



Strengthening the role of rural councillors

Best Practice - The identification, collection and dissemination of best practice is a commonly used approach to improving practice. This includes benchmarking, evaluating and monitoring good practice and innovation, sharing lessons and disseminating information from across England and beyond.

City Region - England's largest cities draw upon and affect communities situated beyond city boundaries. Increasingly, government expects these cities to work together with surrounding authorities to drive forward England's economy. In addition, areas with several large cities are making linkages with each other. Both of these types are broadly referred to as city regions

Clustering - This usually refers to a grouping of parishes that come together to, for example, liaise with a local authority. This model is common in France where groups of very local councils get together to purchase services.

Co-governance - involves inviting social actors to participate in the core activities and delivering the operations of governments.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment /Comprehensive Area Assessment- The Audit Commission assesses the performance of councils and the services that they provide for local people. Comprehensive Performance Assessment is part of the improvement agenda and aims to bring together evidence from a range of sources to assess the quality of councils' performance. These assessments are designed to help councils to focus on improvement. The assessment is followed by a Commission judgement.

Community Call for Action - The community call for action is a mechanism originally proposed in the Police and Justice Bill, allowing members of the public who are dissatisfied with service provision to ask their local councillor to call for action from the local authority and its partners. Issues that cannot be resolved through normal mechanisms can be referred to Overview and Scrutiny committees for consideration. The Local Government White paper "*seeks to provide a similar remedy to cover local government matters more generally, in other words those issues that local authorities are responsible for either alone or in partnership with others. The exceptions will be those services that are already subject to statutory appeal processes, for example, planning, licensing, council tax and non-domestic rates*".

Commune System - in France, there are thousands of independent communes. These act as the building blocks for local government structures. Communes are grouped together in 96 departments that have populations of between 250,000 and 1 million (broadly equivalent to English counties). These are then grouped into regions.

County Council - The upper tier of two-tier authorities, counties are generally responsible for core services. The lower tier district councils are usually responsible for more local services.

Decision Making - The cognitive process leading to the selection of a course of action based on a set or sets of evidence or indicators. In local government terms the course of action taken relates to policy and delivery functions and how local budgets, services and governance are administered.

Deliberative democracy - is a democracy based on decision making arising from the public deliberation . It is also sometimes called discursive democracy, which refers to any system of political decisions based on an amicable trade-off between consensus decision-making and representative democracy.

Devolution/Double Devolution - This refers to more powers being devolved (handed over) from central to local government. The 'double' element of devolution refers to the devolved powers being devolved one step further to neighbourhood, town and parish council level.

Disadvantaged groups - The definition is complex but we have defined Disadvantage as " a wide set of difficulties preventing people from participating fully in society, including poverty, but also for example, limiting factors in one's life situation, such as a lack of skills, unequal levels of health and well-being associated with economic disadvantage, and discrimination."

District - Districts are local administrative units and have at various times been used in all four countries of the UK. The only current references to districts however are found in metropolitan and non-metropolitan districts in England, and district council areas in Northern Ireland

District Council - Also known as borough or city councils. The lower tier in a two-tier system, districts are responsible for delivery of local services, while counties take on core services.

Dual Mandate/Dual Hattedness – This refers to a councillor who represents more than one tier of government. E.g. a Parish town councillor can also be a ward and/or district councillor.

Governance - Refers to the rules, manner and function of government, but it is broader than 'government'. In the past decade or more, politicians have been searching for ways to involve people in the business of governing, partly because of the decline in voting turnout in local elections, and partly because of a recognition that there are many other players involved in the delivery of local services than just a local authority – the police, health services and voluntary sector for example. Governance refers to methods of involving all these 'stakeholders' and the general public through involvement in partnerships, consultation activities etc.

Local Area Agreements - Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are made between central and local government in a local area, usually between the regional government office and the Local Strategic Partnership. Their aim is to achieve local solutions that meet local needs, while also contributing to national priorities and the achievement of standards set by central government. By 2007 all authorities will be expected to have an LAA.

Local Charters – Charters are used to set out the service standards and priorities for action, which local people expect from their local authority, and sometimes a wider group of partners, as well as any obligations the community has taken on itself. The charter is an outcome of dialogue between the community, the local authority and its service providers, which is greatly enhanced where there is a process of neighbourhood or parish planning in operation.

Local Democracy - Refers to the election of representatives, who operate at local level i.e. councillors, rather than at a national level i.e., Members of Parliament (MPs).

Local Government White Paper - The stated aim of this White Paper, published in October 2006, to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives. It is about creating strong, prosperous communities and delivering better public services through a rebalancing of the relationship between central government, local government and local people.

Local Public Service Agreements - Local Public Service Agreement (LSPA) predate Local Area Agreements. They provide a framework through which local authorities and other local organisations agree challenging targets with central government. These include twelve targets for specific improvements in performance, and these can run across the full range of local services. Financial rewards, paid directly by the government, are associated with the achievement of these targets. LPSAs now form part of Local Area Agreements

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) - LSPs are intended to be cross-agency, umbrella partnerships that include all sectors of society, including: public; private; community and voluntary bodies. The LSP remit is aimed at working together to improve the quality of life in a particular locality. The Government sees LSPs as the main mechanism for the coordination of delivery of better local services, and as the key partnership in a local area, responsible for the Local Area Agreement.

Lyons Review – In 2004 Sir Michael Lyons was asked by Chancellor Gordon Brown, and the then Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, to look at the way local councils are funded could be changed. This included reforming the council tax. The inquiry's remit was extended last year to look at the role of local councils. It is expected to report in December 2006.

Market Town Partnerships - consist of local authorities and town groups who form partnerships that seek to provide quality information and advice, promote opportunities to share solutions, and are aware of best practice from around the country. For more information please see: <http://www.towns.org.uk/index.php>

Market Town Plans – are a way of setting out proposals to revitalise a town. It is derived from a community consultation process of determining locally important issues. Market town plans are also encouraged to draw upon other sources of information, such as local parish plans, to strengthen knowledge of the local area. A plan will put forward a programme of actions to be taken forward by a Market Town Partnership and/or local authority.

Minority Groups - A minority group is a sociological group that does not constitute a politically dominant group of the total population of a given society. A sociological minority is not necessarily a numerical minority — it may include any group that is disadvantaged with respect to a dominant group in terms of social status, education, employment, wealth and political power.

Multi-Area Agreements – This is a new initiative referred to in the recent Local Government White Paper. It refers to agreements between groups of local authorities, linked to each strategy expressed in Local Area Agreements.

Neighbourhood Level Partnerships - Neighbourhood level partnerships are made up of local residents working together with key agencies and service providers. These partners work with a neighbourhood manager, or a small neighbourhood management team. They are responsible on the ground for helping to improve and join up services, address service gaps and focus action on local priority areas and problems. There is no one model of neighbourhood management.

Partnership - Partnership is a key term that is used in current political debate to describe cooperation or collaboration on a formal or informal level between any number of individuals or organisations. Local strategic partnerships (LSPs), in particular, are increasingly regarded as the key vehicle for local level strategic decision-making.

Parish - English parishes are a very old form of spatial unit that originally represented areas of both civil and ecclesiastical administration. Modern parish councils (which may choose to call themselves a town council) can provide facilities such as village halls, war memorials, cemeteries, leisure facilities and playgrounds. They have duties concerning maintenance of public footpaths and may also spend money on cultural projects, community transport initiatives and crime prevention equipment. In addition they must be notified of all planning applications and consulted on the making of certain byelaws.

Parish/Town Charter - A charter sets out what town and parish council (Local Councils) can expect from the local authority and what the local authority can expect in return. It is a working document, which is reviewed regularly and adapted to meet changing requirements. Central to a town/parish charter is the recognition and need to define the town/parish area information. This is done through participation and clear delegation of responsibilities.

Parish/Town Councils - Parish and Town councils are the most local elected body within the English system of local government. Unlike district, borough, county and unitary authorities, a parish council represents the concerns and aspirations of a genuine community or geography. There are around 10,000 community, parish and town councils in England and Wales; they are corporate bodies and local authorities.

Parish/Town Councillor - Parish and town councillors represent the people living in their local area at the closest level to the community. When decisions are being made locally they are there to listen to your views and to take those views into account.

Parish Plans - A Parish Plan brings together the views, needs and opinions of the whole community. It should be a holistic document, covering the social, economic and environmental issues of relevance to you and your neighbours. This sets out what is important locally, and by including local views and knowledge gives everyone a chance to guide future development of the parish. A parish plan will set out a concise action plan of priorities to address the issues raised, and sets out how they might be tackled.

Parish Precept - Local taxpayers in parished areas can be subject to 'double taxation' – known as a parish precept. This happens where the parish rather than the principal authority provides services, but the principal authority still charges taxpayers in the parish for the equivalent services it provides elsewhere. Another way of describing this situation is that parishes are expected to pay the costs of a particular service in their locality while the district council bears the cost of the same services in the un-parished areas.

Participation – where local communities are involved in informing, deliberating or influencing decision making

Participatory democracy - traditional democracies tend to limit citizen participation to voting e.g. during elections/referenda, leaving the main work of governance to professional political elected representatives. Participatory democracy seeks to create opportunities for all members of a political group to make meaningful contributions to decisionmaking, and seeks to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities.

Principal Local Authorities – are local authorities above parish and town council level. In England, these include, district councils, county councils and unitary councils.

Quality Parish Scheme - The Quality Parish and Town Council scheme was launched in June 2003, following the publication of the governments [Rural White Paper, 2000](#). The scheme was designed to provide a benchmark of minimum standards for parish and town councils and enable them to better represent the communities they serve. The scheme also aims to give enhance relationships between local councils, principal authorities and community and voluntary sector organisations

Rural Proofing – Rural Proofing is a commitment by Government that aims to ensure that all its domestic policies take account of rural circumstances and needs. It is a mandatory part of the policy process, which means that as policies are developed, policy makers should systematically consider whether their policy is likely to have a different impact in rural areas, because of particular rural circumstances or needs. Rural proofing applies to all policies, programmes and initiatives and it applies to both design and delivery stages. Policies that are rurally proofed will have made:

- make proper assessment of those impacts, and if these are likely to be significant
- adjust the policy, where appropriate, with solutions to meet rural needs and circumstances.

Scrutiny Committee - Scrutiny Committees administer scrutiny inquiries and panels. They have the power to invite any witness to appear before them. Witnesses sit in front of committee and provide evidence – factual and anecdotal – but always relevant to the issue at hand.

Scrutiny Inquiry - A scrutiny inquiry is an in depth investigation of important and topical issues. They are often triggered by events locally and are set up to react to those events. Scrutiny inquiries are mechanisms for changing local policy or delivery functions. Local councillors can bring a major concern or issue forward to their local authority, often to a dedicated scrutiny team. The issues that are progressed through to an inquiry stage are those that:

- have an existing or growing body of interest/support at community level, and/or
- have become more prominent by new or amended strategic policies and/or new government targets.

Scrutiny panel - Scrutiny panels have responsibility to examine specific issues of public concern or poor performance through in depth studies and gathering of evidence. They deal with less immediate issues than a scrutiny inquiry and look more broadly at the 'nuts and bolts' of policy and service delivery concerns. Scrutiny panels consider and, where necessary question, decision making; they monitor the way policies and services are delivered and make recommendations as to whether new policies or delivery solutions are required.

Service Level Agreements - A 'service level agreement' (SLA) is made between two parties or organisations that sets out how services will be provided and to what standard and how those services will be monitored. They are usually between a local authority and its contractors, which could include voluntary sector organisations (for example, care services).

Shire local government – represents all of the principal local authorities in England that fall outside of London and other metropolitan areas.

Social Capital - Social capital describes the pattern and intensity of networks among people and the shared values arising from those networks. While definitions of social capital vary, the main aspects are citizenship, neighbourliness, trust and shared values, community involvement, volunteering, social networks and civic participation.

Third Sector - The Third Sector sits alongside the private and public sectors. It has long performed a valuable role in delivering services for rural communities and providing them with a strong voice. The Third Sector plays a critical role in advocacy, campaigning, advice and information as well as direct delivery, in some cases. In this way the sector can, and does, contribute to the planning and development of particular services as well as offering increased choice and a voice to rural communities. This is particularly important in some rural areas, where public and private services can sometimes be patchy or non-existent.

Two-tier Government – describes the inter-relationship between county and district councils working together to deliver services. County councils tend to deliver all-encompassing services, such as highways, while districts tend to deliver the smaller more localised services, e.g. local (non contentious) planning.

Unitary Authorities - A unitary is a single tier authority, which means it has responsibility for delivering all services in its area. English unitary authorities can be called council, district, city or borough. For example, Rutland and Hereford are unitary authorities, but both are called county authorities.

Wards- Wards are key divisions and building blocks of UK administrative geography. Wards are found in Scotland, Northern Ireland and most of England. In Wales and the Isle of Wight the equivalent areas are legally termed 'electoral divisions', although they are frequently also referred to as wards.

Ward Councillor –A ward councillor is directly elected to represent and serve the people in a specific ward. The ward councillor should make sure that the interests of the people in the ward are represented. Your ward councillor should play a key role in making sure people are consulted and kept informed about local council decisions. People can also bring their local issues/concerns to the ward councillor with the view that he or she will be able to represent their views with local council officials.

Well Being Power - The Local Government Act 2000 gives councils the power to do anything which they consider is likely to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas, in order to respond to the needs of their local communities. The power is wide-ranging, and enables local authorities to improve the quality of life, opportunity, and health of their local communities, so linking directly to innovation and delivery of community strategies.

White Paper - Statement of central government policy. The Government may publish a white paper indicating policy on a matter, before presenting it to Parliament as a bill. A white paper is not a requirement of any bill. For example, the Government published a local government white paper: 'Strong local leadership: quality public services', in December 2001. It introduced several new mechanisms, such as comprehensive performance assessment (CPA), and indicated the way central government thinking on local government is heading.