



Putting the customer first

Modernising Policy Making
in Local Government

Barry Maginn

With foreword by Simon Baddeley

About Localis

Who we are

Who we are Localis is an independent think-tank dedicated to issues related to local government and localism. We carry out innovative research, hold a calendar of events and facilitate an ever growing network of members to stimulate and challenge the current orthodoxy of the governance of the UK.

Our philosophy

We believe in a greater devolution of power to the local level. Decisions should be made by those most closely affected, and they should be accountable to the people which they serve. Services should be delivered effectively. People should be given a greater choice of services and the means to influence the ways in which these are delivered.

What we do

Localis aims to provide a link between local government and the key figures in business, academia, the third sector, parliament and the media. We aim to influence the debate on localism, providing innovative and fresh thinking on all areas which local government is concerned with. We have a broad events programme, including roundtable discussions, publication launches and an extensive party conference programme.

Find out more

Please either email info@localis.org.uk or call 0207 340 2660 and we will be pleased to tell you more about the range of services which we offer. You can also sign up for updates or register your interest on our website.

Contents

About the Author	2
Forward by Simon Baddeley	4
Executive Summary	5
1 Introduction	11
2 The elements of successful policy making	16
2.1 'Customer focus'	17
2.2 Extended leadership and officer-member relationships	29
2.3 Communication and evidence flows	34
2.4 Member expertise and capacity	39
2.5 Engrained council scrutiny, transparency and accountability	43
3 Conclusions	48
3.1 Strengthen consultation, customer-focus and public engagement	48
3.2 Improve internal relationships and gain officer buy-in	49
3.3 Strengthen internal and external communications	49
3.4 Support members and officers in strategic thinking	50
3.5 Strengthen accountability	51
Appendix 1	52
Appendix 2	53

About the Author

Barry Maginn

Barry Maginn is a researcher at Localis. He holds a BA(Hons) in History and Social Sciences from The University of Manchester, and an MSc in Social Science Research Methods (Merit) from The University of Bristol. His Masters dissertation sought to understand the causal factors that influence MPs to act to varying degrees as representatives of their constituents. He has previously worked for the think-tank Policy Exchange, and also with the accountancy firm Grant Thornton.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Hamish Dibley (Kent County Council), Ed Hammond (Centre for Public Scrutiny), Gareth Wall (London Borough of Hackney), James O’Leary (the Co-Operative) and Jeremy Cox (Vanguard Consulting), for their comments and expert advice on a range of issues relating to policy-making in the local government environment.

Laurence Ainsworth and Jonathon Amos from Cheshire West and Chester Council (CW&C) have also been particularly helpful in shaping the research and providing in-depth details regarding the CW&C systems of policy-making.

Also deserving of thanks are the many councillors and officers from CW&C who took the time out to complete our surveys and who shared their experiences and issues with Localis in various meetings. Without their input this research would not have been possible.

Foreword by Simon Baddeley

Barry Maginn's language may sound managerial, but his report is very much about the machinery of political-management, emphasising the key conclusion of the 2005 SOLACE Commission on which I sat and which heard, over and over, the point made by the politicians and managers who spoke to us, that "good government is where the best of politics and management combine to be greater than the sum of the parts."

Newly elected members, and even more experienced councillors faced for the first time with the 'instruments' of policy-making, as described here, can feel like passengers who, in safer times, could request a visit to the cockpit of the airplane in which they were flying. A complex array of dials, switches, levers, flashing lights impressed the visitors, who remained undaunted for knowing there wasn't the slightest chance that they would ever - except in a movie thriller have to take over the mystifying responsibilities of their genial pilots. But when it comes to understanding and steering the policy-making process they really will, and in many cases already have. This is no fantasy, though it may feel as exciting, daunting and even frightening.

The idea that members are mere customers who make policy by passing on their wishes to skilled but deferential officers has long been discredited in excellent councils. Equally discredited by these authorities is the idea that officers run the council. Both officers and members know this can never be as satisfactory as forging policy together, while at the same time knowing that members must stand back from the operational work of managers, and officers must resist being drawn into politics. Both know they must negotiate and sustain an intimate overlapping of responsibility for their local populations - who rather than customers are citizens to be drawn into that shared activity we have come to call 'governance'.

A chief executive suggested the relationship between politicians and officers in government is like a tango: "Who's leading and who's led is only clear in the most formal sense; to get it right you have first of all to learn the dance". More and more members and officers, with the help of people like Barry Maginn, are learning to do just that.

More and more elected members are learning the value - indeed the necessity in these difficult times - of policy-making skills, of drilling deep into the intricacies of finance to learn how money works to serve their policies, and more and more officers are matching the increasing skills of members with a keen understanding, appreciation of and sensitivity to the world of elected members, how it feels for them in their wards, on the street and at the ballot box.

Local democracy doesn't just happen because there's a locally elected authority. It has a chance of happening despite the constraints placed on UK local government by the most centralising system of government in Europe if a local council contains men and women, members and officers, deeply committed to inventing and reinventing, honing and re-honing, the machinery of government machinery so ably and usefully described in this report.

Simon Baddeley

Institute of Local Government, University of Birmingham

Executive Summary

Better policy-making processes create better policy, and good policy is fundamental to effective governance.

Since the 2000 'Modernising Government' white paper, which set out a commitment to, and framework for, modern, 'customer-focused' policy-making, demands have been placed on central government policy-makers to create policy that matches the expectations of a public who are increasingly demanding in terms of lifestyle choices and options.

Yet, as central government set about the task of ensuring policy was more demand-led and public facing, local government was simultaneously adjusting to the structural changes brought about by the Local Government Act 2000 (LGA 2000). This Act ended the committee system of decision-making for councils and instead mandated them to choose from a range of executive-led structures. From the available options, the overwhelming majority of councils chose the 'leader cabinet system'.

While this Act empowered leadership in councils and aimed to cut the bureaucracy that some political figures believed the committee system created, it also internalised and concentrated policy-making processes, disincentivising the outward looking aspects of policy-making demanded by the modernisation agenda, through a greater concentration of executive power.

This report sets out how councils can modernise policy-making in a manner that complements the positive aspects of the LGA 2000. It uses the experience of one innovative council, Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) to develop a range of transferable lessons applicable across the local government sector. CW&C is a new unitary which has developed a new approach to council decision-making through the creation of policy development boards (PDBs).

Cheshire West and Chester

CW&C was established in April 2009. From the outset the council was committed to involving the majority of councillors in day-to-day roles in running the authority. To achieve this goal the council has developed a new structure to policy development, introducing PDBs, aligned to the council's cabinet portfolio areas, which discuss and develop policy ideas and who advise portfolio holders on policy implementation.

The PDBs were created not only to provide the broadest possible democratic accountability by giving the majority of the 72 councillors a role running the council, but also to help policy become more cross-cutting and ensure that policy development was based on consensual discussion. These PDBs proved

especially important during the mass upheaval brought about by the creation of a completely new unitary, and they helped to focus CW&C's policy following that major reorganisation.

While these boards are an innovative new direction for policy-development in local government and appear to have a range of advantages over the usual council structure, they still raise a range of issues, and they must still be implemented alongside the outward facing aspects of customer-focused policy to truly modernise local government policy-making processes.

Lessons from CW&C

The five key lessons from our study of policy-making in CW&C which we present in this report provide examples for other councils, whether they are interested in developing a similar system of expanded decision-making, or simply want to make their current system of policy making more efficient, effective, and successful. Not all of the recommendations necessarily need to be implemented together to effect improvement, recommendations can be acted upon individually or collectively depending on specific circumstances. The key lessons are:

1. Better policy develops through a 'customer focus'

Engagement with citizens in the policy-making process is good for increasing the council/resident relationship. Demands from the public do not fit neatly into departmental lines, and therefore it is more important to focus on what residents actually want than to follow strict departmental remits.

The structural institutions within a council should reflect local priorities and the needs of local residents. With greater consultation to understand local priorities, councils can restructure the bodies involved in decision-making to reflect these key local priorities.

Councils also need to align their key external partnerships to ensure that all relevant parties can work together to develop policy – this includes both subject matter experts from other parts of the public and private sector, and the general public that policy is being created for. Community engagement must be given a central position in the policy-making process to ensure citizens are consulted in policy-making in an on-going manner.

Recommendations for local government

- Councils should use consultations with residents to identify what 'theme' based concerns are prioritised locally, and create Policy Development Boards to focus on creating policy to address these themes
- Create or use existing internal measures which reflect the key outcomes for each of these 'themed' policy areas
- Re-think the existing roles of cabinet members, executive officers and PDBs to align directly with key desired outcomes
- Consider creating 'portfolio holders *sans frontieres*', with discretionary budgets, to sit across boards and represent specific citizen groups
- Councillors on community boards should act as formal representatives for their wards/local districts

2. Building the relationships between officers and members is crucial to improving policy

Policy creation is most effective when the ‘key players’, the political and professional personnel in a council, work well together. However, with different forms of accountability and the potential for conflicting aims, tension can be a feature of the relationship between the political leaders and senior managers in councils.

Yet, evidence shows that when staff are engaged and involved in decision-making, there is a greater likelihood of resident satisfaction. To maximise policy-making capacity, therefore, the officers and members within a council must work together to create a shared vision of council strategy, as the foundations of a productive and effective working relationship.

Recommendations for local government

- Councillors must lead the way while communicating reforms with officers
- Councils should initiate workshops to allow officers and members to discuss their respective roles and negotiate where there should be cross-over
- Formalise meetings between policy area portfolio holders, PDB Chairs and senior officers
- Give PDB members space to discuss policy independently from executive members
- Clarify the role of PDBs with senior officers – this will feed down

3. Improved communication and evidence flows creates better policy

Good communication, both internally and with external partners, is an important aspect of effective policy-making. When communication and evidence sharing is not prioritised within a council’s policy-making process, it becomes difficult to understand what demand exists locally. And as policy becomes more complex, shared communication lines grow in importance. Policy-making units that are cross-cutting need to build comprehensive shared evidence bases, through clear communication and data-gathering channels, from which to discuss holistic approaches to prioritised problems.

Recommendations for local government

- Refocus measures of success on understanding customers perceptions of services
- Ensure all lines of communication link clearly to senior level decision-making
- Use available communication and feedback tools available to move citizen engagement from consultation to active participation

4. Building the expertise of decision-makers can improve policy processes

With the ultimate aim of creating cross-cutting policies to tackle multi-causal issues, PDB led policy-making is likely to become more complex. Therefore, under such a system, ensuring sufficient knowledge and strategic expertise in

policy-makers becomes more important. However, under a system of PDBs, those directly involved in analysing complex policy issues and choices grows considerably, and councillors more used to community engagement roles are thrust into the complex world of making critical choices on serious issues.

With role specific training, on-the-job experience building, and a role for external experts on PDBs, members can build the necessary expertise.

However, while it is important that councillors broaden their skill-sets to match the expectations modern policy-making places on them, it is also important that they do not lose the generalist approach and 'soft' skills that allow them to understand choices from the users point-of-view, and to be able to engage citizens.

Recommendations for local government

- Select PDB Chairs based on merit and previous experience and fix their terms of office
- Emphasis the 'broker' role of officers in 'training' PDB members in specialised areas of policy
- When selecting external board members for PDBs, consider what external expertise would improve the knowledge of the decision making teams

5. Scrutiny boards can act as an on-going consultation device for PDBs and the executive, and can increase council accountability

Local decision-making should be open and accountable to the public. Arguably, the LGA 2000 reduced the focus on public accountability in decision-making by the powers it vested in the cabinet. Because of this, scrutiny boards, as the bodies that have been widely developed to act as a check on executive decision-making, must be central to a policy-making process.

In practice, scrutiny boards have also proven invaluable at producing evidence based reports, and creating innovative avenues to engage local residents and stakeholders. However, under a system of more inclusive policy-development through PDBs, there is a need to consider whether scrutiny boards need to be proactive in how they hold the executive to account. It may be unnecessary for scrutiny boards to engage with the public in policy development if a council has PDBs performing many of the proactive policy duties.

Regardless of what position and roles a council ultimately decides on for scrutiny boards, it is crucial that scrutiny boards work collaboratively with PDBs in the policy development stage, helping policy-makers refine policy.

Recommendations for local government

- PDBS can learn from best practice developed by scrutiny boards on how to engage with and reflect the views of citizens
- Scrutiny boards should be given a proactive role in shaping and checking policy development
- Remuneration should be considered for the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to incentivise the role of internal council scrutiny to members

The following diagram shows how CW&C is currently internally structured (figure 1), it is similar to the majority of councils with the exception of the advisory PDB boards. This is followed by how a policy-making system could work under the proposals set-out in this report (figure 2).

Figure 1: Cheshire West and Chester Council's Current Policy-Making Systems and Functions

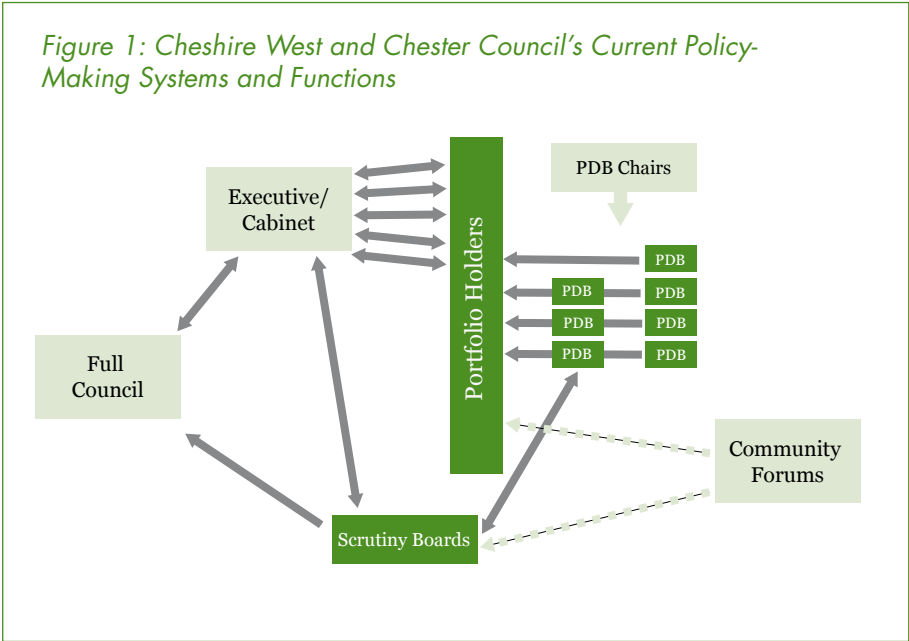
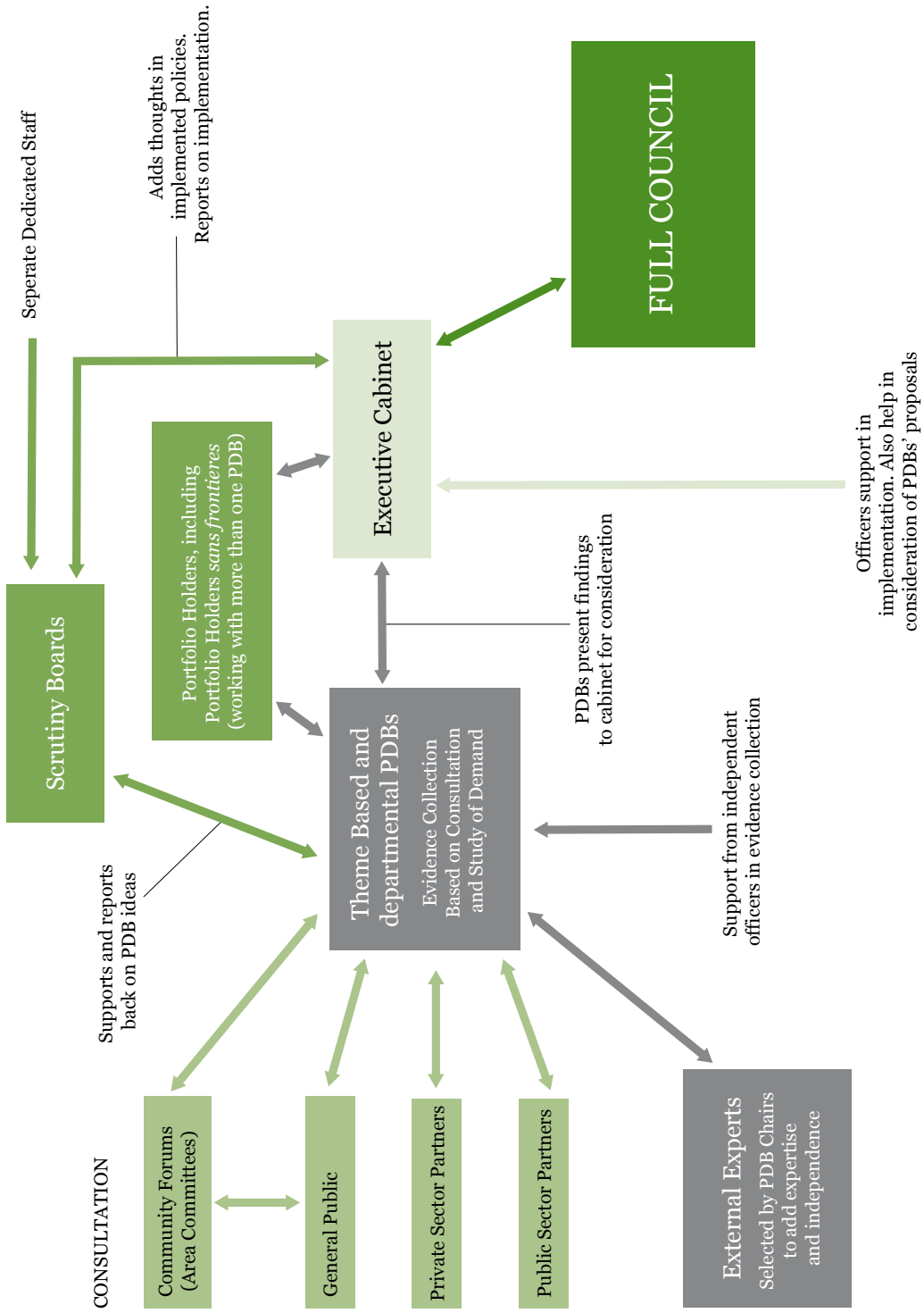


Figure 2: Ideal Council Policy Making Structure



1. Introduction

1.1 What is the purpose of this project?

The fundamental importance of policy-making processes are an underestimated aspect of good governance.¹ Without suitable processes of developing and implementing policy, it is unlikely that the services and initiatives created by government will meet the ever increasing demands of citizens.

With government at all levels experiencing rising expectations, coupled with decreasing resources to provide for increasingly complex issues, the need for more responsive and effective policy-making has never been greater.

In central government, since the 'Modernising Government' white paper of 2000, this has manifested itself in a drive towards outward-facing, citizen engaged policy-making. This policy-making attempted to make policy more effective by focusing on to a greater extent on evidence collection, on-going partnership engagement, and cross-cutting solutions to underlying social issues.

With the scale of challenge put forward by the Modernising Government agenda, it is difficult to judge the success central government has had in meeting its aims. However, in terms of modernising policy-making processes, there has been mixed success. Targets have been implemented (with limited success) to drive cross-departmental collaboration where issues crossed departmental boundaries. Cross-cutting units have been set up with dedicated staff, and pooled budgets, designed to focus on a specific agenda, whether it be the 'Social Exclusion Unit', the 'Neighbourhood Renewal Unit', or the 'Office for Climate Change'. An entire department, the Department for Children, Schools and Family (DCSF) was created to be a cross-cutting unit, yet the disbanding of the department, to be replaced by the Department of Education has amply demonstrated how difficult it is to get cross-cutting structures right.

Although the outcomes of these attempts to meet the challenges of modernising government have met mixed fortunes, the ultimate aim the agenda is a commendable one, and one which central government is still striving to address. All the initiatives were developed to create a policy-environment that tackles prioritised issues at the root cause, with input from a range of governmental and non-governmental partners.

Local government has also gone through major transition since 2000. The Local Government Act 2000 (LGA 2000) mandated entirely new council structures. The LGA 2000 aimed to split the councillors into those who make executive decisions, and those that serve as backbenchers. The Act mandated three options of executive-led councils, which councils had to choose from. These options were:

¹ Municipal Research & Service Center, 'Local Government Policy-Making Process', 1999, p.1

- A mayor elected by the electorate, with a cabinet appointed by the mayor;
- An elected leader, elected by the council, with a cabinet either selected by the leader or the full council; or
- An mayor elected by the electorate with an officer appointed by the council known as a council manager.

Given the available options, the overwhelming majority of councils choose the leader cabinet option.²

The LGA 2000 system aimed to empower the senior members within a council to allow for strong leadership and efficient decision-making. However, the resulting centralisation of power contradicts, to a certain extent, the 'Modernising Government' agenda. With less diffused power there is a potential for a decreased focus on collaborative, open policy-making.

This project aims to use evidence of best practice from central government, from international comparison and from innovative councils, to develop an open form of policy-making at the local level, which nevertheless fits in with the council structure favoured, under current restrictions initiated under the LGA 2000, the elected leader cabinet structure.

To guide the discussion we use the example of one innovative council, Cheshire West and Chester Council (CW&C), and its policy-making structure, as a guide to both learn lessons from, and from which to shape our new policy-making structures around. CW&C, a recently created council, has developed a system of policy-making that extends the policy-making function to the majority of councillors, providing an environment of considered policy-development through consensus based policy boards.

1.2 Cheshire West and Chester in context

CW&C is a unitary authority that was established in April 2009, created through the splitting of Cheshire County Council into Cheshire West and Chester Council and Cheshire East Council. It has a population of almost 330,000, and covers over 350 square miles. The council is Conservative controlled, with 53 Conservative councillors, 13 Labour, 4 Liberal Democrat councillors, and 2 independents.

In an Audit Commission inspection, the council was praised for its strong leadership and commitment to working with partners. The council has been judged effective in its services to young people and in developing safer and stronger communities. It made good progress in improving adult health care services and in tackling pre-existing environmental sustainability challenges.

Overall inspection has shown that the council is making good progress in most areas, and is clear about the weaknesses it must improve on.

CW&C's 'Making it Local' initiative has put an emphasis on partnership working to understand and deliver service priorities in conjunction with a range of major partners through a Local Area Agreement (LAA). Making it Local has provided CW&C with a clear vision and a range of themes and pledges to improve the local quality of life. Furthermore, the council has prioritised local engagement, with a range of Area Partnership Boards and Community Forums which aim to identify local needs. They have also developed a new Local Strategic Partnership to take responsibility for the Making it Local strategy.

² Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 'Implementing the 2000 Act with Respect to New Council Constitutions and the Ethical Framework: Baseline findings from a long-term evaluation', Local and Regional Government Research Programme, 2003, p.3

As part of their aim to be one of the top five unitary councils in England by 2010/11, CW&C have committed to involving all councillors in vital day-to-day roles running the authority.

Despite, or perhaps due to, CW&C being a new authority with a range of strategic issues to consider, the council has developed a new structure to policy development. This structural organisation is part of the council's commitment to ensuring all councillors have a role in the day to day running of the council. As part of the policy development process, boards, which are aligned to portfolio areas, meet quarterly to provide support to the executive member in the development of 'future strategic policy'. These boards, known as Policy Development Boards (PDBs), are not decision making bodies, but they are designed to help policy become more cross-cutting and ensure that there is policy development based on consensual discussion.

The PDBs are potentially a breakthrough device in local government policy-making. The LGA 2000 has decreased the opportunities of non-executive councillors to become involved in policy discussion. However, policy-making should aim to be inclusive and outward facing. It must be open and based on evidence collection processes. By allowing more members an opportunity to shape and discuss policy, PDBs could be a major motivator in modernising local government policy-making.

In Whitehall, public sector boards have become a central, practical innovation in British government.³ The importance of fostering successful PDBs at CW&C and similar policy boards in other councils can be recognised by the success that public sector boards in central government have achieved.

The role of the public sector boards is similar to the PDBs' role, although the PDBs are political boards, whereas the public sector Whitehall boards are comprised of, and have been set up by, civil servants. However, both are concerned with expanding those involved in decision-making and both aim to provide independent challenge.

To understand the PDBs' purpose, it is important to understand the reasons why they have been implemented in CW&C. PDBs were developed as an idea during the 'shadow year' as the old Cheshire County Council prepared structures for the new councils. The aim of introducing policy advisory boards was to:

1. Increase member knowledge and experience;
2. To rationalise policy following major reorganisation;
3. To drive innovative policy rather than political game playing;
4. To foster member/officer working relationships (as the restructuring meant new officers and members who had never worked together before)

It is important to emphasise that the role of the boards is to advise their respective executive member. PDBs formulate ideas but their ultimate role, as stands, is to advise the cabinet. In this sense, the boards share many characteristics with Cabinet Committees in central government. PDBs are an innovative branch of decision-making, they are a vital aspect of policy-making, yet must be seen in the context of a larger overall policy-making process.

The boards were designed to act as brainstorming forums, involving many councillors, with cross-party input. They were created to allow innovative and consensual policy development, with long-term planning and strategic thinking

³ Parker, S. et al, 'Shaping Up: A Whitehall for the Future', Institute for Government, 2010, p.72

facilitated through a flexible and dynamic atmosphere. For such an environment to develop, non-public debate was considered crucial, so that ideas could be discussed without leading to adversarial political debating. It was decided by the council that with opposition members present on the boards, public attendance at PDB meetings may deter the openness of the discussions. The council considered that consensus based discussion of policy must be free from the pressure to debate along party lines. Area partnerships, Community Forums, and scrutiny boards act as consultative branches of the council, from which PDBs may draw evidence of public priorities.

The boards have provided members with more time to do initial policy research and have offered the potential for officers to guide members in policy making.

However, initial Localis meetings with Chairs of PDBs and other senior council members highlighted several issues that are causing difficulties with the PDB system. The complex organisational positioning of the PDBs, which develop policy but are ultimately advisory boards, has led to tensions in the relationship between the PDB and the executive. There is also a challenge in ensuring that all members on PDBs have the necessary expertise to analyse complex policy options, with many councillors being more used to community leader roles than being strategic thinkers. Information was considered a barrier, with a weak internal communication system. There is obviously a range of improvements that could help make PDBs work more constructively in the policy-making process.

Policy boards offer huge potentials to improving council policy-making, although they also produce a range of challenges. When considering the ideal local policy-making system, the policy-making process at CW&C provides a useful system to work from. It offers the possibility to consider how a process which extends policy-making throughout the structure could function effectively, given sufficient expertise and with strong communication channels.

It must be noted, however, that CW&C is a very young council, bravely testing innovative new ways to strengthen policy-making and involve more Councillors in the decision-making process. The PDBs are still being fine tuned, and while their purpose has been effectively defined, their role is still to be fully realised. However, they continue to develop through practice; the current main concern when developing a work programme for the PDBs is in ensuring that policy-making is not done in silos. PDB Chairs have been tasked with ensuring linkages between policy areas are made over a range of identified issues. This is a promising development, moving towards the demands made of modern policy-making.

1.3 The importance of this study to local government

By studying the policy-making system in one council we can develop a range of transferable lessons. By choosing a specific council, especially an innovative one, on which to build our model of policy-making, we can learn from actual policy processes in real life circumstances, analysing how they meet, or fail to meet, the requirements of demanding citizens.

Basing our research around one large-scale case study also allows us to learn from the concerns and the achievements identified by the councillors belonging to a council with an innovative system. The issues raised by board members and other councillors can guide us in the issues that are most likely to affect other councils as they develop more inclusive, modern, policy-making processes.

We have conducted an in-depth survey, as well as group interviews, of CW&C councillors (including executive members) as well as certain senior officers, to understand policy-making from their point-of-view. The main areas of recommendation provided in this publication are based on issues raised by examination of, and consultation with, CW&C, yet are common policy-making concerns. These include concerns about knowledge and expertise, about relationships with officers, and about communications with executive members.

These are concerns that councillors in councils nationwide will understand. They are likely to become even more common and relevant issues as councils take up the challenge of developing modern policy processes, particularly in the context of a new government with an unprecedented deficit to address.

2. The elements of successful policy making

Policy-making, as defined by central government, is 'the process by which governments translate their political vision into programmes and actions to deliver 'outcomes' – desired changes in the real world.'⁴ The white paper 'Modernising Government' set out an agenda for policy-makers to re-evaluate policy-making processes to be more outward-facing, flexible and joined-up. This was seen as necessary to meet the ever more complex demands placed on government by the consumers, or customers, of government services (all citizens).⁵

The government document 'Better Policy-Making' states simply that the 'aim of better policy-making is better policy.'⁶ It is this simple truth that has led CW&C to develop an internally inclusive system of policy development.

The nine features of modern policy-making, as defined by the Modernising Government agenda, are:

1. Forward looking: Clearly defined outcomes with a long-term view
2. Outward looking: Policy takes account of influencing factors
3. Innovative, flexible and Creative: Whenever possible, the process is open to comments and suggestions of others
4. Evidence-based: All relevant evidence, including that from specialists, is available in an accessible form
5. Inclusive: Takes account of the impact on and or needs of people directly or indirectly affected
6. Joined up: Holistic view, cross cutting objectives defined from the outset and joint working arrangements with other departments clearly defined
7. Review: Policy constantly reviewed to ensure it is really dealing with problems it was designed to solve
8. Evaluation: Systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of policy is built into the policy making process
9. Learning lessons: Information on lessons learned and good practice disseminated⁷

International assessment of successful policy-making largely agrees with this list. Research produced by the OECD, and analysis of Danish, Canadian and U.S. policy-making processes, confirm that a focus on inclusiveness, on cross-cutting and evidence-based strategising, produces policy that is more likely to meet the demands set out by citizens, and succeed in the long run.⁸ The core aim of policy-making should be to take account of the impact of a particular policy on those people that are affected by it. And it is with this in mind that

4 Bullock, H. et al, 'Better Policy-Making', Centre for Management and Policy Studies, 2001

5 Cabinet Office, 'Modernising Government', The Stationery Office, 1999, p15

6 Bullock, H. Et al, 'Better Policy Making', Centre for Management and Policy Studies, 2001, p.15

7 Bullock, H. Et al, 'Better Policy Making', Centre for Management and Policy Studies, 2001, p.14

8 OECD, 'Engaging Citizens in Policy-Making: Information, Consultation and Party Participation', PUMA Policy Brief No. 10, 2001; Jorgensen, H., 'Consensus, Cooperation, and Conflict: The Policy-Making Process in Denmark, London: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2002; and, Hall, J., 'Policymaking in Local Government', Encyclopedia of Public Policy, 2nd Edition, Birmingham, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2008; Canada workshop study.

we make proposals regarding the entire structure of council decision-making processes and relationships, with the ultimate aim of developing a structure that ensures all elected officials and civil servants within a council are united around a shared strategy of developing policies that aim to meet the public need.

In this report we look at the different areas of governance that research has suggested helps create an environment conducive to modern, outward facing, policy-making processes. We base our research specifically on areas of decision-making that CW&C have had difficulty strengthening, and where more readjustment could lead to better policy-making as defined by the Modernising Government agenda. These are obviously complex areas of governance, many of which are areas of weakness for the majority of public sector bodies; they are common difficulties in implementing modern policy-making, with examples of success often far more rare than examples of failure.

This section begins by explaining the main theme of modern policy-making - customer-facing policy-making - where engaging citizens directly in policy development is a key dimension. We discuss what it is, what it involves, and set out the barriers and solutions to councils in re-organising their decision-making structures to meet the complex challenges associated with customer-facing policy processes.

We then look at some of the indirect areas that can be improved to create an environment of citizen engagement and focus throughout the council structure, as well as solutions to common problems faced internally by local policy-makers.

2.1 'Customer focus'

The value of a 'customer focus' in policy development

A customer focus in policy development is absolutely vital for a range of reasons. As this chapter will demonstrate, a customer focus can lead to the production of better policies and services as well as to more efficient government. Both of these aspects are underpinned by the relationship between citizen satisfaction and good government.

Independent research identifies that people worldwide tend to be less satisfied with local government than they are with the area they live in general.⁹ However, there is a clear correlation between the two. Respondents from countries that registered high local government approval were also much more likely to register satisfaction with their local area.

The local governance within a country affects, to some extent, the satisfaction people have with their locality. However, there is also something more important than local governance that affects satisfaction with one's area. This missing link must be presumed to be the community, and the sense of place that only other residents of an area can shape. To make people more satisfied with their local government, then, councils must link local governance more closely to the community.

Indeed, when analysing the link between local government community engagement and satisfaction in local government in comparative countries, it becomes clear that giving people a say in how they are governed locally – bringing decision-making down to the community level – is strongly related to a greater sense of contentment with local government (See figure 3).

⁹ Ipsos Mori Research Institute, 'One World, Many Place: Citizens' Views of Municipal Government and Local Areas Across the World', 2010

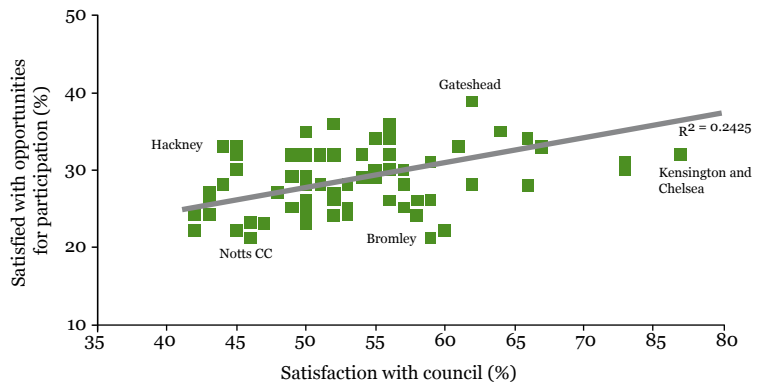
Figure 3



Base: 22,000 online citizens, Nov '09 – Jan '10
 Source: Ipsos Global @dvisor

This correlation is mirrored in comparisons of council satisfaction levels within the UK. Having greater involvement and being engaged in the decision-making process locally has a noticeable correlation to overall citizen satisfaction with their council (See Figure 4).

Figure 4



Base: BVPI 2006 (70 District, County and Unitary Authorities)
 Source: Ipsos MORI

The evidence suggests that council engagement with citizens in the policy-making process is good for improving the council/resident relationship. Local engagement also feeds into a range of efficiency and responsiveness based arguments regarding why focusing on citizen input is important to the policy-making process of a council. OECD research suggests that engaging citizens allows policy-makers

to 'tap wider sources of information' and 'respond to citizens' expectations'.¹⁰ Citizen engagement also strengthens public trust in government, which could potentially create a virtuous circle in integrated policy-making.

The CW&C approach to engagement with residents and local partners

There is a desire within CW&C to make policy-making more customer-focused, as evidenced by numerous strategy documents, which state that the council's: "key pledges" are "based on the core themes that reflect what is most important to our communities"¹¹

There is evidence that the PDBs are considering the customer and their demands when developing policies, in at least some circumstances. Almost 70% of survey respondents believe that members feedback resident's demands for **some** polices, while 38% of respondents stated that members received feedback from the frontline on resident's need for **most** policies. A potential problem, however, is that almost 90% of respondents believed that they had a good knowledge of resident's needs for at least some policies. With the complexities of modern policy, it is unlikely that decision-makers can ever totally understand ground-level demand without prior consultation.

Furthermore, survey results from CW&C members also suggest that customer focus and policy-making based on public consultation is lacking in CW&C. Only 21% of respondents thought that it was accurate or very accurate that policies originate from the public or the front-line, while 78.5% believe that policy is formed internally.

Despite its centrality to the modern government agenda, CW&C has therefore not sufficiently prioritised a 'customer-focus' in its new system of policy-making.¹² In fact, many survey respondents do not put a huge value on public input, with 40% believing that policies are better when they are made out of the public eye.

More promisingly, with regards to engagement with other bodies within the area, there is overall agreement that consultation with external partners is important to improving policy-making processes. For example, 64% of respondents stated that the private sector is an important partner in policy delivery. 80% saw other public sector bodies and 63% saw the third sector as important partners.

However, currently only 14% of respondents believe that members are more involved with external bodies, and only 21% with residents, in the current system compared to the last. It is not clear from survey analysis, whether any positive points, in terms of external engagement, can be directly attributed to the PDB system.

While there are a range of consultation devices used by CW&C (i.e surveys, forums etc.), none have formalised an upward chain of dialogue involving PDBs. CW&C currently have a range of local community forums, where councillors

10 OECD, 'Engaging Citizens in Policy-Making: Information, Consultation and Party Participation', PUMA Policy Brief No. 10, 2001, p2

11 Cheshire West and Cheshire Council, 'Making it Happen: Corporate Plan 2009-2011', 2010, p.2

12 'Customer-focus' essentially means a focus on all users of services. 'User as customer' is a growing rhetoric of government, which is fully explained in the 'Customer Focused Document'. 'Customer' in terms of policy-making and service provision, refers to the ultimate beneficiary of public service. 'Customer Focused Government' explain that 'customer' is favourable to 'citizen' when exploring service provision as 'citizen' is too closely related to political identity. 'Customer' also reflects the growing pressure on government bodies to treat service users as consumers of products, providing choice and striving to improve services. In this report the terms 'citizen', 'resident', 'user', and 'customer' are used interchangeably, depending on the context of the argument. All relate, fundamentally, to members of the public that are governed by, use the services of, councils. To learn more about Customer-focused Government', please refer to the Customer Focused Government' document: Barker, L., 'Customer-Focused Government: From Policy to Delivery', Public Services Productivity Panel, HM Treasury, 2001, specifically page 4.

meet with and talk to local community and voluntary groups, however, and while PDB members do sometimes use feedback from Community Forums in idea development these discussions are held in isolation to the policy-development process. As one survey respondent noted: 'There is no feedback mechanism for residents – the obvious links (ward members, community forums) are not consulted.' This must be addressed in order to deliver more responsive, joined-up public services – the next step is to increase the flow of information between resident inputs and PDBs.

Why a 'customer focused' approach means joined-up services

A 'customer-focus' is a major theme of governmental renewal.¹³ It is part of the more general attempt to create a more open government. It meets many of the challenges set out by the Modernising Government agenda in formulating modern policy-making processes.¹⁴ Customer-focused policy-making is outward looking, inclusive and, importantly, joined up.

To a large extent, policy-making processes in British government have evolved along departmental lines.¹⁵ Budgets tend to stay within departmental silos, and policies are formulated and enacted within strict organizational boundaries. The strict departmental outlook of central Government is mirrored at the local level, as funding streams are, to a large extent, based on single departmental initiatives. This obviously misses the fundamental aim of designing policy to meet the needs of consumers. Demands from the public do not fit neatly into departmental lines – they are often complex and multi-causal.

This is why the modernisation agenda is focused on providing support to joined-up policy making. Customer-focused policy-making turns the current provider-led model of governance on its head, beginning instead through careful identification of community demand and then facilitating the necessary collaboration between partners to ensure that the needs and wants of citizens are met.

In central Government, customer-focus has already resulted in a degree of culture change in how policy is formulated, with ministers using innovative alternative sources for policy ideas – including secondments to and from the private sector, and a range of public participation initiatives.¹⁶

The components of customer focused government can be summed up as follows:

- Understand the customer: Knowledge building and objective setting by group
- Build operations around the customer: Aligning performance measurements and strategic objectives to face outwards
- Managing customer relationships: Identify customer representatives
- Use customer understanding to deliver target outcomes: Adjust the core processes of policy and service delivery to build in customers¹⁷

Modern processes of customer-focused policy-making do not just focus on the demands of the public to a greater extent; they also improve policy options through greater ground-level understanding, as, to be successful, they rely on a broad involvement of the public in the policy-making process.

The IDeA (now Local Government Improvement and Development) have called for the leading elected officials and senior management within councils to align

13 Baker, L., 'Customer-focused Government: From Policy to Delivery', Public Sector Productivity Panel, HM Treasury, 2001, p.10

14 Cabinet Office, 'Modernising Government', London: The Cabinet Office, 1999, pp. 14-22

15 Centre for Management and Policy Studies, 'Lessons From the Development of Cross-Cutting Units', Cabinet Office, 2002

16 For a successful example of secondments to and from government departments with private partner involvement, see the Department of Trade and Industry's review and reform of company law. The project involved secondment to the Financial Service Authority as well as a range of legal and accounting firms. In return the DTI utilized a range of lawyers, accountants and business representatives to lead the review through an independent Steering Group. For further information please see page 43 of Bullock et al, 2001.

17 Barker, L., 'Customer Focused Government: From Policy to Delivery', Public Services Productivity Panel, 2000, p10

their council's partnerships to the priorities defined by their customers.¹⁸ Not only should councils involve all stakeholders, and recognise their value in the process, they should also ensure that partnership working gives them influence where the council has no direct power. Examples of this include defining the safety priorities of the community with the police, or similarly gaining a voice in local health issues through partnerships with PCTs.

This statement, by Sussex County Council's Chief Executive, Mark Hammond, provides an example of how councils can use partnerships to gain a greater influence in other social arenas can be: 'We have pooled budgets and are looking at joint appointments with the health service, close bonds with the Learning and Skills Council and a good rapport with Sussex police and our district colleagues...I couldn't do my job with all those external partners unless I knew I was on the right lines.'¹⁹

Overall, by focusing policy-making on the demands of residents, through understanding, and working with, customers directly and through other stakeholders, policy-making can become much more engaged and relevant. Drawing attention to the need for funding to be pooled and spent along prioritised themes can aid this. Initiatives such as Total Place and local area agreements (LAAs) are invaluable in illustrating the need for, and benefits of, less 'siloed' and more pooled customer-focused funding streams.

The CW&C approach to joined-up, customer focussed policy development

Constitutionally, the PDBs were designed with citizens' interests in mind. The CW&C constitution states that PDBs should 'consider stakeholder needs and external influences on council policy', and also tasked them with identifying 'flagship' issues. PDBs were also designed to work on cross-cutting issues closely with one another.²⁰ CW&C clearly have a desire to base policy on the issues that are important to their citizens, the challenge is to make this a practical reality using instruments of citizen engagement to truly understand what 'stakeholders needs' are.

Involving a range of partners is also an important aspect of understanding ground-level demand. The PDB system has had mixed success in this regard; while some members commented that PDBs had no dialogue with external bodies, others stated that the process of external involvement is still under development. To a certain extent this reflects the different stages of development PDBs may be at in terms of partnership working. The Adult Social Care and Health PDB, for example, worked with carers, staff, third sector and private sector partners to develop the policy-area's 3 year strategy, while others have yet to engage other bodies formally.

There is clearly a mixed focus on external consultation and user priorities in the policy-making process in CW&C. While several PDBs have utilised and commissioned outward consultations, others have not. They have also been reactive rather than proactive in understanding priorities, although this is perhaps largely due to the relative youth of the boards.

18 IDeA, 'Inside Top Teams – A Practical Guide', 2006, p.47

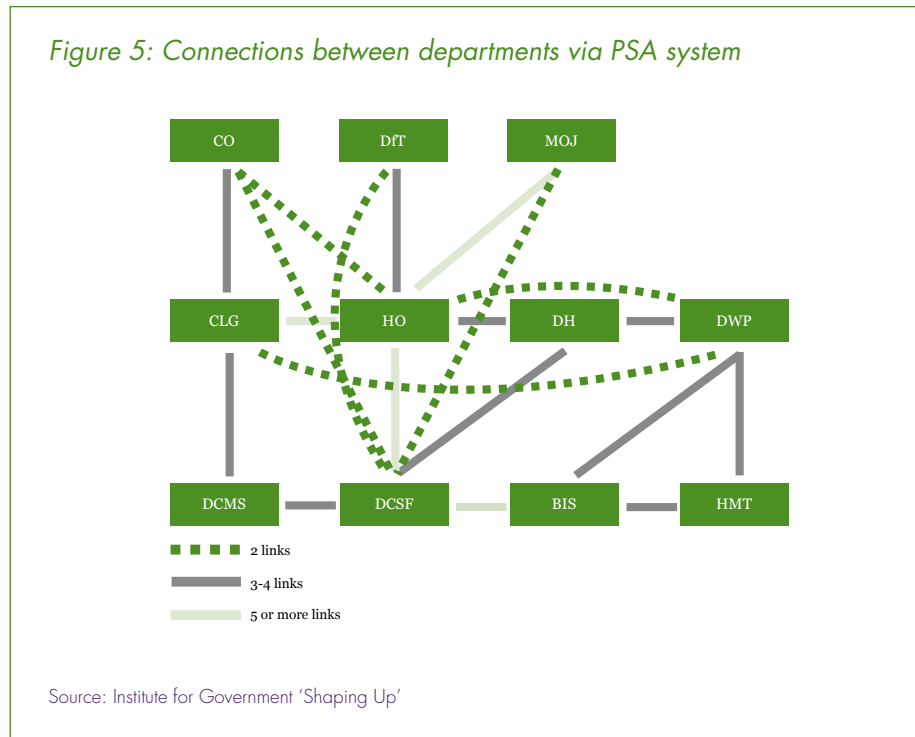
19 IDeA, 'Inside Top Teams – The Research Report', p.39

20 Chester West and Cheshire: Policy Development Board – Terms of Reference

Lessons for Better Policy Making

A basic first step in creating the environment for joined-up, customer-focused policy-making is providing the structures and incentives that can foster and support the necessary changes. The fragmentation of local government policy-making has been institutionalised by departmentalised funding streams. This has, in turn, created unintended incentives for council officials to focus on narrow departmental concerns. Therefore an obvious first step is in backing customer-focused initiatives with budget allocations and measures that meet cross-cutting goals.

Perhaps the most ambitious current attempt to reengineer government along more collaborative lines has been the development, by Whitehall, of performance targets shared by more than one department. The new PSA system has attempted to create a web of connectivity across Whitehall, with key 'hub' departments (See Figure 5). While these PSA targets may have aided considerations of cross departmental boundary collaboration, they were arbitrarily set targets that may have been poorly formulated against complex problems. Only 35% of joint PSA targets were met in the 2005-08 round of PSAs.²¹



In Scotland, however, policy systems are small enough to allow the political executive to communicate directly with policy makers and service providers. Due to this they do not have to centrally control departments and agencies with targets to ensure conformity, as is the case in central Government.²²

The Scottish executive decided against imposing PSA targets on its departments and agencies, and instead chose to work with them to identify performance measures. This leads us to consider a potential middle ground in incentivising and formalising cross-cutting projects. PSAs are very detailed, top-down targets. They have been somewhat successful at incentivising cross-cutting, however, with a smaller scale system it would be more effective to identify cross-cutting performance measures in conjunction with the departments they will impinge

21 Parker et al, 'The State of the Service', London: Institute for Government, 2009, p.19-21

22 Keating, M., 'The Government of Scotland: Public Policy Making After Devolution', Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005, p. 171

on. If a region as large as Scotland can do this, they will be quite implementable at local government level.

There are also challenges involved with this approach (see Collaboration Section below), but as a theoretical approach, this is a good starting point.

Recommendations for local government

- Prioritise those existing measures of performance which are inherently cross cutting
- Where appropriate measures do not already exist, create new internal measures which reflect the key outcomes for the area

Collaboration

Customer-focused policy-making must be an outwardly driven policy process, it must clearly identify the 'public interest', and it must, as a prerequisite to the success of the former points, maintain close partnerships with external organisations. The policy-making culture in Denmark provides an example of what collaboratively-based policy making can become, with external groups taking a crucial shaping role in the policy-making process.²³

Case Study: Government as a partner in the policy-making process in Denmark

In Denmark consensual processes of policy-making dominate. Government, locally and nationally, is not considered the natural originator of policy; it instead takes on the role of facilitator, convener, and partner in the policy-making process. Most Danish policies have multiple creators and supporters. Danish policy-making requires multiple actors at the policy formulation stage, and the mediatory process of policy development helps to bridge the gap between contrasting interests.

Policy fields in Denmark have developed highly institutionalized arrangements for dialogue between politicians and stakeholders to facilitate this process. Professional organisations collaborate on decisions affecting their profession, while non-governmental interest groups participate in fact finding missions to develop recommendations to government.

Collaborative policy-making can lead to disagreement and conflict. However, it also provides the potential to create innovative and responsive solutions with high levels of public support.²⁴

Collaboration is a difficult process, and it is not surprising that consultancy and partnership working can still lead to failures in policy-making. Currently, few councils have a particularly consultative policy-making process; one South Eastern county council, tried to develop a consultancy based policy-making process, with a team of expert consultants engrained in the process. However, the process failed due to difficulties in maintaining suitable engagement and because of an increase in bureaucracy.²⁵ The case of devolved policy-making

23 Jorgensen, H., 'Consensus, Cooperation, and Conflict: The Policy Making Process in Denmark', London: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2002, pps.207, 232 and 249

24 Woodford, M, 'Successful Community-Government Collaborative Policy Making: A Case Study of a Workshop to Improve Income Support Services to Victims of Intimate Violence', Journal of Policy Practice(9)2, 2010, p98

25 Based on evidence collected from Localis interviews with a Kent County Council Policy Analyst. See the case study, as described by Ashbridge Consulting, the consultancy which helped the Council develop this form of policy-making, here: <http://www.ashbridge.org.uk/website/content.nsf/wCON/Case+Study+Surrey+County+Council?opendocument>

in Scotland proves that consultancy and partnership policy-making is no panacea.²⁶

Case Study: The need to ensure ‘customer-focus’ in collaborative arrangements

Policy making in Scotland is more consultative than it is in central government. Executives cannot expect to push through every idea that the First Minister develops, due to the negotiation necessary in coalition government.

Policy-making in Scotland relies, to a large extent, on outside groups and professionals. This makes policy making more participative, but also slower and less decisive. Interest groups have more channels of influence in the Scottish government. Specialised committees in Scotland have provided interest group focus, while ‘insider groups’ (i.e. economic interest groups and professions bodies) are consulted about policy on a regular basis.

Consultation is so central to Scottish policy-making that groups have complained about ‘consultation fatigue’ – they are constantly asked for input and are further required for ongoing clarification.

Arguably, Scottish policy-making relies too heavily on consultation. The main problems of this, apart from less decisive decision-making, are that policy networks are vertically linked within policy fields, not across underlying social themes, and that the small consultative network leads to a ‘village community’.

In Scotland, policy-makers work on a casual face-to-face basis, with short lines of established communication. Scotland has certainly embraced consultative policy-making, but it has potentially also created an unrepresentative power elite. By not focusing policy on the customer, consultative policy-making instead excludes outsiders and stifles change.

The underlying lesson is that policy-makers must engage with a wide range of external stakeholders, based on customer-focus, along ‘outcome’ based, not policy area, lines.

Recommendation for local government

- Councils should be targeted in their engagement with external partners, aligning relationships with desired outcomes rather than departmental silos

The importance of having external members on boards

There is a compelling argument for involving external experts directly on decision-making boards. Public sector boards have shown that the input of external experts can be crucial to improving outcomes. External experts on the public sector boards have developed and strengthened the boards, and they are becoming a vital part in broadening the available skills-sets and expertise within Whitehall.

²⁶ Keating, M., ‘The Government of Scotland: Public Policy Making After Devolution, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005, p.90-94

The main benefits associated with external expert membership on decision-making boards, all of which are extremely pertinent to the development of CW&C's PDBs, are:

- Teams are more creative and effective when they comprise of members with a wide range of expertise and knowledge
- External experts can bring specialist knowledge and insight to the debate that policy-makers and their staff might otherwise find difficult to access
- External experts bring independent and external scrutiny to the debates and decisions of a board.
- External experts who sit on more than one board can help collaboration on cross-cutting projects
- External experts often mentor and advise internal board members, adding to internal expertise
- External membership can act as a direct and on-going form of consultation in customer-focused policy-making²⁷

Seeking cohesiveness at the expense of any adversarial debate can lead to errors in decision-making.²⁸ While cohesiveness can be a positive attribute to a certain extent, high levels of agreement and a lack of challenge on a board often leads to 'groupthink'. This is where external experts can prove so vital in providing a different viewpoint and external challenge. Academic research has reinforced that it is a 'core requirement' to include multiple perspectives in collaborative policy-making if it is to be successful. This is as important internally as it is in external partnership working.²⁹

Recommendation for local government

- PDBs should recruit external experts from key public and private strategic partners

Creating avenues for public input

Consultancy approaches are becoming more important in policy-making. CW&C must open up PDBs and concentrate on creating more avenues for stakeholders to get involved. Existing local community forums in CW&C, as well as in most councils, could, and should, be integrated more directly into policy-development processes. Community forums can act as a consultation device, and as an instrument for directly understanding local priorities and to learn how new policies can improve services for customers.

There are very relevant lessons regarding how service users can be engaged in the decision-making process to be learnt from the Co-Operative Group's membership structure. The membership of the Co-Operative Group is much larger than any single council's population,³⁰ yet the group's membership and decision-making structure manages to give all members a democratic voice on the group's strategy. All members of the Co-Operative Group are legible to become a member of their local Area Committee, by standing for election to the Committee. Committees then elect members to represent their interest on Regional Boards. The Regional Board Members, through selected members, are represented on the Executive Board. This system means that there is a formalised up-wards chain, whereby the concerns of the bottom level members are carried up through the corporate structure by democratic representatives.³¹

27 Parker, S. et al, 'Shaping Up: A Whitehall for the Future', Institute for Government, 2010, p.43-76

28 IDeA, 'Top Teams – The Research Report', p.21

29 Huxham, C., 'The Challenge of collaborative governance', Public Management: An International Journal of Research and Theory, (2)3, 2000, p.337-375

30 Birmingham City Council has the largest council population in the U.K., with 992,400 residents (see <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/council-and-democracy/city-statistics/population-statistics/largestcouncils/>), however The Co-Operative Group boasted a membership of over five million individuals (see: <http://www.co-operative.coop/corporate/Press/Press-releases/Headline-news/The-Co-operative-Group-members-share-record-50Million-dividend/>)

31 Based on Localis interviews with members of the Co-Operative Group's Parliamentary Office. For further information please see: <http://www.co-operative.coop/corporate/Sustainability/delivering-value/modern-co-operation/democratic-structure/>

Community forums in CW&C could be used in a similar fashion to the Co-Operative Group's Area Committees. Elected officials who attend community forums could act as the forum's representative at council level, and could take forward local ideas for council consideration, feeding upwards to the PDBs and on to the Cabinet.

Furthermore, councillors could actively and continuously engage residents in the policy-making process by consulting them on current policy discussion and idea development that may directly affect them. Similarly to the Co-Operative Group (where the Regional Board must agree to the closure of a local branch of the Co-Operative Group's businesses, for example), there should be a mechanism whereby a community forum can effectively veto a policy that uniquely affects their district, as long as they are willing to engage the council in developing an alternative solution.

It is fundamentally crucial to increase user engagement in policy development if councils are to develop better policy-making processes. Increasing use of community forums in policy-making can aid this. Customer-focused policy processes should ensure that public consultation through community-based discussion forums is utilised in the evidence collection stage of PDBs.

Recommendations for local government

- Councillors on community boards should act as representatives for their local district, taking ideas and concerns raised locally to the relevant PDB
- Councils should create a mechanism whereby a community forum can effectively veto a policy that uniquely affects their district

Rethinking the PDB and the role of portfolio holders

International comparative local government research by Ipsos Mori presents some interesting findings about the priorities local residents take. The issues identified by respondents as important to improving local quality of life are much more theme based than the departmental nature of PDBs (or, indeed, most UK council overview and cabinet committee bodies). 'Activities for Teenagers' (which UK respondents identified as the top priority for local government), for instance, does not fit neatly into any PDB or department.³² Rather than focusing on departmental-type boards joining up to work on problems that may fall between departmental gaps, identifying key priorities allows councils to base their policy-making institutions on real citizen demand.

If an extensive consultation period is used to define what concerns and objectives take priority with local residents, several PDBs could be refocused to operate along cross-cutting lines, based on thematic concerns that have been defined through ground-level research. The restructuring of decision-making institutions could work along similar lines to the attempts by central government to create joint departments (as in the now defunct DCSF) or cross-cutting units within Whitehall (for example the Office for Climate Change, now part of DEFRA), both of which attempted to initiate policy along prioritised 'outcomes'.³³

Theme based PDBs, with external experts, could act in a similar manner to policy workshops that have been developed successfully by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada.³⁴ There, in a series of specific policy

32 Ipsos Mori Research Institute, 'One World, Many Place: Citizens' Views of Municipal Government and Local Areas Across the World', 2010, p.16

33 Parker, S. et al. 'Shaping Up: A Whitehall for the Future', Institute for Government, 2010, p.80-90

34 Woodford, M, 'Successful Community-Government Collaborative Policy Making: A Case Study of a Workshop to Improve Income Support Services to Victims of Intimate Violence', Journal of Policy Practice(9)2, 2010, p96

initiatives, usually based on a direct social concern affecting a specific social group, workshops have been created in an ad-hoc fashion, with a mixture of relevant governmental partners (including policy personnel and operational managers) and a range of individuals from representative organisations. These workshops are tasked with providing solutions to a specific problem, and do so through a shared leadership team liaising with each other and further external partners.

What is interesting about the policy workshops is that their recommendations often lead to extensive shifts in current policy and a change in accepted philosophy. Furthermore, external representatives not only take a lead in developing policies, they also work with departmental staff in the implementation stage of policy operationalisation.³⁵

However, if several PDBs are based on themed priorities, there still needs to be another level of connection to join what otherwise could be quite separate 'problem based' bodies. Another level, based on a different set of more exhaustive priorities, could be important in joining-up 'theme based' policy areas.

While traditional portfolios could adequately link theme based PDBs, there are avenues for redefining what portfolios exist at executive level. If, for example, two PDBs are created to meet priorities of 'Activities for Teenagers' and, say, 'Affordable Housing', linkages could be created by portfolio holders who work along the lines of the Irish Citizen Group Ministers (See Appendix 1), with coordination between these two PDBs developed by a portfolio holder with responsibility for, say, 'Young Persons' Wellbeing'.

This is one reason for portfolio holders to be separated from single PDB membership (the other being to reinforce the leadership position of the PDB head). This citizen-group representative linkage role for a portfolio holder we define as a 'portfolio holder *sans frontiers*'. 'Citizen group' portfolio members could sit across the PDB boards as necessary, joining up the policy that each of the respective boards are working on, based on citizen-group priorities.

Of course, given the statutory burden placed on councils in terms of their structuring, this is a potential idea to be considered at a later stage for CW&C, or, indeed, immediately by councils willing to make radical immediate departures from the typical LGA 2000 cabinet status quo. However, cross-cutting portfolio holders could be a useful addition to a PDB based policy-making system. By creating portfolio holders who hold differing remits to PDBs, cabinet members would have to work across boards, leading to a more informal relationship between the PDBs and the cabinet. PDBs need greater independence to work *with* cabinet members, as opposed to *for* cabinet members, if they are to flourish as rigorous, customer facing bodies. With this new system PDB boards would be given independence from complete subordination to a single portfolio holder, which would ensure that the PDB Chair is the recognised leader of the PDB.

It has previously been suggested in central government that creating a handful of secretaries of state without a department, holding responsibility for a cross-cutting problem and a pooled commissioning budget to spend across Whitehall, would encourage joined-up projects.³⁶ With less institutionalised departments and cabinet positions in the newly formed CW&C, it may be easier to redistribute functions and resources to recalibrate cabinet positions within the council than any such initiative would be in central government.

³⁵ Woodford, M, 'Successful Community-Government Collaborative Policy Making: A Case Study of a Workshop to Improve Income Support Services to Victims of Intimate Violence', *Journal of Policy Practice*(9)2, 2010, p98

³⁶ Cabinet Office, 'Modernising Government', London: The Cabinet Office, 1999, p18

Recommendations for local government

- Councils should use consultations with residents to identify what ‘theme’ based concerns are prioritised locally, and create PDBs focused on creating policy based on these themes
- Consider creating ‘portfolio holders *sans frontieres*’ to sit across boards and represent specific citizen groups

Maximise opportunities for Pooled Budgets

To aid outcomes based policy units, *pooled budgets* should be created for top-priority issues as identified by studying local demand; these could be overseen by a cross-cutting portfolio holder or PDB Chair. Pooled budgets are increasingly being considered by councils through Total Place pilots, and the next logical step is for governmental institutions to mirror these new theme based budget streams. Therefore, pooled budgets for top priorities should be created and managed by dedicated portfolio holders or PDBs.

Pooled budgets, allocated to commission policy based on citizen group priorities automatically provide ‘portfolio holders *sans frontieres*’ a clear role and position within the policy making process. They could link PDBs through creating cross-cutting solutions to defined concerns, providing funds as necessary.

As mentioned in the previous section, there have been suggestions in central government advocating secretaries of state responsible for a cross-cutting problem to hold a pooled commissioning budget.³⁷ However, Whitehall, as the ultimate controller of budgets and with huge revenues to commission with relative freedom, is in a much more flexible position to create pooled budgets.³⁸ Local government, who largely receive funds through central pots, have less flexibility to pool funds creatively. However, initiatives such as Total Place may begin to give local authorities new freedoms to share budgets across agencies and boundaries.

Stipulations attached to pooled budgets could begin to define the measures that the executive need to create in conjunction with individual portfolio holders and PDBs to distinguish what achievements and ambitions should be aimed for. Linking funding directly to clear customer groups and social outcomes increases the ability for councillors to gauge whether policies offer value for money.

Taken together, and depending on whether customer group and/or prioritised issues budgets can be pooled in practice, these budgetary recommendations lay the ground-work to ensure that budgets focus and develop cross-cutting PDBs rather than hinder them.

37 Cabinet Office, ‘Modernising Government’, London: The Cabinet Office, 1999, p18

38 Joined-up Whitehall initiatives such as the Department for International Development, Ministry of Defense and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, pooling budgets for a joint solution to conflict management show the flexibilities central departments have with a defined budget. Council departments do not have such access to non-earmarked funds.

Recommendation for local government

- Councils should provide cross cutting portfolio holders with discretionary budgets to initiate cross-cutting projects for prioritised issues

Ensuring officer structures match member structures

These recommendations come with the prerequisite that council officer units reflect the outcomes based areas of member institutions. Changing the elected

members' structures of decision-making processes, without a reflected shifting of processes and working units at the officer level, can lead to greater tension and a lack of clear direction and coordination.

PDBs could be used to initiate policy ideas along themes, which are then taken on by officers with a remit in a corresponding cross-cutting department. In this way, PDBs could work as ideas factories, commissioning ideas for further refinement and discussion before implementation.

Recommendation for local government

- Councils should make sure that all restructuring in councillor responsibilities are mirrored in officer structures

2.2 Extended leadership and officer-member relationships

With current council structures, it is not uncommon for a council's executive members to be concerned primarily with decision-making within a small power-elite. This capacity for concentrated power and leadership has undoubtedly been reinforced by the executive powers brought about through the LGA 2000. The cabinet can take decisions, pass them through full council with little objection, and then pass it to management to implement, with little internal challenge or outward engagement.³⁹

Obviously, this undermines the ability of councillors, provides little obligation for improvement, and internalises the priorities of the council. To avoid this, leaders need to recognise that good relationships rely on creating and empowering a range of leaders within the council. In CW&C there is recognition that strong senior level leadership is vital, and that it will shape the direction of the council. Not only are senior members within CW&C dedicated to providing a strong vision and leadership for the council, they are also actively engaged in encouraging other councillors to take on leadership roles.

The CW&C approach to Leadership

CW&C have created a strong council vision. It has a clear aim to involve more councillors in the running of the council, has developed a set of key corporate priorities, and has set a target of being in the top five unitary councils in England by 2010/11.⁴⁰ This focus has been commended through the Audit Commission's conclusion that the council's leadership is clear and that its Corporate Plan sets out clear priorities.⁴¹ Power dispersal, with the positive extension of leadership it entails, was an important reason for the commissioning of a policy-making system based on PDBs. If further embraced, the PDBs can give a majority of its councillors a real leadership role, a role involved in the strategic vision of the council.

Within councils, policy-making is more effective when the 'key players' work well together.⁴² These key players are usually the two separate 'top teams', the senior decision-making elected officials, for example the portfolio holders led

39 Morrison, J., 'Spin, smoke-filled rooms, and the decline of council reporting by local newspapers: the slow demise of town hall transparency', Kingston University, p.2-4

40 Cheshire West and Cheshire Council, 'Making it Happen: Corporate Plan 2009-2011', 2010

41 OnePlace, 'Cheshire West and Chester: Organisational Assessment', Audit Commission, 2009, p.2&7

42 Municipal Research & Service Center, 'Local Government Policy-Making Process', 1999, p.13

by the Leader, and the senior management, the departmental managers led by the Chief Executive.

However, in CW&C there is a more complex picture of what the 'top team' consists of, and this potentially leads to complexities in the officer-member relationship. If PDBs have a place in policy-making, should they be considered part of the top team? At the minute, PDBs, and therefore their Chairs, do not have a defined position that is clear to all in the council hierarchy. While 50% of survey respondents agreed that PDBs should actually lead on policy-making in CW&C, many respondents noted that PDBs currently only work on policies agreed with the executive, policies which they only influence, rather than create. As one respondent noted, the role of the PDBs are underestimated and need greater recognition.⁴³ In their current form, there is undoubtedly confusion at some levels as to their role in the council.

Senior CW&C members entered into dialogue regarding the need for the boards to achieve more officer support with the Chief Executive and Directors (the most senior officials in the council).⁴⁴ This has had an impact on how senior officers relate to PDBs, which in turn should lead to greater understanding of the PDBs' role throughout the officer side of the council. This communication is vital for the success of PDBs and is part of a larger communications 're-launch' of the PDBs within the council.

Shared Leadership and Management

The critical aspects of political leadership and council management perform best when shared.⁴⁵ Communicating and sharing the overlapping roles of management and leadership is critical to ensuring a council provides a good local service while also understanding the wider context of their decisions.

Elected officials and managers have different concerns, and come from different places when approaching policy processes. Whereas politicians make choices as public representatives, with a focus on responding to public requests in the shortest possible time, managers are subject area experts who derive authority through their professional experience and who focus on longer-term aims and performance indicators.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the understanding of a council's aims and priorities needs to be shared. An effective top team should aim to create a shared council vision for its policy-making. This involves listening to the demands of the residents, as well as listening to each other.⁴⁷

Tension can be a feature of the relationship between the political and managerial in councils. Max Weber once commented that the fault-line between democracy and bureaucracy produced the greatest source of tension in the entire social order.⁴⁸

Good officer-member relationships need to move past these tensions. If they do not the strained power dynamics can lead to an 'us-and-them' culture, where officers distance themselves from the responsibility of the outcomes of policy. Such a situation risks losing the specialised knowledge that officers can input into the policy-making process, and can also lead to a lack of officer buy-in into the entire policy process.

With a sense of trust and shared ownership, a more creative atmosphere develops between officers and members in the process of setting priorities. Understanding where policy is 'made' is often a frequent conversation between

43 When asked to outline how the policy-making process could be more efficient respondent (a PDB Chair) stated: 'Better recognition by the Executive, by other Council Members and by some Lead Officers of the important status that should be associated to PDB Chairs (i.e. importance of the role is currently understated).'

Another PDB member, when asked what structural changes they would make to the policy making process stated that the 'PDBs appear to be on the "outside" and not part of the system. Executive members, by and large, do not seem interested in the PDBs and their status is too low within the CW&C hierarchy.'

44 Based on conversations with senior CW&C members

45 IDeA, 'Inside Top Teams – The Research Report', p.11

46 Baddeley, S., 'Constructing Trust at the Top of Local Government', *Contracts: Relationships in local government, health and public services*, Policy Press: Bristol (4), pp. 55-78

47 IDeA, 'Inside Top Teams – A Practical Guide', p.57-63

48 Weber, M., 'Bureaucracy', in Gerth and Mills (eds) 'From Max Weber – Essays in Sociology', London: Routledge, 1991, p231

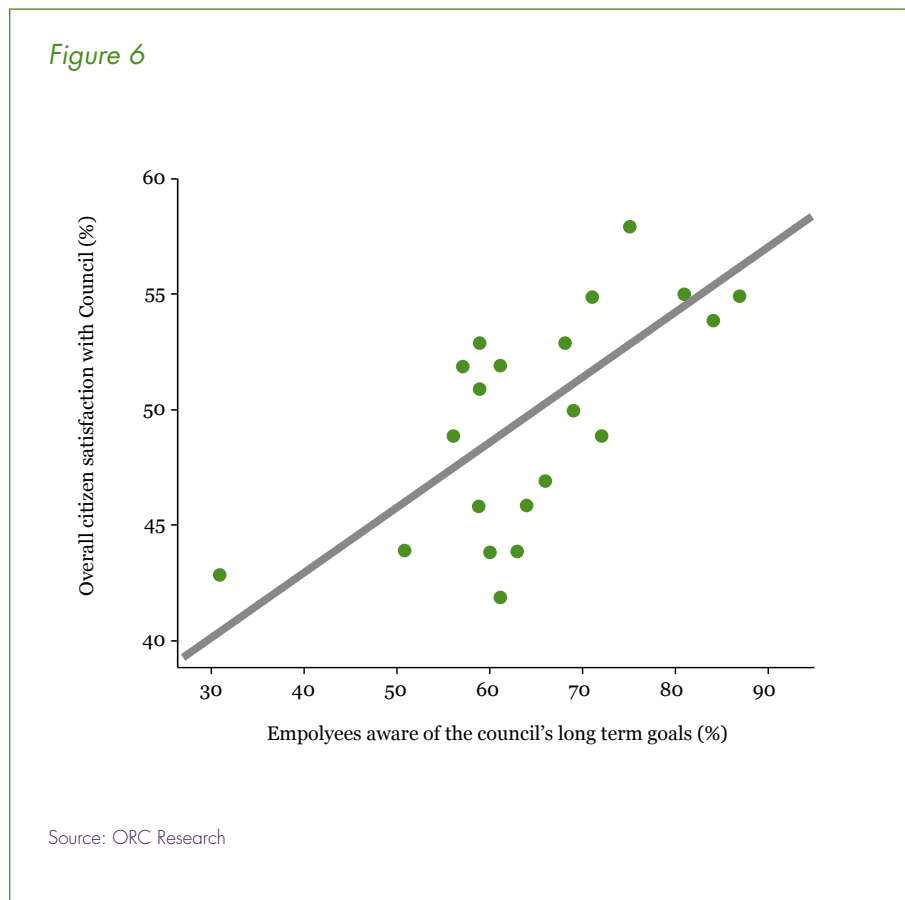
elected members and officers.⁴⁹ This conversation is more productive when officers and managers negotiate and understand the tensions involved in the different expectations made of each other. Officers can widen politicians' choices if they know what politicians want, and, at the same time, politicians can improve the quality of policy choices if they understand how officers formulate options.

However, even well maintained officer-member communications can be strenuous, due to the complex overlap of the role of officer and politician in the policy-making process. For example, the management tool of 'pre-briefing', a way of sketching out detailed options to allow variations on the main policy agenda that follows, though welcomed by some politicians, is perceived by others as pre-empting their contribution to policy.⁵⁰

Therefore, initial and well-developed officer buy-in is crucial to achieving desired policy outcomes. As Simon Baddeley has noted in his research, 'most political goals are achieved through the application of managerial and professional expertise.'⁵¹

Engaged Officers lead to greater council satisfaction levels

Research conducted by ORC Research has found that when staff are engaged and involved in decision-making, there is a greater likelihood of resident satisfaction (See figure 6).⁵² With an understanding of the council's goals, and a clear place within the policy-making process, council officers develop a more positive relationship both with council members and residents. This feeds back, through both better policy-making and more effective policy implementation, to higher levels of resident satisfaction.



49 Baddeley, S., 'Political-Managerial Leadership', p.182
 50 Baddeley, S., 'Political-Managerial Leadership', p.185
 51 Baddeley, S., 'Owl, Fox, Donkey or Sheep: Political Skills for Managers', Management Learning, 18(3), 1987, p.19
 52 ORC International, 'Linking Employee and Customer Data – A New Way Forward for Local Government?', 2010

Lessons for better policy making

Help officers see past central target regimes

The range of inspections and target regimes that affect civil servants potentially confuse the allegiances and priorities of officers at council level.⁵³ The long-term nature of officer priorities, alongside tight centralised control of their behaviour, has led to a situation where officers are often entrenched in, and attached to, the status-quo.⁵⁴ Politicians, on the other hand, are less emotionally attached to underperforming systems, as they have a greater focus on delivery and outcomes.

In order to incentivise council officers to look beyond departmental boundaries, systems and reviews need to place an emphasis on collaborative behaviour. Before systems that allow members to engage in cross-cutting policy-making can be implemented, it is vital to incentivise joined-up thinking at the officer level. Academic studies have found that civil servants can destabilise attempts to make policy-making more outward-facing, in an attempt to minimise risk to themselves.⁵⁵ Officers are a vital layer of policy shaping and implementing, yet they are hampered in their creativity by perverse targets.⁵⁶

Previous research has revealed the burden of target regime scrutiny that officers are under,⁵⁷ while Institute for Government research has revealed that the threat of further inspection and scrutiny has made the civil service cautious of taking risks and being innovative.⁵⁸ It is clear that councillors must lead the way in trail-blazing reforms, and must understand the central pressures that officers are held accountable to.

At the same time, councillors should not be totally ignorant of officer concerns. Officers have a strategic awareness of the statutory commitments that a council face, and the demands placed on it by central government. If officers are reluctant to a specific decision, there may be good reason to consider their reluctance.

Recommendations for local government

- Councillors must lead the way while communicating reforms with officers
- Councillors need to be aware of the inspection regime pressure affecting officers and be aware of these pressures

53 Baddeley, S., 'Political-Managerial Leadership', p.180

54 Baddeley, S., 'Political-Managerial Leadership', p.185

55 King et al, 'The question of participation: Toward authentic public participation in public administration', *Public Administration Review*, 58(4), 317-326

56 Wind-Cowie, M. et al., 'Leading from the Front', London: Demos, 2009, p.4; Shakespeare, T., 'For Good Measure', London: Localis, 2010

57 Shakespeare, T., 'For good measure', Localis, 2009

58 Parker, S., et al, , 'State of the Service', Institute for Government, 2009, p.29

59 IDeA, 'Inside Top Teams - The Research Report', p.36

Facilitate ongoing discussions and workshops

The IDeA have found that the formalised discussion of performance priorities in top teams has helped broaden the nature and ownership of both performance management systems and the joint management of performance results.⁵⁹

Internal workshops can help officers and members understand how to work closer together. A starting point to engaging officers in policy-making must begin with bringing officer and member groups together to discuss and suggest ways of acknowledging the value of the other position, and to consider what areas of leadership managers should engage with and what areas of management members should be involved with. Feedback from such exercises can help councils prioritise action that has been agreed on.

It is important to support the natural relationships that develop between officers and members through a commitment to dedicate spaces for officers and members to learn from each other and discuss roles and procedures.

There needs to be clarity of outcomes within the clusters of portfolio holders and managers for each policy area. Potential structural changes to PDBs (to reflect customer priority themes) make this all the more relevant. Without clear working relationships and channels of communication, teams that should act closely to ensure delivery together will instead have problems working mutually to meet desired outcomes. In such circumstances they will fundamentally have inconsistent working relationships.

On-going discussion between leaders on the officer side and on the member side of any policy-delivery area is crucial. Established communication, if located within suitable structures, and in an environment of mutual understanding of priorities, is the primary source of clarity in the internal workings of policy-making and implementation.

Suffolk County Council maintains an 'M4' process where the senior four members of each policy area meet their respective senior policy area management team to discuss what the management team are taking forward on behalf of members. These groups of leading personnel get together fortnightly to learn from each other what major issues are coming up.⁶⁰

CW&C have groups that are similar to the Suffolk County Council 'M4' model; however they do not meet frequently, and are not as established as the M4 process. Formalizing these meetings and making them frequent events would help establish officer buy-in; it would also provide a strong communication chain.

Recommendations for local government

- Initiate workshops to allow officer and members to discuss their respective roles and negotiate where there should be cross-over
- Formalise meetings between policy area cabinet members and PDB Chairs with senior officers

Reinforce the role of the PDB

The structured, professional and time-pressured nature of officer commitments means that they require a clear understanding of who key decision-makers are, and who they should be reporting to, in order to ensure their considerations are included in top-level decisions.

Therefore, the role of PDBs needs to be made absolutely clear to officers. They must understand who they are working for and what role the PDBs have in decision-making. Without this, officers will overlook PDBs. Officers naturally report to those they believe have the power to act upon their advice and information.

Our survey of councillors reinforces this fact. Several respondents notice that the blurred and subordinate role of the PDBs and PDB chair means that officers lack buy-in to the process. For example, a PDB Chair stated in the survey that:

*'The Role of the PDB Chairs is still not fully appreciated between Officers and Members not involved on PDB Boards. This creates a credibility problem which restricts the amount of help and officer time to supporting the PDBs.'*⁶¹

⁶⁰ Baddeley, S., 'Political-Managerial Learning', 2008, p.182

⁶¹ Respondent (a PDB Chair), was asked how the PDB/policy directorate process could be improved, the answer in full was: 'The Role of the PDB Chairs is still not fully appreciated between Officers and Members not involved on PDB Boards. This creates a credibility problem which restricts the amount of help and Officer time to supporting the PDBs' and hinders progress on policy support. The process would be improved by re evaluating the important role that the PDBs' play and creating a proper status position for the Chairs which would be recognised throughout the Council, and give the Chairs the recognition and standing to be recognised for achieving policy improvements to help the Executive.'

While an executive member noted:

*'Officers need to understand this [the PDBs'] rationale and be willing to engage with members and others to make it work.'*⁶²

Within CW&C, Directors have a large role to play in reinforcing the role of PDBs to other officers. There is a recognition with CW&C senior councillors that engagement with Directors could provide a lot more buy-in from council personnel.

In order to provide clear, independent, leadership for PDBs, there also is a requirement to let the PDB Chair be a leader on the PDB. Our survey found overwhelming support for a more independent leadership within the PDBs. The vast majority of respondents felt that the PDB chair should lead the PDB (91%), while a majority felt that PDBs should have equal weighting with the executive in terms of policy formation (73%).

Although they are required to be present and engaged in meetings of the PDBs to receive PDB advice in the CW&C structure, executive members on PDBs are potentially an inhibiting aspect to the functionality of the board. A chair on a board must unequivocally be the leader of that board, and it is likely that a portfolio holder also formally sitting on all board members' meetings will lead to confusion. Cabinet members have a role on a well-functioning policy board, but it should be more informal, steering the direction of discussion while not directly dominating it. As previously discussed, changing the roles of both portfolio-holders and PDBs, so they are not explicitly linked with each other, can help make this transition.

CW&C have dealt with these problems, to a certain extent, by allowing monthly informal meetings which may or may not be attended by the executive member, while creating quarterly formal meetings in which the executive member takes a more leading role. The extent to which executive members' overexposure is a problem depends on the extent to which a council wishes PDBs to take a leading role in policy development. If the board is to be limited to an advisory role, executive dominance at official meetings is not an overriding concern.

Recommendations for local government

- Provide PDB Chairs with more leadership power on the PDBs
- Give PDB members space to discuss policy independently from executive members
- Clarify the PDBs' role with senior officers – this will feed down

⁶² Respondent (a PDB Chair), was asked how the PDB/policy directorate process could be improved, the answer in full was: 'Officers need to understand this rationale and be willing to engage with members and others to make it work - this applies particularly to those with a background in the NHS, where there appears to be a view that the process gets in the way of efficient working. However, it is acknowledged that the process is likely to be time consuming if it is to be done properly and it may be that the available resource is stretched!'

⁶³ IDeA, 'Inside Top Teams – The Research Report', p.29

2.3 Communication and evidence flows

Often the communications of a council are not as extensive as they could be. This can occur when there is little dialogue with external stakeholders, and when different units within the council do not share information freely.⁶³ When communication is not prioritised within a council's policy-making process, it becomes difficult to understand what demand exists locally and it becomes impossible to tackle problems in a 'wrap-around' manner. It also becomes less-likely that decision-makers will understand what they are actually agreeing to implement.

Furthermore, securing and maintaining buy-in from customer facing staff can prove difficult if they are not involved in initiating, and understanding the need for, change. This level of council staff must be an integral part of policy-making if policy-makers are to be able to engage demand when developing policy. To tackle the lack of buy-in that certain levels of the customer facing staff are characterised by, it is important to involve them at an early stage. The best way to involve internal operational staff is to improve vertical lines of communication, something that is all too often not prioritised. For example, in CW&C, despite a commitment to spreading decision-making powers throughout the council, 73% of survey respondents saw internal communication as a problem for policy-making going forward.

Our survey also revealed that 31% of survey respondents do not believe that communications with residents are carried out for any policy development within their team.⁶⁴ Lack of communication, internally and externally, is endangering the success of policy-development in CW&C.

If policy is to be demand-led, and focused on producing positive outcomes from the viewpoint of the user, it should begin with evidence building. The evidence should then be shaped by the commonly understood strategic vision of the council. It should be further refined through the input of external stakeholders, and then realised through council officers discussing the realities and options in regard to policy implantation. Extensive communication channels must be developed if councils are to develop a shared evidence base from which to build policy.

The appetite is clearly within CW&C to increase the use of evidence in developing policy, as 82% of survey respondents saw evidence collection as the most important first step in policy development. However, involving external partners and officers more (the key to collecting evidence) relies on having extensive communication channels to link different partners seamlessly in the policy-making process.

Policy-making units that are cross-cutting in how they tackle problems need to build more shared evidence bases from which to discuss holistic approaches to prioritised problems with a range of internal and external partners. The problems experienced by communities, when tackled from the underlying conditions, are complex and often involve conflicting goals and issues. If a problem is to be tackled in a cross-cutting nature, a lack of concise and pertinent data to analyse and understand the ground-level situation can impede and impair decision-making.⁶⁵

While CW&C has acknowledge the necessity for joining-up policy-making, more survey respondents disagreed than agreed that the new PDB system creates an environment to tackle root problems. As the PDBs are not based around prioritised themes (see Section 2.1), and as they do not often proceed from rigorous evidence collection and communication with the customer/council interface, they cannot produce policies that tackle at the root cause.

Interviews with senior CW&C members indicate that the council is aware that its current systems of information sharing leads to gaps in accountability. There is a general recognition by several senior council members that there needs to be greater information sharing between officers and members to aid decision-making.⁶⁶

The need to ensure that communication channels support cross-cutting initiatives has been recognised in other areas of government. In Whitehall, Senior

⁶⁴ Respondents were asked: 'Please indicate the frequency with which your team uses the following approaches to involve residents in policy formations', followed by a list of options. Option (b) was: 'Direct communications with residents are carried out', to which 31% of respondents stated 'Not used for policy making'.

⁶⁵ Parker, S., 'Shaping Up: A Whitehall for the Future', Institute for Government, 2010, p.83

⁶⁶ Based on data collected by Localis from interviews with CW&C members

Responsible Officers (civil servants in charge of joint targets), have taken responsibility for ensuring that departments collate evidence and share it with all partners to ensure a greater understanding of how to meet the shared goal.

Lessons for better policy making

Understand current policy success or failure

One of the first steps that must be taken in actively understanding demand and local priorities is a re-evaluation of the methods used to gauge performance and satisfaction. Setting priorities necessitates engaging the public in policy-development; however it also requires a system to realistically judge the performance of existing policy. Targets, based on arbitrary measures, can misrepresent actual customer satisfaction of a current policy or service. Measures need to be developed that relate to the end-to-end experience of local residents using a service. With a measure of a service that is based on the customers' point-of-view, policy-makers can ensure that service redesign policies are based on actual ground-level study.⁶⁷

Recommendation for local government

- Refocus measures of success on understanding customers perceptions of services

Use ground-level knowledge in strategic decision-making

Evidence collected by the IDeA suggests that top teams that are currently considered effective are noticeable for their ability to quickly 'assimilate, analyse and prioritise information' from a variety of sources.⁶⁸ Councils need to ensure that data collection systems and lines of communications complement top team decision-making and help them increase capacity to prioritise according to frontline knowledge.

Strategic decision-makers should have an understanding of the ground-level. Often current policy-development processes involve the development of policy in council chambers by councillors with ideas for policies based on their beliefs of what is demanded and needed locally. These are often plausible ideas – but often in-depth study of the ground-level issues and the actual situation undermines current policy. Instead, councils should manage by objective; they should have an understanding of their customer.

Understanding the 'customer' is a crucial first step in building up a cross-cutting policy environment. Before cross-cutting units and performance measures can be implemented, policy-makers must first gain a rigorous grounding in what is required and prioritised on the ground-level. Senior politicians and managers need to understand the need for change – policy should be developed and implemented through understanding demand.

⁶⁷ Seddon, J., 'Citizen-centred services: a discussion of the aims and methods of the White Paper', 2007, p.6

⁶⁸ IDeA, Top Teams – The research Report', p26

Case Study: Special Educational Needs transport in Stockport

Vanguard (a consultancy firm who work extensively with government bodies) is currently working with Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy-makers in Stockport. In the current system of transport for SEN young people, all that is needed to receive free transport (i.e. taxi service) is a statement of Special Need and to live more than 3.6 miles away from their place of education. This is regardless of whether the transport is actually a necessity. Vanguard Consultancy helped officials study the demand, and found that a majority of the young people currently receiving free transport could travel by themselves, often doing so during the weekend. By removing unnecessary users from the 'demand', Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council now can concentrate on those in real need of support.⁶⁹

Recommendation for local government

- Ensure all lines of communication complement and feed into decision-making bodies

Facilitate and encourage active participation

In terms of understanding priorities for new policy, citizen engagement must move past consultation if the maximum amount of information and priorities are to be gained. Consultation, important as it is in the movement to base policy on demand, is a feedback process. As Woodford suggested in his study of collaborative policy-making in Canada, involving external partners is commonplace, however the involvement is often meaningless in affecting policy decisions.⁷⁰ Policy-makers must move beyond quasi-collaboration, to a situation of active citizen participation. This involves allowing citizens avenues to propose policy options and shape the policy dialogue.⁷¹

One interesting comment made by a survey respondent was that the PDBs need to be more imaginative in the ways that communication channels are created. This is certainly a positive attitude, and one we recommend policy boards actively consider.

Opening up community forums to act as a dialogue between the ground-level and council members provides a direct avenue for active engagement. However, many more tools could be considered in actively engaging citizens. Several countries have developed citizens' juries, which act as an external scrutiny of policy, at the local level, while others have experimented with on-line discussion groups or interactive on-line 'games'.⁷²

There are a range of options that a council can take to actively engage citizens, and we do not wish to be prescriptive in our recommendations. However, we do recommend formalising existing community forums into policy debates, strengthening bonds with external experts through board membership, and developing e-government initiatives.

⁶⁹ Based on information collected by Localis interview with a public sector consultant employed by Vanguard Consulting.

⁷⁰ Woodford, M, 'Successful Community-Government Collaborative Policy Making: A Case Study of a Workshop to Improve Income Support Services to Victims of Intimate Violence', *Journal of Policy Practice*(9)2, 2010, p97

⁷¹ OECD, 'Engaging Citizens in Policy-Making: Information, Consultation and Party Participation', *PUMA Policy Brief No. 10*, 2001, p.2

⁷² OECD, 'Engaging Citizens in Policy-Making: Information, Consultation and Party Participation', *PUMA Policy Brief No. 10*, 2001, p.4

Recommendation for local government

- Use communication and feedback tools to move citizen engagement from consultation to active participation

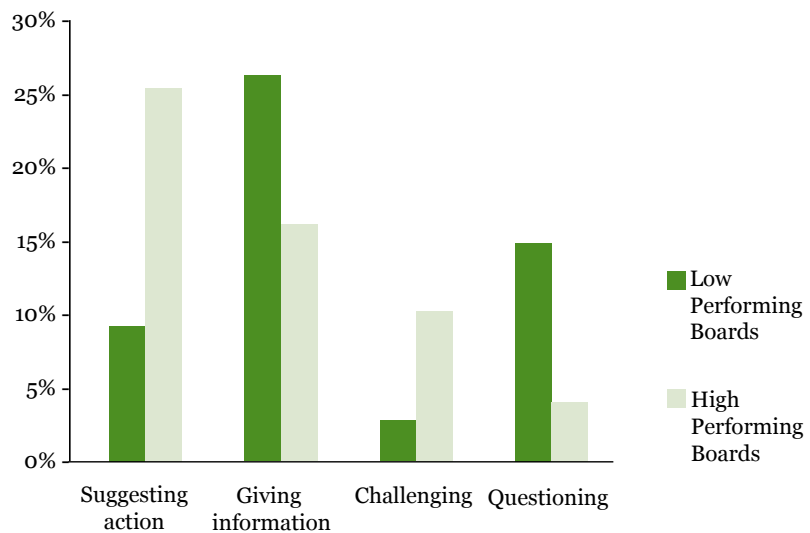
Internal Communications of PDBs

Based on analysis of Whitehall public sector boards, it is clear that there are clear defining characteristics that differentiate high-performing from low-performing boards. High achieving boards tend to spend a longer time actively involved in the management of the performance of policy delivery. Low-performing boards, in comparison, spend much more dealing with capability reviews and discussing strategy.

In high-performing board meetings analysed by the Institute for Government, 11% of comments were of a challenging nature, as opposed to only 3% of comments in low-performing boards (See figure 7). Members of high-performing boards expressed more than two and a half times as many comments suggesting actions (26%) as the low-performing board (10%). A problem is that criticism and challenge, even in their constructive forms, can be difficult for board members to take.

Without a strong sense of purpose, and strong team morale, low-performing board members are less likely to engage in challenging, yet decisive, debate.⁷³

Figure 7: main differences between high and low performing boards' discussions



Source: Institute for Government analysis

73 Ibid, p.56-58

Clarify policy boards' position in communication chain

A customer-focused form of policy-making, as envisioned in this report, ensures evidence sharing through close internal communications between PDBs. In the proposed model of portfolio holders *sans frontieres*, this would be further aided by cross-cutting portfolio holders ensuring 'outcomes-focused' constant communications between teams.

However, survey responses mention that the current lack of credibility afforded to PDBs makes extensive communications more difficult. One respondent noted that executive members did not engage in sufficient contact with PDB members, while another comment stated that executive members are not interested in communicating with PDBs, as the PDBs' status within the councils hierarchy are 'too low'. Executive members must support the PDBs and their Chairs if they are to have an important input in the policy making process.

Recommendation for local government

- Ensure that as PDBs' are firmly placed in the communication chain

2.4 Member expertise and capacity

Expertise is becoming an increasingly important aspect of good policy-making. Modern, customer-focused policy is more complex and multi-faceted than traditional internal, departmentalised policy-making.⁷⁴ Even in central government, there is a compelling case for a more systematic development of policy-makers to deal with these complexities. Research indicates that policy-makers require grounding in economics, statistics and relevant scientific disciplines as a prerequisite to understanding and analysing complex policy evidence.⁷⁵

The Public Administration Select Committee has found that the expertise, or lack thereof, of government ministers is a substantial issue in central government policy-making.⁷⁶ Expertise deficit is exacerbated by the convention of appointing ministers based on political loyalty rather than based on experience and skills. Solutions to insufficient expertise are often based on knowledge building schemes, such as rigorous role-training; however a focus must also be put on the initial selection of leading policy-makers.

Developing the expertise of local decision-makers is a complex and somewhat contradictory process. In local government, the majority of politicians are not full-time and yet there is an expectation that they should keep up to speed with a manager who is a highly specialised careerist. This is especially true under a PDB system, where a large amount of members are increasingly expected to produce cross-cutting policies. Members new to policy-making can undoubtedly learn a lot from experienced senior officers.

However, we also need to consider what 'expertise' actually means in relation to our elected politicians. In the endeavour for councillor expertise it must also be understood that technical expertise is not necessarily a positive attribute of a decision-maker. Councillors are often regarded as effective partners in decision-making due to their 'generalist' approach. Councillors can consider a problem at ground level with little prior preconceptions. Members are not professional experts; they are representatives of the public. Technical expertise is not as important, for politicians, as being responsive to the needs and priorities of their constituents.

⁷⁴ Bullock, H. et al, 'Better Policy Making', Centre for Management and Policy Studies, 2001, p21

⁷⁵ Good Government - Public Administration Committee, June 2009: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmpubadm/97/9704.htm>

⁷⁶ Good Government - Public Administration Committee, June 2009: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmpubadm/97/9704.htm>

Councillor expertise and CW&C

CW&C have a well developed strategy to ensure that members are continuously trained and developed. As part of that, all members undertake a personal development plan and the specific circumstances of each member is taken into account. The council also has a Member Learning Panel who produce annual reports on member progress.

Furthermore, all members go through an internal training programme involving a range of seminars and workshops on diverse areas such as budget processes, public speaking, and various briefings on policy areas.

However, ensuring that members with a policy development role have sufficient expertise to make strategic decisions has become an issue within CW&C due to the major extension of those involved in complex policy development. Although initially brought up in Localis interviews with senior CW&C leadership, it is a concern that exists throughout the council membership. Three quarters of survey respondents view lack of member experience as a major problem going forward, while almost 70% view the ability of members to deal with large strategic issues as a current concern.

This is not surprising in a council where the amount of individuals directly involved in policy-making is almost fivefold the usual number with real decision-making powers compared to a normal cabinet-based policy-making process. A concern about lack of elected politician expertise, however, is far from a concern unique to CW&C.

Although expertise is an area that CW&C wish to develop further, the new PDB system appears, to an extent, to have offered some organic avenues of individual member knowledge building. Over 70% of respondents agreed that the PDB structure has increased member knowledge compared to the previous structure. This is undoubtedly a positive derivative of allowing many more members a stake in policy development, with the extension in responsibility it entails. The council is also proactively monitoring their training regime and opening it up for assessment from organisations such as the Centre for Public Scrutiny.⁷⁷

Building member expertise

Skills and knowledge increase with tailored training programmes. If councils are willing to invest in training, and provide policy-makers with the necessary support to develop the skills learnt from training, there are a range of case-studies that provide interesting ideas to learn from.

A development programme initiated by Shropshire County Council provides an example of how deficiencies in certain knowledge sets within a council can be improved with skill specific training. Although in Shropshire the problem was too much focus on technical skills by officers, with a lack of soft skills, a similar programme could be implemented to help introduce CW&C's PDB members to the 'hard' skills that they will require to gain a technical expertise of their policy area.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Based on information from internal Member Learning Panel meeting minutes, date 8th July 2010

⁷⁸ For more details on Shropshire County Council's 'Insight' programme, please see: <http://www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/imp/aio/1033787>

Case Study: Developing new Skill Sets

Shropshire County Council has had a tradition of valuing technical skills, which over time has led to a serious deficit of people management skills.

Shropshire developed the 'Insight' development programme, which aimed to identify talent and bring individuals together to grow. It gave senior managers the opportunity to be involved in the development of staff.

The Insight programme concentrates on Organizational Skills Development - gaining a balance between 'hard' and 'soft' skills, and the ability to use those skills appropriately. The programme is run over 12 months and is flexible enough to meet the needs of different directorate units.

Feedback on the programme has found that participants have a greater ability to network across directorates and have greater confidence in their abilities.⁷⁹

Development programmes designed in partnership between Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Oxford City Council successfully improved management focus on outcomes and cross-departmental engagement.

Case Study: Developing new Skill Sets

Kensington and Chelsea and Oxford City Council teamed up to put middle managers through a development year.

Following an initial Development Centre (with business simulation and action learning sets), participants, facilitators and the IDeA reviewed the learning. It was found that the course helped participants give greater contributions to local authority committees, and increased their self-awareness. Participants also recorded being able to engage with people more fully, and noted being able to take broader views on service areas and the community.

Participants also showed improved performance in their respective councils. Internal feedback found that they had greater impact on their teams, were more focused on outcomes, and more engaged with other departments.⁸⁰

Although the programme was designed for council management employees, there is no obvious reason why a members' development centre could not have similar positive effects on elected members.

There is little in the way of prescriptive recommendations that can be provided in terms of specific training schemes that can improve the expertise of council members. However, learning from previous training programmes conducted by local authorities can give an idea of the range of options that other councils have taken to resolve specific problems.

There are a range of organisations in the UK that have a focus on improving expertise and building capacity and knowledge in local authorities. The Local Government Improvement and Development's (formally the IDeA) aim, for example, is to work for local government improvement so councils can serve

⁷⁹ See the Ideas Network (<http://www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk/imp/aio/1033787>) for more information on the Shropshire experience.

⁸⁰ See the IDeA (<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=10643258>) for more information on the RBKC and Oxford City Council experience.

people and places better. Local Government Improvement and Development endeavours to help councils share good practice and learn from each other, and has set up a range of improvement schemes, such as the national Beacon Scheme and the Councillor Leadership programme, which helps councillors become better leaders.

Local Government Improvement and Development has worked with many councils to develop training programmes which are tailored to the specific needs of councils. Its predecessor, the IDeA, also started the Improvement Network, a partnership that aims to build capacity and share expertise on key improvement issues.

Recommendation for local government

- Work in consultation with independent local government bodies to identify the options available in terms of programmes and methods for improvement

Ensuring board stability

As a new institution, CW&C has the opportunity to ensure that PDB membership is relatively stable, in terms of elected members, so that board members can build expertise and avoid short-termism.

Appropriate councillor expertise is crystallised through practical experience. This underpins the importance of having sufficient incumbencies in certain roles, and having a career progression where councillors can learn on the job as they rise through the ranks. In Hackney, for example, learning-on-the-job, while rising through the ranks, has proven to be an important aspect of the role of scrutiny board member. In CW&C it should be an equally important aspect of membership on a PDB.

A PDB Chair, or any member given a senior role in council policy-making and strategy, should be selected based on merit. Once selected, the councillor should receive support to develop their role expertise, and they should be allowed time to develop and learn. It is crucial that policy-makers are given sufficient time to cultivate the knowledge that training and experience can provide. Spending money on training schemes would be counter-productive if elected politicians are not given sufficient time to develop skills.

Recommendations for local government

- Select PDB Chairs based on merit and previous experience
- Avoid unnecessary reshuffles of PDBs, and appoint PDB Chairs for fixed terms

Using officer-member relationships to increase member expertise

Policy-making members can learn a great deal about their policy area from experienced officers. Close team working between officer and member is an organic and simple solution to expertise building that is often over-looked.

Communication between members and officers can help disseminate complex knowledge, in a more 'on-the-job' and practical manner than formalised

training courses. The success of this form of expertise building relies on close communications with engaged officers, and also on the willingness of members to admit relative naivety and show the desire to learn.

Members learning from officers can also act as a public funnel for complex information, with an informed member using their 'lay-person' knowledge of an intricate subject area to translate detailed information into a message that residents can readily understand.

If a council is going to extend powers to new policy boards, they must ensure that the roles of the boards are clearly understood. Policy-makers new to specific policy areas need officer support more than anyone, yet officers are unlikely to spend sufficient time with members who they do not believe will have any real input on final policy decisions. However, once officers are engaged, they can offer 'real-life' expertise that no other sources of knowledge can hope to match.

Policy workshops in Canada, which this report has previously used as an example for themed PDBs to learn from, rely on 'brokers', essentially government officers, who educate the workshop members on issues such as legislative requirement and financial considerations.⁸¹ As the role of the PDB is clarified to senior council managers, and as officer structures are reformed around PDB remits, PDB members will gain many opportunities to communicate closely with, and learn from, dedicated and engaged council staff.

Recommendation for local government

- Emphasise the 'broker' role of officers in 'training' PDB members in specialised areas of policy

Increasing knowledge through involving external experts

Giving evidence to the Public Administration Committee, Lord (Digby) Jones (former Trade Minister) suggested that greater use of external experts in leading policy-making roles could provide substantial additional expertise to a decision-making team. This supports the evidence provided from the experience of public sector boards in Whitehall.⁸²

The knowledge that carefully selected external experts can provide may be difficult to gain elsewhere, and external experts are potentially invaluable for their ability to mentor and advise councillors. Councils must consider what external expertise would improve the knowledge of their decision-making units.

Recommendation for local government

- Councils must consider what external expertise would improve the knowledge of their decision-making units when selecting external board members for PDBs

2.5 Engrained council scrutiny, transparency and accountability

Scrutiny boards were developed in the LGA 2000 act, as a way to provide oversight and as a check on executive decision-making.⁸³ The scrutiny function

81 Woodford, M., 'Successful Community-Government Collaborative Policy Making: A Case Study of a Workshop to Improve Income Support Services to Victims of Intimate Violence', *Journal of Policy Practice*(9)2, 2010, p.10

82 Parker S. et al., 'Shaping Up: A Whitehall For the Future', Institute for Government, 2010, p.105

83 For the details of the Local Government Act 2000, and the official role of scrutiny boards, please see: www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_2000022_en_1

in CW&C has largely developed its specific ways of working based on core responsibilities.

The CW&C Approach to Council Scrutiny

The scrutiny role in CW&C is led by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, comprising of 12 councillors. The main functions of the Committee are to 'consider call-ins' of executive decisions; 'review the performance of the council, the executive and its partners in relation to its policy objectives'; to question members of the executive about their decisions; and to 'question and gather evidence' from which to make recommendations. Scrutiny boards have two dedicated officers to help the members carry out their duties.

With this broad set of functions, the Committee has been creative in how it carries out its tasks. The Committee holds meetings in various locations as part of their 'Scrutiny on the Road' programme. When the Committee questioned the executive member for Adult Social Care and Health, for example, the meeting was held in a care home, where concerns from residents could be understood and considered.

The Committee has also developed Executive Question Time, to hold the leader and executive members to account on their decisions. As part of this quarterly meeting, the Committee actively invites local resident input, both through submitted questions and through an open audience.

The Committee has also used community forums to understand public concerns. In one instance an issue was raised by a community forum, regarding changes to school transport arrangements, which the Committee made recommendations on, with input from affected pupils, identifying suitable transport options, which the executive accepted.

The CW&C scrutiny function is commendable in many ways, with a forward thinking focus on creative ways of challenging executive decisions. Over 50% of respondents believe that the executive take on the advice of scrutiny boards, while 65% agree that the scrutiny boards have improved CW&C's performance.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been open and public facing in how it seeks to understand issues and how it challenges executive decisions. It has used various methods to engage and collaborate with local residents. However, it is constitutionally a reactive body, and its creativity is not being utilized in an on-going manner during the policy-making process.

Scrutiny boards, as devised by the LGA 2000, are an internal form of executive accountability; however, modern government also demands more external, public accountability. Accountability has been defined as:

*'A relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences'*⁸⁴

84 Bovens et al, 'Does Public Accountability Work? An assessment Tool', Public Administration, 86(1), 2008, p225

In local government, the council is the actor, and the local residents the forum. It is to the public which decision-makers must be accountable. Currently, public accountability is mainly exercised through the ballot box or through the media. These are reactive forms of accountability, with no immediate ability for the public to pass judgement. Certain on-line initiatives have been developed to extend accountability and make it more immediate, such as the posting of council boards' decisions and forward plans. However, these are still reactive measures that do not provide accountability to the vast majority of local residents.

A large amount of accountability is 'hard accountability' – redress, regulation, inspection and audit. 'Soft accountability', on the other hand, involves engagement and partnership working with decision-making.⁸⁵ It involves on-going persuasion and discussion on the part of decision-makers. Soft accountability ensures that decision-makers are brought together with those they are held accountable to discuss matters of public concern, and act and respond to public concerns in the development of decisions.

However, other than the scrutiny boards, few other institutions in the CW&C structure focus on soft accountability. While the executive ensure that their decisions, once reached, are in the public domain, discussions by PDBs are held in private, with opposition members acting as the only aspect of on-going accountability. This is true of most councils.

CW&C must explore the role that scrutiny boards should play in their structure. The council should also consider whether a proactive scrutiny is necessary with a PDB structure taking many of the proactive policy duties often found in other councils' scrutiny structures. Although proactive PDBs *and* scrutiny boards may cause duplication, it may be considered important to have a both a strong PDB working proactively with the executive and a proactive body which is independent of direct executive influence (scrutiny boards).

Lessons for better policy making

Proactive Accountability

Local decision-making should be open and accountable to the public at all stages.⁸⁶ However the LGA 2000 introduced a Westminster style cabinet form of governance that reduced the obligation for councils to make decisions publically. Council leaders can, under the LGA 2000 system, invest the majority of decision-making powers within their cabinets, and, through portfolio-holders, can develop policy on key decisions in private.

The LGA 2000 changes were designed to end the old committee system of local government which was considered, although far from universally, slow, bureaucratic and ineffective.⁸⁷ However, without due care, the positive strong leadership aspects of the LGA 2000 changes could be outweighed by the potential losses of democracy and accountability.⁸⁸

Commendably, CW&C has broken ranks with this aspect of the LGA 2000 system, to ensure that decision-making processes are more inclusive. However, more can still be done to ensure a stronger role for scrutiny boards, the body that arguably acts as an entry point for on-going public accountability. This can be done in a way which balances the concerns of those who favour the cabinet style system.

In addition to open decision-making through greater use of citizen engagement, scrutiny boards, as the institution developed to act as a check on executive

85 Centre for Public Scrutiny, 'Accountability Works!', 2009, p.25

86 Centre for Public Scrutiny, 'Accountability Works!', 2009, p.6-16

87 Baddeley, S., 'Political-Management Leadership', Institute of Local Government Studies, Birmingham, 2008, p.178

88 Morrison, J., 'Spin, smoke-filled rooms, and the decline of council reporting by local newspapers: the slow demise of town hall transparency', Kingston University, p.2-4

decision-making, should be central to a policy-making process. Good scrutiny invites public discourse and improves the evidence base of policy through independent evidence collection and report creation.

Scrutiny boards are free from vested interests, and are, theoretically, independent from executive control. When recognised and utilised, they are often considered a free consultancy within the policy-development process. Scrutiny boards usually boast independent officer support, with officers who have no duty to the executive.

Its position as an independent body, with a proportionate mixture of party members, ensures that scrutiny boards often attract external partners that would be wary of working with the executive. Evidence from the Centre for Public Scrutiny studies suggests that external groups want to work with scrutiny.⁸⁹

Scrutiny boards collect evidence and publish reports in the public domain. They present findings to the executive in full public view, and therefore force the executive to engage with a range of options that are publically known. The executive may reject a scrutiny board's findings, but, due to the public nature of the process, the executive is forced to justify their decisions regarding scrutiny advice.

This is potentially a more independent system than CW&C's PBDs, where debate is, to an extent, shaped by executive members on the boards, where decisions are made in private, and, therefore, where the advice given can be rejected by the executive with no recourse. The same system of policy advisory boards can be found in many councils, and this situation is not at all unique to CW&C. The challenge is to learn from innovative councils where policy advice is developed and presented in full public view.

The London Borough of Hackney provides an example of the positive role scrutiny boards can play in council engagement and policy-making. Scrutiny in Hackney is proactive in the policy development process; it is not there merely to be disruptive to the executive. Scrutiny boards work in conjunction, in an independent manner, with the executive in policy development. Scrutiny is seen as a useful function in the evidence collection stage. It is effective at getting people on-board and developing ideas based on ground level research. In Hackney, the evidence collection conducted by scrutiny board members is seen as an extension of the policy-making process.⁹⁰

Strengthening scrutiny's proactive role

Scrutiny must be allowed to work proactively with the PDBs and the cabinet at all stages to help improve and add value to policy ideas before final implantation.

Scrutiny is an important part of the accountability of the policy making process. In many councils scrutiny boards are also an ideal body to create evidence-based policy, while in CW&C the Scrutiny Committee has already proven the ability of scrutiny members to engage and open debate with the public. However, with the PDB system already in place, it does not seem necessary to use the scrutiny boards as engagement agencies and policy report producers in the CW&C model. The PDBs should instead learn from the scrutiny boards. Meetings should be open and forums should be used as an avenue to understand issues. While this is a departure from the current role of PDBs in CW&C, it is a crucial aspect to accountable decision-making, and a necessary one even in an advisory situation.

⁸⁹ Centre for Public Scrutiny, 'Accountability Works!', 2009, p.27

⁹⁰ Based on information gathered by Localis through interviews with a senior London Borough of Hackney Policy Analyst.

Even if a council implements a PDB system, experience from CW&C's structure suggests that scrutiny boards must be more than just a reactive body. It must be a strong branch of the council structure, providing an independent check on the cabinet. Scrutiny Committees in CW&C are beginning to take a strongly proactive role in decision-making, with, for example, the Community Select Committee taking a lead in considering the areas where public alcohol consumption should be banned.

To further strengthen the proactive aspects of the council's scrutiny, scrutiny committees should work collaboratively with PDBs in the policy development stage, helping policy-makers refine policy and raising issues with potential problems before policy is initiated. This involves much more communication between scrutiny and PDBs. Currently, over 50% of survey respondents did not agree that scrutiny and PDBs had on-going dialogue.

Ensuring scrutiny becomes firmly proactive requires a challenge to the member level institutionalised belief in scrutiny's reactive role in policy. Over three quarters of respondents believed that scrutiny should be separate from policy development. Experience of the possible strengths of proactive scrutiny is the best tool to prove that scrutiny boards do have a place in policy making. One survey respondent noted the value of scrutiny when it has flourished in CW&C, noting that 'Where this has happened [scrutiny board engagement with the executive and PDBs], there has been good stakeholder engagement and strong commitment politically'.

To further strengthen the role of scrutiny boards, CW&C should incentivise scrutiny roles through a parallel career structure. With both PDBs and scrutiny boards offering numerous opportunities for councillors to prove themselves and progress to cabinet roles, it is clear that the CW&C model provides opportunities for councillors to use non-executive policy-making roles as a proving ground. Yet, for members that are determined to act as a strong check on the executive, providing a solidified career progression that completely circumvents executive membership as an end goal is a necessity. Remuneration for Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - similar in value to the payments received by cabinet members – as well as a clear leading position for the Chairman, should be implemented.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister identified the exemplar of the spirit of the LGA (2000) reforms as being a council that has both strong leadership and strong scrutiny. They define such an example as '*the separation of powers model*'. Only 16% of councils as of 2003 fit such an exemplar, yet it is within the grasp of CW&C to be such a council.⁹¹ CW&C has committed to developing a strong leadership, a leadership that is strong throughout the entire body of council members. It must also continue to develop a strong scrutiny branch.

Recommendations for local government

- PDBS can learn from scrutiny boards in how to engage citizens
- Scrutiny boards should be given a proactive role in shaping and checking policy development
- Remuneration should be considered for the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to incentivise the role of scrutiny to members

⁹¹ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 'Implementing the 2000 Act with Respect to New Council Constitutions and the Ethical Framework: Baseline findings from a long-term evaluation', Local and Regional Government Research Programme, 2003

3. Conclusion

This report has based its recommendations on a system where decision-making power has been extended to many councillors – we determine this to be a positive step. Although this report has critically assessed the Policy Development Boards of CW&C, and found them lacking in certain aspects, we commend the council for being innovative in the policy-making structure, when so many other councils have been satisfied with the fairly insulated policy-making arrangements legislated by the LGA 2000.

We recognise that PDBs are a very important step towards creating modern policy processes in local government. The PDB method of developing policy is an excellent vehicle from which to extend policy-making, allowing for greater consultation and evidence collection in the policy-making process.

However, PDBs, if initiated in councils, must be given a strengthened role and strong internal framework. They must have clear leadership and the power to influence decisions. PDBs should not have to function along traditional departmental lines, and should be shaped to facilitate cross-cutting policy and a flexible environment.

The main recommendations we advise councils considering more open policy-making process are:

3.1 Strengthen consultation, customer-focus and public engagement

Understanding, and communicating with, customers is crucial to improving policy-making, regardless of internal policy-making structures. Councils must use consultation periods to identify key priorities; this allows councils to base their policy-making institutions on real citizen demand. To ensure a clear vision of what is prioritised locally, it is important to maintain a clear two-way communication flow between councils and their residents. Conversations with residents must be able to flow through to decision-makers, linking the ground-level to the decision-making process in an accountable manner. And also, to gain expert views on prioritised issues, councils should maintain close relationships with a range of external partners, creating new groupings of experts to tackle issues as they arise. Councils must concentrate on creating more avenues for stakeholders to get involved:

- Community forums should be able to suggest and shape policy initiatives
- Councils should learn from policy-making processes in Canada, Denmark and Scotland to focus on greater use of external partnerships in the policy-making process

We also believe that, going forward, more radical structural changes could further increase the focus of councillors on the demands of their residents.

Although these changes may be difficult changes to make, we recommend that councils consider these further options when developing strategies for a major extension in policy-making structures:

- PDBs could be refocused to operate along cross-cutting lines, based on thematic concerns that have been defined through ground-level research
- Cross-cutting portfolio holders would be a useful addition to the policy-making system. These portfolio holders could have a remit to support specific social groups, and could link theme based policy boards
- To aid outcomes based policy units, pooled budgets should be created for top-priority issues as identified by studying local demand

3.2 Improve internal relationships and gain officer buy-in

Understanding the customer, and focusing on their priorities, are the major demands of modern policy-making. By sharing an understanding of the long-term aims of policy, and policy-making structures, officers and members can both work more collaboratively to operationalise demanded services, and understand service users. Councils must improve internal relationships to ensure that officers and members are focused on the same strategic vision, and are primarily concerned with providing services as demanded by residents.

Officers are constrained by the vertical nature of accountability, however, this is as much a cultural problem as anything else. It is, to a large extent, up to elected members to help officers move past current inflexibilities. On-going discussion between leaders on the officer side and on the member side of any policy-delivery area is crucial. We recommend formalising senior member/officer meetings and making them frequent events. With more regular, considered communication between officers and members, with a shared vision, internal relationships can flourish. It is important to support the natural relationships that develop between officers and members through a commitment to dedicate spaces for officers and members to learn from each other.

However, as with any new structural changes, the role of PDBs needs to be made absolutely clear to officers. With growing officer/member communications, it is important that executive clearly defines the role of the PDBs and communicate with PDB members, so that officers understand the important role PDBs will have going-forward. Depending on the extent to which the PDB is to lead on policy development, councils should let the PDB Chair be the leader of the PDB. PDB Chairs should be supported in not allowing portfolio holders dominate the agenda of PDBs. Without the freedom to discuss ideas from all perspectives, PDBs will be less effective, this will also undermine their role in the eyes of council officers.

Finally, if officers and members are to work successfully in close teams it is crucial that their roles dove-tail each other as closely as possible. Therefore, PDBs and management need to be structured around the same functional areas. Without such a change, there is likely to be confusion between the demands of cross-cutting policy development units and the departmental policy-implantation units' ability to respond.

3.3 Strengthen internal and external communications

While there is often a strict distinction between the political and professional aspects of governance, both groups must clearly understand the blurred nature of where the political meets the managerial and seek to build upon this joint

arena, rather than shy away from it. Internal workshops between officers and members can help bring officer and member groups together to understand the value of the other position, while building shared ownership of key priorities. It is crucial that members and officers communicate with each other frequently, as politicians can improve policy options if they understand how officers formulate options, and officers can widen options if they know what politicians want.

Modern policy-making relies on strong channels of communication and a focus on collecting evidence to develop and support policy. The policy-making must change to allow for the study of demand to focus the requirements of policy. Policy ideas should not be initiated by townhall meetings, but rather through the issues brought up by local residents. To understand what policy should be prioritised, and the success of policy, measures of performance need to be developed that relate to the end-to-end experience of local residents using a service.

Policy-makers must also move beyond quasi-collaboration, to a situation of active citizen participation. This involves allowing citizens avenues to propose policy options and shape the policy dialogue.

This can be developed through:

- formalising existing community forums' communications into policy debates;
- strengthening bonds with external experts through board membership; and
- developing e-government initiatives

If PDBs are to become central to communicating evidence-based policy both upwards and downwards, it is important to consider how well boards are working internally. The effectiveness of a board is limited to how well the board communicates and shares ideas. Furthermore, research has shown that a clear role and purpose is crucial to the performance of a board. Monitoring the output of boards should be a crucial first step. There are certain tones of discussion (excessive giving of information rather than the suggestion of actions, for example) that point towards ineffective board workings and these should be seen as warning signs. Subtle efforts, especially while the boards are developing capacity, are important to board effectiveness. Coaches can build board camaraderie and can focus board direction, while social team-building exercises are important to strengthening a board team.

3.4 Support members and officers in strategic thinking

With an extension of decision-making personnel, combined with a commitment to developing more complex cross-cutting policies, the expertise of policy-makers becomes even more important. Councillors who are used to general party-line politics and community engagement may find themselves thrust into strategic-thinking situations, required to make decisions based on complex information and conflicting options. There are a range of recommendations that a council concerned about member expertise in policy-areas can take away from our findings.

Councillors new to policy making must build up strong relationships with officers, who are experts in their field. Once officers are engaged, they can offer 'real-life' expertise that no other sources of knowledge building can hope to match. Allied to that, and in conjunction with our other areas of recommendation, PDBs could gain greater officer support through a showing of confidence by the executive, and also with greater executive reinforcement of the PDBs' exact role and remit.

There are a range of support networks, and example training schemes that can provide direction for council expertise-building. CW&C have engaged in training for their members and officers, and we recommend that councils considering new policy-making structures carefully analyse their strengths and weaknesses, and work with agencies such as Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly the IDeA) to develop programmes to improve on perceived weak areas, something that CW&C have recently begun to do.

However, one lesson that has come up through comparative study with central government is that it is important to allow members sufficient incumbencies in certain roles. Councillors should receive support to develop their role expertise, and they should be allowed time to develop and learn. While it is important that PDB membership is not too secure, and therefore undemocratic, unnecessary reshuffles may damage the learning process. 'On-the-job-training', especially when links with officers are strong, are invaluable to creating strategic thinkers at the elected member level. A sense of security in their position also helps member decision-makers take a longer-term strategic view, as opposed to the short term populist approach that insecure incumbencies encourage.

Alongside this, councils initiating policy boards should consider inviting external experts onto the boards. External experts bring specialist knowledge, independence and creativity to policy boards. The benefits of external experts from a range of public, private and voluntary sector agencies have been proven to improve board performance through the use of Non-Executive Directors on Whitehall public sector boards.

3.5 Strengthen accountability

Finally, councils should consider how accountable their policy-making system is. Outward-facing policy-making requires a commitment to public engagement and accountability, even where councillors may rather pass decisions quickly through closed door methods. The public must be involved throughout policy development, and scrutiny boards, so often a reactive body, should be engaged throughout the policy development.

See figure 1 (on page 10) for a model of the ideal policy-making process constructed through the recommendations of this report.

Appendix

Appendix 1 Cross-cutting political roles



In several countries, cross-cutting ministers have been appointed to represent the interests of a particular citizen group, such as the children’s and disability ministers, who have responsibility for leading a government wide strategy for the citizen group in question. In Ireland, for example, ministers for particular citizen groups are supported by dedicated cross-cutting offices, and have responsibilities across several relevant departments:

Appendix 2

Survey Results

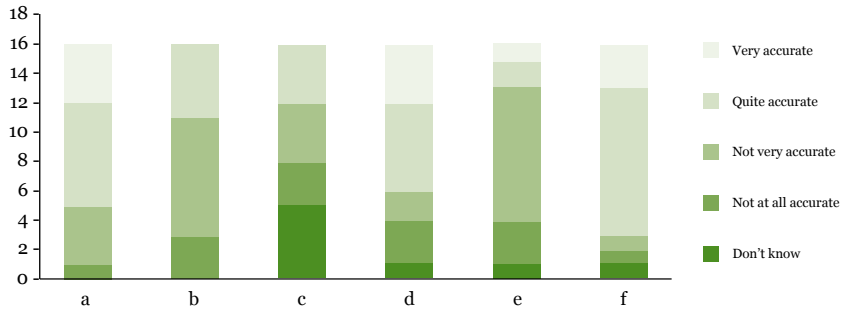
Survey on the policy making process in cheshire west and chester

Which directorate(s) do you work under?			
Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count	
Adult Social Care	8.3%	2	
Children and Young People	20.8%	5	
Environment/Area and community	41.7%	10	
Regeneration and Culture	29.2%	7	
Resources	20.8%	5	
		Answered question	28
		Skipped question	4

Please select the job title(s) which applies to you			
Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count	
PDB Chair	17.9%	5	
Member of PDB	60.7%	17	
Member of Scrutiny Board	14.3%	4	
Policy Manger of PDB	0.0%	0	
Executive Management	17.9%	5	
Other	7.1%	2	
		Answered question	28
		Skipped question	0

Please indicate the accuracy of these statement on the policy making process:						
Answer options	Very accurate	Quite accurate	Not very accurate	Not at all accurate	Don't know	Response count
a) There has been strong support to help members better understand the key issues	25%	43.8%	25%	6.3%	0%	16
b) The PDB policy making process is quite rigid	0%	31.3%	50%	18.8%	0%	16
c) The Executive team's policy making process is more informal the the PDB's	0%	25%	25%	18.8%	31.3%	16
d) There are other people or networks (beyond PDBs and executive management) within the council which have a large influence over policy formation	25%	37.5%	12.5%	18.8%	6.3%	16
e) Most policy ideas originate directly from the front-line and residents	6.3%	12.5%	56.3%	18.8%	6.3%	16
f) Most policy ideas are formed internally within the Council	18.8%	62.5%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	16
	Answered question					28
	Skipped question					0

Figure 9: Please indicate the accuracy of these statements on the policy making process

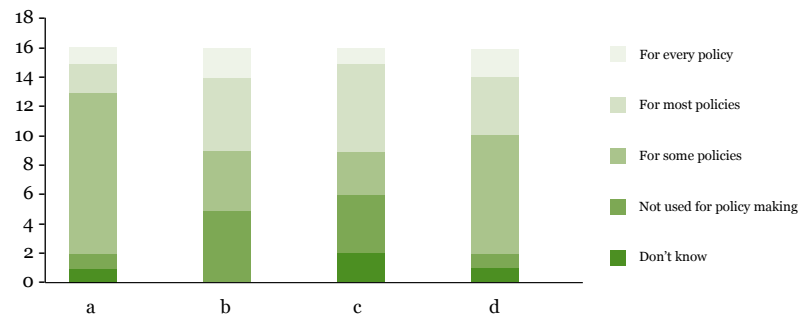


- a) There has been strong support to help members better understand the key issues
- b) The PDB policy making process is quite rigid
- c) The Executive team's policy making process is more informal than the PDB's
- d) There are other people or networks (beyond PDBs and executive management) within the council which have a large influence over policy formation
- e) Most policy ideas originate directly from the front-line and residents
- f) Most policy ideas are formed internally within the Council

Please indicate the frequency with which your team uses the following approaches to involve residents:

Answer Options	For every policy	For most policies	For some policies	Not used for policy making	Don't know	Response Count
a) Elected members feedback resident's demands	6.3%	12.5%	68.8%	6.3%	6.3%	16
b) Direct communications with residents are carried out	12.5%	31.3%	25%	31.3%	0%	16
c) Feedback is received from front-line staff on resident's needs	6.3%	37.5%	18.8%	25%	12.5%	16
d) You have a good knowledge of people's needs already	12.5%	25%	50%	6.3%	6.3%	16
	Answered question					16
	Skipped question					12

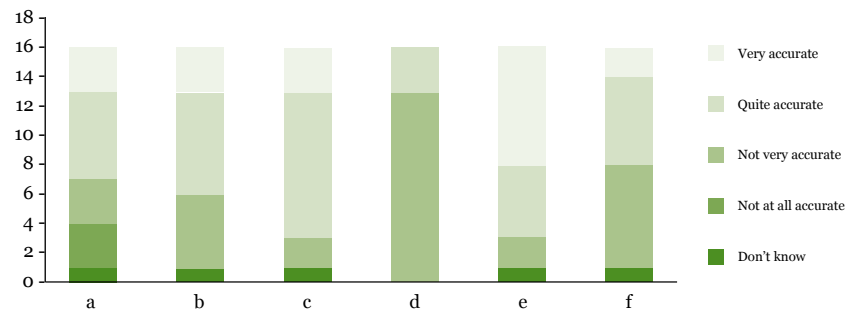
Figure 10: Please indicate the frequency with which your team uses the following approaches to involve residents in policy formation:



- a) Elected members feedback resident's demands
 b) Direct communications with residents are carried out
 c) Feedback is received from front-line staff on resident's needs
 d) You have a good knowledge of people's needs already

Please indicate how accurately the following statements describe how the third sector influences policy formation under you PDB/Portfolio:						
Answer options	Very accurate	Quite accurate	Not very accurate	Not at all accurate	Don't know	Respose count
a) We meet with third sector organisations regularly to influence and shape policy	18.8%	37.5%	18.8%	18.8%	6.3%	16
b) The third sector are a very important delivery partner and their influence on policy reflects that	18.8%	43.8%	31.3%	0%	6.3%	16
c) We are already aware of the needs of third sector organisations and are working hard to meet them	18.8%	62.5%	12.5%	0%	6.3%	16
d) The third sector is not relevant to our work	0%	0%	18.8%	81.3%	0%	16
e) Creating an environment for the third sector to thrive is vital for the success of my portfolio/ directorate	50%	31.3%	12.5%	0%	6.3%	16
f) Our policies are heavily influenced by the approaches taken in the third sector	12.5%	37.5%	43.8%	0%	6.3%	16
	Answered question					16
	Skipped question					12

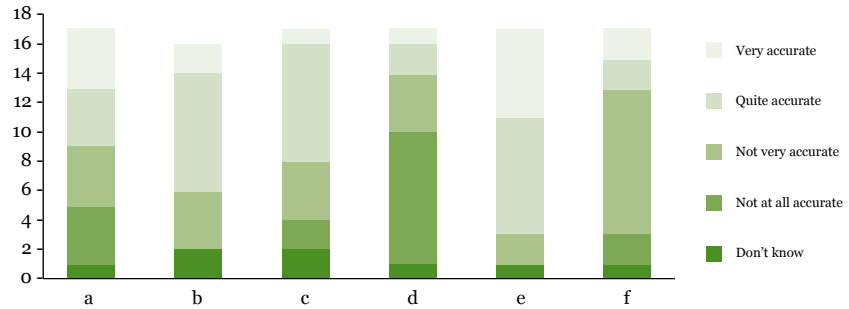
Figure 11: Please indicate how accurately these statements describe how the third sector influences policy formation under your PDB/Portfolio



- a) We meet with third sector organisations regularly to influence and shape policy
- b) The third sector are a very important delivery partner and their influence on policy reflects that
- c) We are already aware of the needs of third sector organisations and are working hard to meet them
- d) The third sector is not relevant to our work
- e) Creating an environment for the third sector to thrive is vital for the success of my portfolio/directorate
- f) Our policies are heavily influenced by the approaches taken in the third sector

Please indicate how accurately the following statements describe how the private sector influences policy formation under you PDB/Portfolio:						
Answer options	Very accurate	Quite accurate	Not very accurate	Not at all accurate	Don't know	Respose count
a) We meet with businesses regularly to influence and shape policy	23.5%	23.5%	23.5%	23.5%	5.9%	17
b) The private sector is a very important delivery partner and their influence on policy reflects that	12.5%	50%	23.5%	0%	12.5%	16
c) We are already aware of the needs of businesses and are working hard to meet them	5.9%	47.1%	23.5%	11.8%	11.8%	17
d) The private sector is not relevant to our work	5.9%	11.8%	23.5%	52.9%	5.9%	17
e) Creating an environment for business to thrive is vital for the success of my portfolio/ directorate	35.3%	47.1%	11.8%	0%	5.9%	17
f) Our policies are heavily influenced by the approaches taken by the private sector	11.8%	11.8%	58.8%	11.8%	5.9%	17
Answered question						17
Skipped question						11

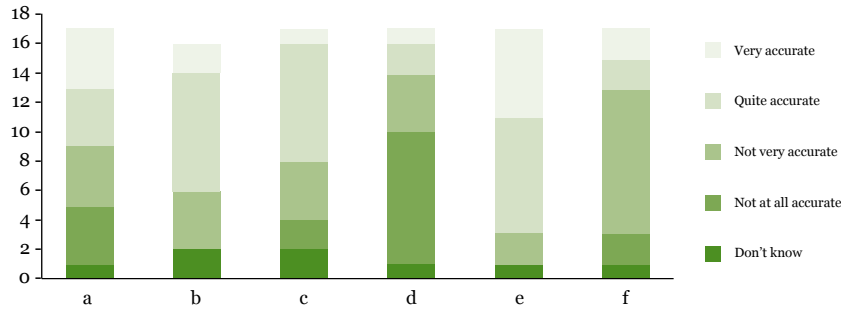
Figure 12: Please indicate how accurately the following statements describe how the private sector influences policy formation under you PDB/Portfolio:



- a) We meet with businesses regularly to influence and shape policy
- b) The private sector is a very important delivery partner and their influence on policy reflects that
- c) We are already aware of the needs of businesses and are working hard to meet them
- d) The private sector is not relevant to our work
- e) Creating an environment for business to thrive is vital for the success of my portfolio/directorate
- f) Our policies are heavily influenced by the approaches taken by the private sector

Please indicate how accurately the following statements describe how you work with other public sector bodies in the area:						
Answer options	Very accurate	Quite accurate	Not very accurate	Not at all accurate	Don't know	Response count
a) We try to work closely with other public bodies, but find it quite difficult at times	17.6%	52.9%	17.6%	5.9%	5.9%	17
b) We have no need to work with other public bodies in the area	0%	0%	17.6%	82.4%	0%	17
c) We have a very strong collaborative relationships with other public bodies	29.4%	47.1%	11.8%	11.8%	0%	17
d) We can learn a lot from how other public sector bodies operate locally	35.3%	41.2%	17.6%	0%	5.9%	17
	Answered question					17
	Skipped question					11

Figure 13: Please indicate how accurately the following statements describe how you work with other public sector bodies in the area:

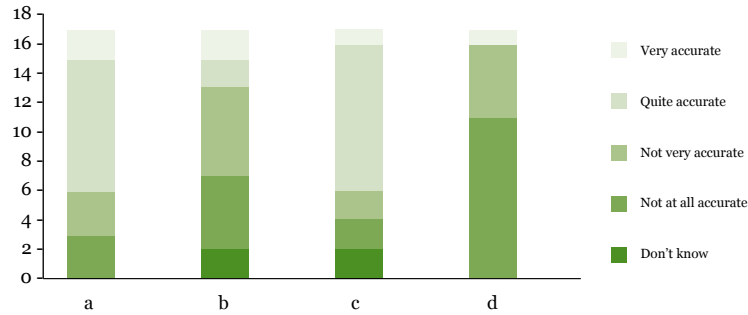


- a) We try to work closely with other public bodies, but find it quite difficult at times
- b) We have no need to work with other public bodies in the area
- c) We have a very strong collaborative relationships with other public bodies
- d) We can learn a lot from how other public sector bodies operate locally

Please indicate how accurately the following statements describe how you work with the rest of the local government community:

Answer options	Very accurate	Quite accurate	Not very accurate	Not at all accurate	Don't know	Respose count
a) We work closely with neighbouring councils on common issues	11.8%	52.9%	17.6%	17.6%	0%	17
b) We would like to work with neighbouring councils, but there are good reasons why we don't	11.8%	11.8%	35.3%	29.4%	11.8%	17
c) We frequently turn to other councils or local government bodies for policy ideas	5.9%	58.8%	11.8%	11.8%	11.8%	17
d) We do not believe there is any need for us to refer to neighbouring councils when addressing policy issues'	5.9%	0%	29.4%	64.7%	0%	17
Answered question						17
Skipped question						11

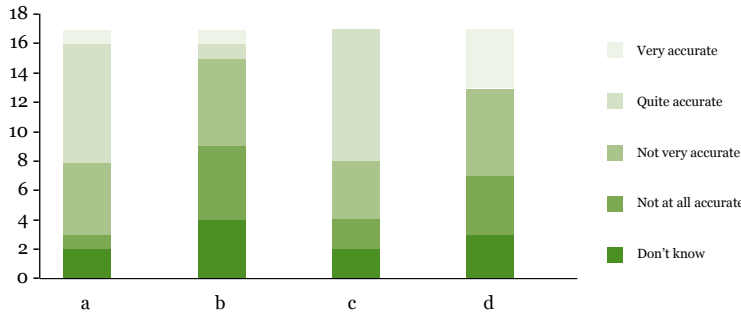
Figure 14: Please indicate how accurately the following statements describe how you work with the rest of the local government community:



- a) We work closely with neighbouring councils on common issues
- b) We would like to work with neighbouring councils, but there are good reasons why we don't
- c) We frequently turn to other councils or local government bodies for policy ideas
- d) We do not believe there is any need for us to refer to neighbouring councils when addressing policy issues'

Please indicate how accurately the following statements describe how you work with the regional tier:						
Answer options	Very accurate	Quite accurate	Not very accurate	Not at all accurate	Don't know	Response count
a) The regional tier have been a big asset in supporting our policies	5.9%	47.1%	29.4%	5.9%	11.8%	17
b) We would like to work with the regional tier, but there are good reasons why we don't	5.9%	5.9%	23.5%	41.2%	23.5%	17
c) We frequently turn to regional bodies for policy ideas and support	0%	52.9%	23.5%	11.8%	11.8%	17
d) The regional tier has sometimes contradicted policies that we have tried to implement	0%	23.5%	35.3%	23.5%	17.6%	17
					Answered question	17
					Skipped question	11

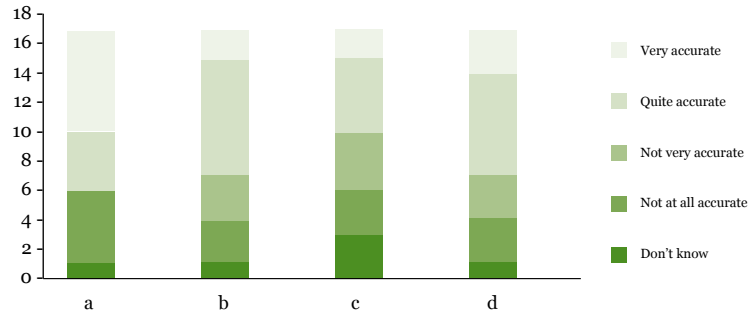
Figure 15: Please indicate how accurately the following statements describe how you work with the regional tier:



- a) The regional tier have been a big asset in supporting our policies
- b) We would like to work with the regional tier, but there are good reasons why we don't
- c) We frequently turn to regional bodies for policy ideas and support
- d) The regional tier has sometimes contradicted policies that we have tried to implement

Please indicate the accuracy of the following statements about how policy is implemented:						
Answer options	Very accurate	Quite accurate	Not very accurate	Not at all accurate	Don't know	Respose count
a) PDBs create the policies and the executive implements them	0%	41.2%	23.5%	29.4%	5.9%	17
b) PDBs and the executive both create policies	23.5%	35.3%	17.6%	17.6%	5.9%	17
c) The executive filter out PDB policies that are deemed not to work	11.8%	29.4%	23.5%	17.6%	17.6%	17
d) Ideas generated by PDBs are well supported through to fruition by the executive	17.6%	41.2%	17.6%	17.6%	5.9%	17
	Answered question					17
	Skipped question					11

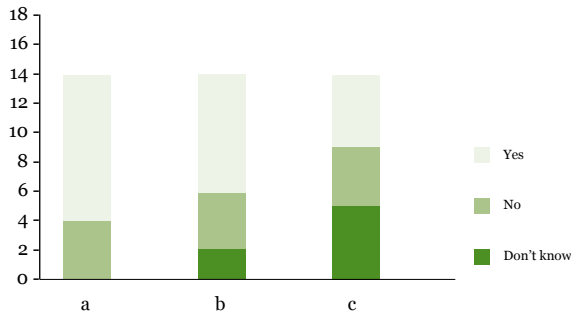
Figure 16: Please indicate the accuracy of the following statements about how policy is implemented:



- a) PDBs create the policies and the executive implements them
- b) PDBs and the executive both create policies
- c) The executive filter out PDB policies that are deemed not to work
- d) Ideas generated by PDBs are well supported through to fruition by the executive

Are the aims of Policy Development Boards achieved?				
Answer options	Yes	No	Don't know	Response count
a) Does the PDB structure increase member knowledge compared to the previous structure?	71.4%	28.6%	0%	14
b) Have policies been rationalised more efficiently thanks to PDBs?	57.1%	28.6%	14.3%	14
c) Have PDBs reduced political differences in favour of better policy making?	35.7%	28.6%	35.7%	14
	Answered question			14
	Skipped question			14

Figure 17: Are the aims of Policy Development Boards Achieved?:

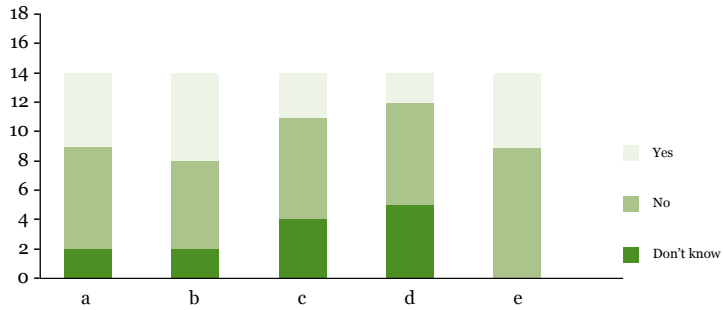


- a) Does the PDB structure increase member knowledge compared to the previous structure?
- b) Have policies been rationalised more efficiently thanks to PDBs?
- c) Have PDBs reduced political differences in favour of better policy making?

Is the current policy making process more efficient?				
Answer options	Yes	No	Don't know	Response count
a) Are ideas turned into policies faster than before?	28.6%	28.6%	42.9%	14
b) Has bureaucracy been reduced as a result of PDBs?	28.6%	28.6%	42.9%	14
c) Have blockages to policy making been reduced as a result of PDBs?	35.7%	35.7%	28.6%	14
d) Is the role of scrutiny more clear as a result of the current structure?	38.5%	38.5%	23.1%	13
	Answered question			14
	Skipped question			14

Have relationships improved?				
Answer options	Yes	No	Don't know	Response count
a) Have tensions between members and the executive reduced?	35.7%	50%	14.3%	14
b) Are members more engaged with strategic policy questions than before?	42.9%	42.9%	14.3%	14
c) Are members more engaged with residents than before?	21.4%	50%	28.6%	14
d) Are members more engaged with other external bodies than before?	14.3%	50%	35.7%	14
e) Do some people in the executive prefer not to engage with members at all?	35.7%	64.3%	0%	14
	Answered question			14
	Skipped question			14

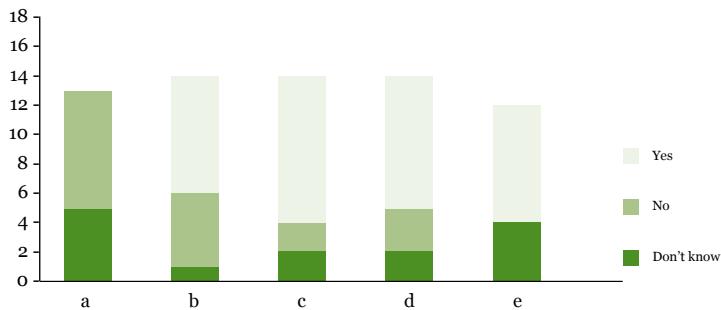
Figure 18: Have relationships improved?:



- a) Have tensions between members and the executive reduced?
- b) Are members more engaged with strategic policy questions than before?
- c) Are members more engaged with residents than before?
- d) Are members more engaged with other external bodies than before?
- e) Do some people in the executive prefer not to engage with members at all?

Does the current policy making process produce a strong environment for innovation?				
Answer options	Yes	No	Don't know	Response count
a) Is there sufficient time and space dedicated to blue sky thinking?	0%	76.9%	23.1%	13
b) Are members provided with sufficient information to develop successful policy?	57.1%	35.7%	7.1%	14
c) Is there flexibility in the current system to run the PDBs in ways that better achieve their purpose?	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%	14
d) Is there sufficient flexibility to address issues within PDB meetings which go beyond the defined priorities of the PDB?	64.3%	21.4%	14.3%	14
e) Do you often feel frustrated that good ideas are not turned into policy?	58.3%	41.7%	0%	12
	Answered question			14
	Skipped question			14

Figure 19: Does the current policy process produce a strong environment for innovation?:

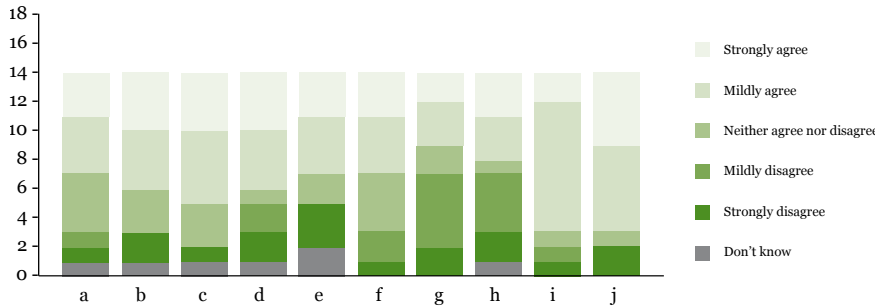


- a) Is there sufficient time and space dedicated to blue sky thinking?
- b) Are members provided with sufficient information to develop successful policy?
- c) Is there flexibility in the current system to run the PDBs in ways that better achieve their purpose?
- d) Is there sufficient flexibility to address issues within PDB meetings which go beyond the defined priorities of the PDB?
- e) Do you often feel frustrated that good ideas are not turned into policy?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the current system of policy making:							
Answer options	Strongly agree	Mildly Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mildly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Response count
a) PDBs take on board all of the advice of Scrutiny	21.4%	28.6%	28.6%	7.1%	7.1%	7.1%	14
b) The executive takes on board all of the advice of Scrutiny	28.6%	28.6%	21.4%	0%	14.3%	7.1%	14
c) Scrutiny has improved the performance of the Council	28.6%	35.7%	21.4%	0%	7.1%	7.1%	14
d) PDBs have led to better policies than under a traditional committee system	28.6%	28.6%	7.1%	14.3%	14.3%	7.1%	14
e) The current system has created more policies which cut across traditional departments	21.4%	28.6%	14.3%	21.4%	14.3%	0%	14
f) The current system has generated more policies which plan for the long term	21.4%	28.6%	28.6%	14.3%	7.1%	0%	14
g) The current system has created more policies which tackle the root cause of problems rather than the symptoms	14.3%	21.4%	14.3%	35.7%	14.3%	0%	14
h) The PDBs are completely unrestricted in the policies they can come up with	21.4%	21.4%	7.1%	21.4%	21.4%	7.1%	14
i) More policies are created through internal processes rather than through direct engagement with front line staff or residents	14.3%	64.3%	7.1%	7.1%	7.1%	0%	14

j) There are clear lines of accountability within the policy making structure	35.7%	42.9%	7.1%	0%	14.3%	0%	14	
Answered question								14
Skipped question								14

Figure 20: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about the current system of policy making:

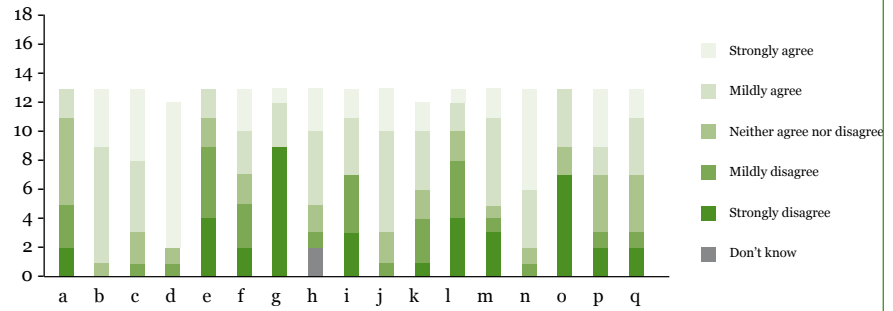


- a) PDBs take on board all of the advice of Scrutiny
- b) The executive takes on board all of the advice of Scrutiny
- c) Scrutiny has improved the performance of the Council
- d) PDBs have led to better policies than under a traditional committee system
- e) The current system has created more policies which cut across traditional departments
- f) The current system has generated more policies which plan for the long term
- g) The current system has created more policies which tackle the root cause of problems rather than the symptoms
- h) The PDBs are completely unrestricted in the policies they can come up with
- i) More policies are created through internal processes rather than through direct engagement with front line staff or residents
- j) There are clear lines of accountability within the policy making structure

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on the policy making process:							
Answer options	Strongly agree	Mildly Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mildly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Response count
a) Better policies are made outside of the public eye	0%	15.4%	46.2%	23.1%	15.4%	0%	13
b) It is better to have a consensual rather than adversarial policy making process	30.8%	61.5%	7.7%	0%	0%	0%	13
c) Consensual policy making allows more difficult decisions to be made (eg tough financial decisions)	38.5%	38.5%	15.4%	7.7%	0%	0%	13
d) PDBs should be representative of all political parties	83.3%	0%	8.3%	8.3%	0%	0%	12
e) It is more effective to create policy in discrete units or departments	0%	15.4%	15.4%	38.5%	30.8%	0%	13
f) PDBs should be the primary policy making body within the council	23.1%	23.1%	15.4%	23.1%	15.4%	0%	13
g) With PDBs, the role of full council is negated	7.7%	0%	0%	23.1%	69.2%	0%	13
h) Some members would be better suited to 'community leadership' roles rather than PDBs	23.1%	38.5%	15.4%	0%	7.7%	15.4%	13
i) Quarterly PDB meetings are regular enough	15.4%	30.8%	0%	30.8%	23.1%	0%	13
j) The more members that are involved in policy making the better	23.1%	53.8%	15.4%	7.7%	0%	0%	13

k) Ideas generated by by PDBs are strongly supported through to fruition	16.7%	33.3%	15.4%	25%	8.3%	0%	12	
l) There is sufficient time and space dedicated to innovation	7.7%	15.4%	15.4%	30.8%	30.8%	0%	13	
m) Members are provided with appropriate support from officers to develop policy	15.4%	46.2%	7.7%	7.7%	23.1%	0%	13	
n) Collating evidence is the most important first step for policy development	53.8%	30.8%	7.7%	7.7%	0%	0%	13	
o) The vision of the Council should be largely set by the Leader and Chief Executive	0%	30.8%	15.4%	0%	53.8%	0%	13	
p) Informal discussions about policy are more effective than formal procedures	30.8%	15.4%	30.8%	7.7%	15.4%	0%	13	
q) Scrutiny needs to be more closely engrained into the policy making process	15.4%	30.8%	30.8%	7.7%	15.4%	0%	13	
	Answered question							13
	Skipped question							15

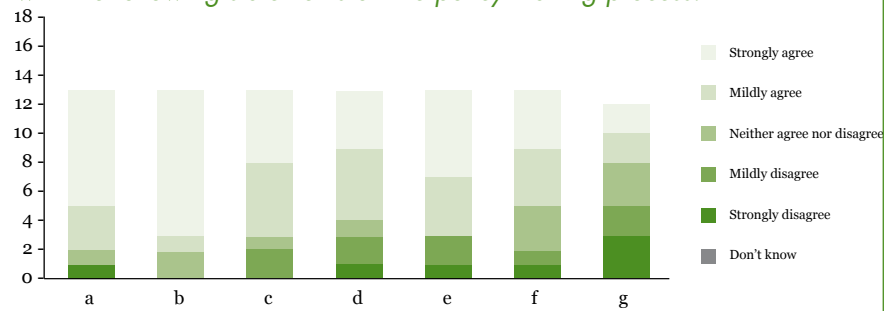
Figure 21: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on the policy making process:



- a) Better policies are made outside of the public eye
- b) It is better to have a consensual rather than adversarial policy making process
- c) Consensual policy making allows more difficult decisions to be made (eg tough financial decisions)
- d) PDBs should be representative of all political parties
- e) It is more effective to create policy in discrete units or departments
- f) PDBs should be the primary policy making body within the council
- g) With PDBs, the role of full council is negated
- h) Some members would be better suited to 'community leadership' roles rather than PDBs
- i) Quarterly PDB meetings are regular enough
- j) The more members that are involved in policy making the better
- k) Ideas generated by by PDBs are strongly supported through to fruition
- l) There is sufficient time and space dedicated to innovation
- m) Members are provided with appropriate support from officers to develop policy
- n) Collating evidence is the most important first step for policy development
- o) The vision of the Council should be largely set by the Leader and Chief Executive
- p) Informal discussions about policy are more effective than formal procedures
- q) Scrutiny needs to be more closely engrained into the policy making process

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on the policy making process:							
Answer options	Strongly agree	Mildly Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mildly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Response count
a) It is the role of the PDB Chair to provide leadership of the PDB	61.5%	23.1%	7.7%	0%	7.7%	0%	13
b) It is the role of the PDB policy manager to provide the necessary information to PDBs	76.9%	7.7%	15.4%	0%	0%	0%	13
c) It is the role of the PDB policy manager to ensure that the PDBs have a strong voice with the executive	38.5%	38.5%	7.7%	15.4%	0%	0%	13
d) The PDB should have equal weighting with the executive in terms of policy formation	30.8%	38.5%	7.7%	15.4%	7.7%	0%	13
e) The scrutiny team should be separate from policy development	46.2%	30.8%	0%	15.4%	7.7%	0%	13
f) The scrutiny team should have more power to force policy teams to address certain issues	30.8%	30.8%	23.1%	7.7%	7.7%	0%	13
g) PDBs should create policy independently of the executive	16.7%	16.7%	25%	16.7%	25%	0%	12
						Answered question	13
						Skipped question	15

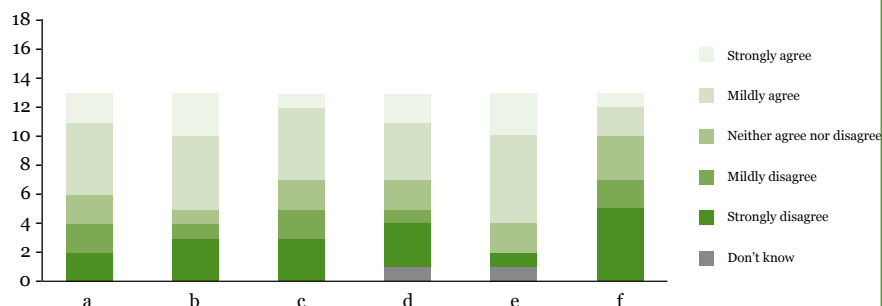
Figure 22: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on the policy making process:



- a) It is the role of the PDB Chair to provide leadership of the PDB
- b) It is the role of the PDB policy manager to provide the necessary information to PDBs
- c) It is the role of the PDB policy manager to ensure that the PDBs have a strong voice with the executive
- d) The PDB should have equal weighting with the executive in terms of policy formation
- e) The scrutiny team should be separate from policy development
- f) The scrutiny team should have more power to force policy teams to address certain issues
- g) PDBs should create policy independently of the executive

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on the relationship between PDBs, the executive and scrutiny							
Answer options	Strongly agree	Mildly Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mildly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Response count
a) Ideas generated by PDBs are well supported through to fruition by the executive	15.4%	38.5%	15.4%	15.4%	15.4%	0%	13
b) PDBs are taken very seriously by the executive	23.1%	38.5%	7.7%	7.7%	23.1%	0%	13
c) Policy Managers dedicate plenty of time to the work of PDBs	7.7%	38.5%	15.4%	15.4%	23.1%	0%	13
d) PDBs regularly report to the executive	15.4%	30.8%	15.4%	7.7%	23.1%	7.7%	13
e) There is a very good relationship between the executive and PDBs?	23.1%	46.2%	15.4%	0%	7.7%	7.7%	13
f) There is an ongoing dialogue between scrutiny and PDBs	7.7%	15.4%	23.1%	15.4%	38.5%	0%	13
	Answered question						13
	Skipped question						15

Figure 23: Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements on the relationship between PDBs, the executive and scrutiny

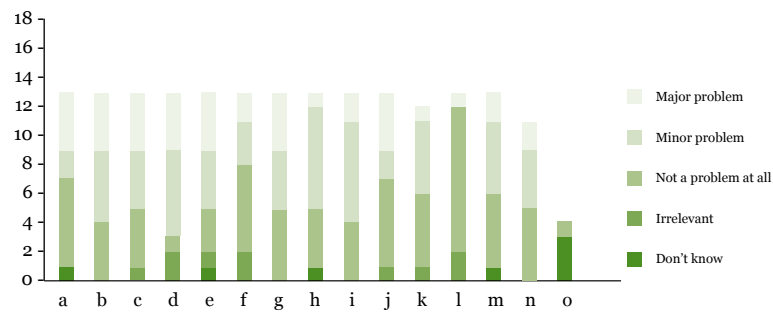


- a) Ideas generated by PDBs are well supported through to fruition by the executive
- b) PDBs are taken very seriously by the executive
- c) Policy Managers dedicate plenty of time to the work of PDBs
- d) PDBs regularly report to the executive
- e) There is a very good relationship between the executive and PDBs?
- f) There is an ongoing dialogue between scrutiny and PDBs

Please indicate what you see as the biggest challenges for PDBs going forward:						
Answer options	Major problem	Minor problem	Not a problem at all	Irrelevant	Don't know	Response count
a) The complexity of the policy issues leading to greater confusion over accountability	30.8%	15.4%	46.2%	0%	7.7%	13
b) The ability of members to engage with large strategic issues	30.8%	38.5%	30.8%	0%	0%	13
c) The executive not taking PDBs seriously	30.8%	30.8%	30.8%	7.7%	0%	13
d) The lack of experience of members	30.8%	46.2%	7.7%	15.4%	0%	13
e) Internal competition for resources	30.8%	30.8%	23.1%	7.7%	7.7%	13
f) The ability to learn from external bodies	15.4%	23.1%	46.2%	15.4%	0%	13

g) Joining up policy initiatives with other PDBs	30.8%	30.8%	38.5%	0%	0%	13
h) Duplication with other PDBs	7.7%	53.8%	30.8%	0%	7.7%	13
i) Internal communication issues	15.4%	53.8%	30.8%	0%	0%	13
j) A potential loss of momentum and enthusiasm	30.8%	15.4%	46.2%	7.7%	0%	13
k) Formality of PDB structure and process	8.3%	41.7%	41.7%	8.3%	0%	12
l) Old members leaving and new members coming in	7.7%	0%	76.9%	15.4%	0%	13
m) Confused lines of accountability	15.4%	38.5%	38.5%	0%	7.7%	13
n) The isolation of scrutiny	18.2%	30.8%	45.5%	0%	0%	11
o) Other	0%	0%	25%	0%	75%	4
	Answered question					13
	Skipped question					15

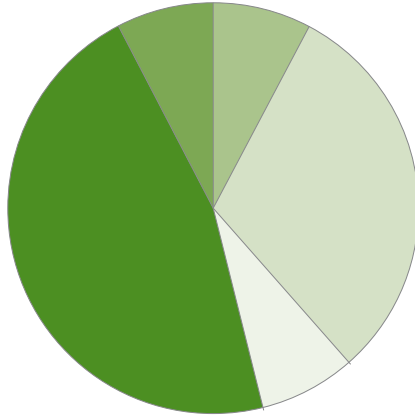
Figure 23: Please indicate what you see as the biggest challenges for PDBs going forward



- a) The complexity of the policy issues leading to greater confusion over accountability
- b) The ability of members to engage with large strategic issues
- c) The executive not taking PDBs seriously
- d) The lack of experience of members
- e) Internal competition for resources
- f) The ability to learn from external bodies
- g) Joining up policy initiatives with other PDBs
- h) Duplication with other PDBs
- i) Internal communication issues
- j) A potential loss of momentum and enthusiasm
- k) Formality of PDB structure and process
- l) Old members leaving and new members coming in
- m) Confused lines of accountability
- n) The isolation of scrutiny
- o) Other

On balance, please indicate which of the following statements best describes what you think of the current policy making process		
Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
The policy making process is excellent, and I wouldn't change anything	7.7%	1
The policy making process is excellent, but I would make a few minor changes to some things	30.8%	4
The policy making process is excellent in some respects, and awful in others	7.7%	1
The policy making process is ok, but is not extraordinary and many things could be done better	46.2%	6
The policy making process is not very good, I would do most things differently	0.0%	0
The policy aking process is a disaster, we need to completely rethink how we approach policy	7.7%	1
	Answered question	13
	Skipped question	15

Figure 24: On balance, please indicate which of the following statements best describes what you think of the current policy making process



- The policy making process is excellent, and I wouldn't change anything
- The policy making process is excellent, but I would make a few minor changes to some things
- The policy making process is excellent in some respects, and awful in others
- The policy making process is ok, but is not extraordinary and many things could be done better
- The policy aking process is a disaster, we need to completely rethink how we approach policy



In 2000 the government set out a vision for more customer-focused, inclusive, and evidence-based policy in central government in the 'Modernising Government' white paper.

But at the same time Whitehall imposed on local government a system of governance which concentrated power and disincentivised public decision-making in local government, through the Local Government Act 2000.

In this report, we discuss the intricacies and virtues of customer-focused policy-making, and how it applies to local government. We based our findings on an innovative council, Cheshire West and Chester, who have developed a system of decision-making that disperses power from the executive to the full council, using policy-development boards.

With a forward by Simon Baddeley, this report explores the shortcomings councils face in their approaches to communications, partnerships, and accountability, and offer practical solutions that all councils can learn from to fine tune their policy-making processes.



www.localis.org.uk