citizens and private consumers, namely public reason. Many political philosophers point to the special nature of public debate or the public sphere, where citizens interact as equals and try to take seriously each others' interests. John Rawls has explained this interaction by using the idea of 'public reason'.²⁹ When we engage with fellow citizens on political and social questions, we should try to use reasons that every citizen can appreciate. That is to say, while we may have our own private justifications for thinking in a certain way, we can't expect our own self-interest to be a good enough reason for *another* citizen to adopt a course of action we are seeking to implement. Instead, we should try to find reasons that everyone can understand, even if they come to reject them. The ideal may be what Rawls's student calls principles that 'no-one could reasonably reject',³⁰ but the basic idea is that the arguments we make in political life need to be accessible by all and not limited solely to our own concerns and interests.

Our second and final concern relates to the notion of a public good. There is an extended literature in economics, political science and philosophy on this concept, but instead of further academic discussion, let us suggest an example that hopefully indicates the relevance of the concept. In consuming private goods, individuals can choose a variety of products, and typically make different choices unrelated to the basic functionality of the product in question. For example, consumers can 'choose' to purchase a £2,000 used car or a new car ranging upwards of £100,000, but all cars provide the service of getting drivers and passengers from A to B. But whether or not we should be concerned about David Beckham driving a car (or cars) that cost large sums of money (and whether or not wealth differentials explain all of the difference in the choices consumers make), we can't be so agnostic in terms of access to public goods.

That is to say, even if it's acceptable for sport celebrities to drive expensive cars, we don't think that they should get more votes, have better access to clean water, public transport, the NHS, or the justice system. On the other side of the spectrum, we don't think it is acceptable to offer a poor person the 'choice' to have a part of their gangrenous appendix removed because they can't afford to have all of it excised. The provision of public goods follows a different logic from that of private consumerable goods, a point that needs to be at the heart of any good government. If we think of citizens as consumers, not only will the poor, BME groups and women have less access to basic rights of citizenship, but we also undermine the legitimacy of democratic government.

Two examples might help to explain why this isn't merely an academic concern. First, there is good evidence the poorer citizens access the NHS at a rate far below wealthier citizens. Those living in middle-class areas not only have better access to GPs and other health services, but they are more likely to go to a doctor when they feel sick. This is not simply a question of resources, but of confidence in and satisfaction with health care providers. Second, we know of the historic inequality of access to public services experienced by BME Britons. In the most recent Citizenship Survey, BME Britons continued to report far less faith in the fairness of public institutions.³¹ We should not therefore assume

²⁸ Phillips (2007).

²⁹ Rawls (1999).

³⁰ Scanlon (2000).

³¹ DCLG (2005).

that providing choice to everyone will deliver fairer or more efficient public services to all citizens, particularly when the context of that choice is unequal access and lower confidence in those services by the poor and BME citizens.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we first summarised how participation matters in democratic theory and practice. This was necessary to explain how and why devolved decision-making can contribute to race equality and community cohesion. Citizenship participation is indeed an important end and justification in democracies, and given our larger societies of many millions of people, local institutions and decision-making are perhaps the most pertinent arena for ensuring such participation.

The greatest obstacle for this research was the lack of good empirical evidence on the purported links between participation and the desirable outcomes, namely more efficient and fair service delivery, or enhanced community cohesion. Councillor data are perhaps the only good quantitative source for determining whether local decision-making achieves some of its stipulated aims, but it is not enough by itself. We recommend further qualitative research on BME councillor experiences, including whether they hold positions of power and their stated capacity to influence decision-making relative to other councillors. We also recommend further research on the consequences of devolved decision-making more generally, specifically including questions directed to a wide variety of stakeholders on whether or not they believe devolution has increased participation, race equality, efficiency and cohesion.

In the fourth section, we turned to the question of devolved decision-making in the public services of education, health and regeneration, but we could just as easily have considered social care, community safety and housing. There are now greater avenues for local participation in *all* of these public services. As our brief survey suggested, however, the data in all these cases are not good, and we see no reason to expect better data in social care, community safety and housing. Until such data are compiled and studied, we cannot straightforwardly endorse existing schemes of enhancing local decision-making.

We have not fully addressed the greatest worry for devolved power, namely parochialism. Because local communities can have strong traditions based on particular histories, they may be more likely to exclude those who don't perfectly fit those traditions. If the aim of service delivery is to respond to local needs, the danger is that local populations will decide they don't want 'outsiders' involved in deciding what matters to the 'community'. If those whose vision of their local community is based on their own personal experience without considering other residents – some of whom may be more recent arrival to the area – it is hard to see how participation can be effective or fair. While central government may have a heavy hand and lesser understanding of local issues, it can at least ensure that all citizens are engaged with in a universal and equal way, without privileging any particular sector. Furthermore, some issues simply *can't* be addressed by local government by itself, including national transport policy but also environmental issues where power plants and refuse disposal are often located in areas far removed from where energy is consumed and rubbish collected.

Devolving local decision-making will hardly prove valuable if the same people end up making the decisions, but only in a slightly different institutional context. Furthermore, there will probably need to be certain areas over which local communities will *not* have the authority to decide. These obviously include matters of national infrastructure, but also involve minimal standards of human rights and race equality. In the United States, the result of devolved decision-making in the content of the school curriculum has been that some districts have now banned the teaching of evolution. Such fears are probably unwarranted in Britain with its greater history of strong central government, but this is precisely

because the national government sets a curriculum standard that all local schools must follow. The examples of differential school exclusions in Inner and Outer London and the US case of parochialism in school curriculum do indicate why local decision-makers cannot always be relied upon to make fair and reasonable decisions.

Different patterns of civic participation by different ethnic and faith groups represent a challenge to civil renewal, since in order to achieve its aims it will either have to change citizens' patterns of participation or offer a range of ways of participating. The various ways of participating should all be valued but this will involve a shift in power. The views of the traditional ward councillor will have to be balanced by the views of the residents' association, the youth parliament, the local web-based forums, or citizens' juries. Increasing civic participation and the range of ways in which it is expressed will, if successful, increase the range of voices to be heard. Politicians' jobs will be made harder as a result as they will have to mediate between these voices and make decisions on priorities. Local government will have to adapt to respond to these new democratic structures and instead of being a service deliverer may have to develop as a co-ordinator of services and an information conduit. Furthermore, they will have to be creative in recruitment and in ensuring that opportunities for participation are equal, even if that participation takes less traditional forms.

This paper has reflected on the challenges involved in making local decision-making processes relevant to all citizens. While the data on whether or not local decision-making can have wide-reaching beneficial effects are poor, this paper has identified where that data might be researched and which concepts will be useful for analysing the findings. One of the many good points about focusing on local decision-making is that it refocuses our attention on the importance of citizenship participation. It therefore leads us to think about the meaning and requirements for a good democratic polity, a key element of which is the equal treatment and participation of all. By protecting the basic rights of all citizens – including the right to participation – government ensures its legitimacy. For citizens who have not been able to participate before, including BME individuals, certain targeted measures may be required so that local decision-making does not succumb to parochialism or listen only to the same old voices. The cohesion that then results is desirable because it defends important democratic institutions and guarantees their long-term existence and success.

Key Points

1. We endorse the idea of devolving decision-making and in particular the notion that it can better respond to the needs of citizens and include them in a more participatory way. It may also increase efficiency and community and social cohesion.
2. The framework for thinking about devolved decision-making should be *citizen participation*. Opportunities for participation should be equal for all.
3. Justice and human rights should be at the forefront of devolved decision-making as well as in central government. For participation to be fair and effective, and for cohesion and integration to be valuable, everyone must be treated with fairness and respect and provided with equal opportunities.
4. When decision-making is devolved locally, it should be done with reference to race equality and of course other equality goals. This may require equality strategies and monitoring, but the most crucial tool is *recruitment*. There is a body of good practice on fair employment practices, including how to attract applicants of different backgrounds, and this should be mainstreamed into the hiring practices that devolution implies.
5. Local Area Agreements need to mainstream race equality goals more centrally. This includes being proactive in recruiting new participants but also extends to monitoring and auditing. The most recent Guidance on LAAs (DCLG 2006b) is extremely detailed on most measures and outcomes, but this is not matched in terms of BME participation in public services and race equality goals more generally. Such measures should be developed and measured for compliance.
6. Further qualitative and quantitative research should be conducted on whether devolving decision-making locally actually delivers beneficial results in terms of
 - a. Efficiency and outcomes
 - b. More widespread participation
 - c. Race Equality
 - d. Social Cohesion
7. One piece of this research could interview councillors, with a focus on BME councillors, to determine their views on devolved decision-making and its contribution to the above aims.
8. Every public service should also be researched to determine what has best contributed to the above beneficial results.
9. Action on cohesion, though necessary, should not wholly take the place of combating the inequalities that some BME groups continue to experience. We have a moral duty as well as a practical need to ensure that the more settled and 'integrated' BME groups do not see their need for enhanced opportunities occluded by the understandable focus on cohesion and indeed security.
10. Citizenship education should be more holistic and extend throughout the curriculum in schools, aiming for what the Citizenship Foundation has termed 'effective citizenship'. (See also the recommendations of the Ajegbo report.) This will help ensure that citizens of the future are fully competent to make decisions regarding public services and strategic aims.
11. Citizenship education should also be interpreted more widely and applied to adults – and not only those applying for British nationality. It could focus on life skills as well as political education, and is necessary to ensure effective and fair participation. Together with point 10, this will result in citizens having the requisite competence to participate effectively in decision-making processes.
12. Communities are of course important for the well-being of individuals and for a prosperous society. However, the term sometimes tries to capture very different types of social groupings, and can be used somewhat imprecisely and inconsistently. For example, discussions of 'cohesion' usually assume that communities are ethnic or faith-based, whereas research on

local government focuses more on 'local communities'. But both sorts of communities impact both areas of research, and are in fact more cross-cutting and differentiated. Furthermore, there are communities of interest that extend internationally and that can be based on interests ranging from political ideologies to specific hobbies to sexual preferences, and these may not all have the same impact on participation or indeed cohesion.

13. Central and local government needs to be creative in involving the 'Web 2.0' users in decision-making processes. This cannot be met simply by establishing a well-laid-out homepage, and is crucial for involving young people in democratic participation.
14. Local funding should be considered as a way of realising the goals of efficiency, race equality and community cohesion. For local decision-making to be independent, it requires an independent source of funding. Furthermore, paying local participants for their contribution, even relatively nominal sums, may realise greater contribution from different stakeholders, including those who have not participated in the past. This may reduce the reliance on retired and wealthy members of the community who currently have more time to engage in governance structures for which they are not paid. Recent reviews and indeed the Strasbourg Charter of 1985 have suggested that democratic participation at a local level should be funded through local taxes.
15. It is important to recognise that local authorities vary widely, and we do not assume that the same strategies will be implemented everywhere. However, even councils with small numbers of BME citizens should consider their needs in designing policy and should aim to try to include them – and not just in areas of policy regarding race or culture.

Bibliography

Advisory Group on Citizenship (1998) *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools*. [The Crick Report]. London: Department for Education and Employment. Available online at www.qca.org.uk

Ajegbo, K., Kiwan, D., and Sharma, S. (2007) *Diversity and Citizenship: Curriculum Review*. London: Department for Education and Skills. Available online at www.dfes.gov.uk

Big Issue (2007). Free insert on the Wedge Campaign in support of local shops. No. 741, April 23-29.

Breslin, T., Rowe, D. and Thornton, A. (2006) *Citizenship Education: current state of play and recommendations*. The Citizenship Foundation's written submission to the Education Select Committee, March 2006.

Burton, P., Goodlad, R., Croft, J., Abbot, J., Hastings, A., Macdonald, G. and Slater, T. (2004) *What works in community involvement in area-based initiatives? A systematic review of the literature*. London: Home Office. Online Report 53/04: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/rdsolr5304.pdf

Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG] (2006a) *Strong and Prosperous Communities: The Local Government White Paper*. London: TSO.

DGLG (2006b) *Local Area Agreements: Guidance for Round 3 and Refresh for Rounds 1 and 2*. London: TSO.

DCLG (2005) *Citizenship Survey: Active communities topic report*. London: TSO.

Department for Education and Skills (2006) *Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions and Exclusion Appeals in England 2004/05*. London: DfES.

Early Day Motion 468 on Sustainable Communities.

European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985). Signed in Strasbourg and published by the Council of Europe.

Goodlad, R. (2002) 'Neighbourhood regeneration policy: rebuilding community?' in V. Nash (ed.), *Reclaiming Community*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

Garbaye, R. (2005) *Getting Into Local Power: The politics of ethnic minorities in British and French cities*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gutman, A. and Thomson, D. (1996) *Democracy and Disagreement*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press.

Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hansard 22nd July 2004, col 583.

Home Office (2005) *Improving Opportunities, Strengthening Society*. London: Home Office.

Khan, O. (2005) 'Labour's third win leaves Commons' ethnic mix unchanged' *Runnymede Bulletin* 342 (June): 1-4.

Le Lohé, M. J. 'Ethnic minority participation and representation in the British electoral system', in S. Sagar (ed.) *Race and British Electoral Politics*. London: UCL Press.

Local Government Association and I&DeA (2007) *National Census of Local Authority Councillors in England 2006*. Slough, Berkshire: National Foundation for Educational Research.

Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life (1999) Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations (OCSE-sponsored).

Phillips, T (2007). Unpublished speech given at the conference 'Poverty: Does Ethnicity Matter?'. Conference organised by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Runnymede Trust, London, April 30th.

Rawls, J. (1999) 'The Idea of Public Reason Revisited' in idem., *The Law of Peoples*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Rollock, N. (2006) *The Experiences of Black School Governors in London*. London: Institute for Policy Studies in Education.

Scanlon, T. (2000) *What we Owe to Each Other*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press.

Weekes-Barnard, D. (2007). *School Choice and Ethnic Segregation: Educational decision-making among black and minority ethnic parents*. London: The Runnymede Trust

Websites Accessed

www.birmingham.gov.uk

www.cppih.org

<http://www.cre.gov.uk/about/regeneration.html>

www.localworks.org