

Key Developments in English Local Government

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Gerry Stoker

Some decades ago it would have been difficult to give a lecture on key developments in English local government because nothing much happened to it. But starting with a major reorganization in the 1970s it is possible to say that English local government has been on a 'roller coaster ride' of change. And one big change is that it is now only possible to talk of English local government as within the UK local government issues are matters for the devolved assemblies and administration in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As a result policy and developments in England and the other constituent parts of UK have diverged somewhat. So this lecture deals with English local government which in any case is fair enough as England contains over 80 per cent of the population of the UK. And I am English and I live in England!

I open the lecture with a basic description of the English local government system. The key messages here are that it is a system that contains by European standards relatively large local municipalities, has officials whose technical and managerial skills are of a very high quality and has a combined spending capacity equivalent to over 10 per cent of the GDP of England. Despite these strengths the local government system remains subject to a great deal of central government inspired oversight and intervention, it raises only a quarter of its own revenues. Crucially the system is perceived as lacking sufficient

governing capacity and prone to failure or underachievement in the delivery of quality public services.

In part because of its perceived weaknesses it has been the focus of a variety of reform measures. The lecture examines three of these in more detail and considers the evidence about whether the reforms have worked. First I examine attempts to enhance the political leadership in local government. Second I review the attempt to improving the performance of service delivery. Third I reflect on the attempt to establish more effective 'joining up' and partnership at the local level.

The final section of the lecture outlines the latest debates and the next stage of reforms.

The roller coaster ride for English local government looks set to continue.

1. Local government in England

To establish the basic features of local government in England I will draw on David Wilson and Chris Game's excellent introductory text- *Local Government in the UK*- which is out in its fourth edition this year. So first what is local government? They provide a useful basic definition of English local government

- A form of geographical and political decentralization,
- in which directly elected councils,
- created by and subordinate to Parliament,
- have partial autonomy
- to provide a wide variety of services
- through various direct and indirect means,
- funded in part by local taxation.

The system, as noted in my introduction, has been subject to extensive reorganization and amalgamations as a result individual English local authority units cover a wide population area compared to most other European systems. The average population coverage of local government units in France, for example, is 1,650. The systems of Austria, Spain, Germany and Italy all have a local council population average of less than 10,000 and all the major European systems have an average population per municipality of less than 50,000. A quick look at Exhibit 1.2 reveals that the scale of English local

government has grown under the impact of various structural reorganizations and the current structures has authorities that serve on average 121,000 people and makes for a system that is out of kilter with that elsewhere in Europe.

Exhibit 1.1 The growing scale of English local government

| | Before 1974/75 | 1974/75- 1996/98 | Current Structure |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| England | | | |
| No. of councils | 1,246 | c. 410 | 388 |
| Av. population per council | 37,000 | 113,000 | 121,000 |

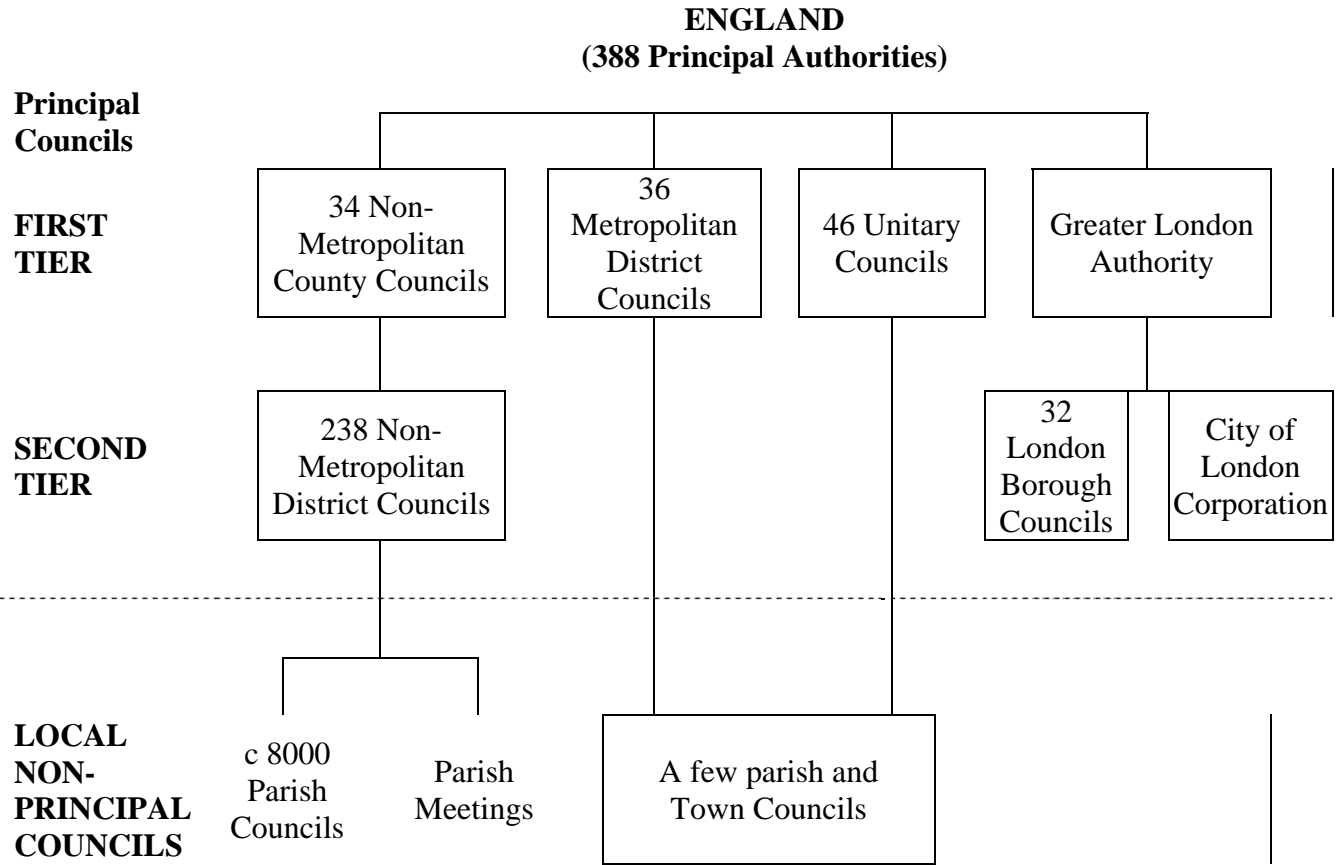
Source: Adapted from Wilson and Game, Local Government in the UK (4th Edition)

One interesting new development in the structure of English local government has been the creation of a local government body with a broader and strategic role, The Greater London Authority (GLA). At the head of this body that serves a population in London of over 7 million (Yes I know small by Chinese standards!) is a directly elected mayor. A separately elected assembly acts as a counter weight to the mayor's powers. The GLA's main responsibilities are exercised through 4 functional bodies and deal with transport, police, emergency services and planning and economic development. The first mayor Ken Livingstone has been re-elected once and as created a prominent role for himself. Judgements differ as to the performance of the mayor but after a difficult start he appears to have become more effective at exploiting his mayoral position. For example, the success of Olympic bid partly depended on Livingstone's influence and charisma, and his ability to be an effective propagandist. The introduction of the congestion charge and a substantial injection of funding into better public transport and rerouting of buses reflect

Livingstone's political legitimacy and focus. Powers of appointment to various boards and bodies are critical to the mayor, but in addition at the core of the mayor's power the authority, budget control, the influence of his office, and the direct relationship with the chief bureaucrats. The lobbying capacity of the mayor and the GLA is considerable. The perception of success that surrounds Ken Livingstone has led to a campaign to give him more powers and outline proposals from the Government to do so have been unveiled in 2006. Moreover there are moves to establish elements of similar 'city region' capacity in other metropolitan areas of England.

The basic structure of English local government is laid out in Exhibit 1.2. The first tier of authorities (leaving aside the GLA) has a wide range of functions including education, welfare, economic development, planning. The London boroughs, although shown as second tier authorities, have in the main the same functions as first tier authorities and large budgets comparable to those in the first tier. The second tier outside London have smaller budgets and fewer powers. The parish councils have smaller budgets still, very few powers but provide an important tier of for consultation and public involvement. Beyond these formal government bodies there are vast array of joint boards, quasi-government bodies and special agencies that add to the complexity of the local governance system.

Exhibit 1.3 Elected local government in England, 2005



Source: Adapted from Wilson and Game, Local Government in the UK (4th Edition)

It is possible following again Wilson and Game to classify what English local government does under four main headings

1. **Need services** – e.g. education, personal social services, housing benefit.

Services provided for all, regardless of means, and which therefore contribute to the redistribution of resources within the community.

2. **Protective services** – e.g. policing and community safety, fire and rescue, emergency planning.

Services provided for the security of people, to national guidelines. Access to them cannot be restricted, and use by one person does not affect availability to others.

3. **Amenity services** – e.g. highways, street cleansing, planning, parks and open spaces, environmental health, refuse disposal, consumer protection, economic development.

Services provided largely to locally determined standards to meet the needs of each local community.

4. **Facility services** – e.g. housing, libraries, museums and art galleries, recreational centres, refuse collection, cemeteries and crematoria.

Services for people to draw on if they wish, sometimes in competition with private sector provision.

The bulk of the budgets in English local government go on ‘needs’ services, accounting for over half of all spending at the local level. Exhibit 1.3 provides a rough breakdown.

Exhibit 1.3 Local authority spending, England 2003/04 – current vs. capital

| | Current | Capital | TOTAL | |
|---|----------------|----------------|------------------------|----------|
| | % | % | GBP billion | % |
| Education | 35 | 23 | 37.8 | 34 |
| Social Services | 19 | 2 | 18.8 | 17 |
| Housing (excl. Housing Revenue Account) | 10 | 28 | 12.9 | 17 |
| Police and courts | 10 | 5 | 10.9 | 10 |
| Local environmental services (LES)* | 9 | 16 | 9.2 | 8 |
| Highways and transport | 7 | 21 | 9.1 | 8 |
| Culture, sports and recreation | 4 | 4 | 4.3 | 4 |
| Fire | 2 | 1 | 2.0 | 2 |
| Central and other services | 6 | 1 | 6.2 | 6 |
| TOTAL (GBP billion) | 98.9 | 12.3 | 111.2 | |

Note: * LES include refuse collection and disposal, environmental health, planning, economic development, etc.

Source: Adapted from Wilson and Game, *Local Government in the UK (4th Edition)*

Only a quarter of this expenditure is covered by money raised and controlled locally by way of what is basically a property tax. The rest comes from a business rate (raised on the property of businesses) that is raised locally but distributed nationally according to an assessment of needs and resources. A further range of both block and special grants are provided by national government out of national taxation in order to underwrite the spending of local authorities. This reliance on non-local sources of finance is a major tension in the existing system.

What is clear is that local government in England has a number of important roles. It is involved in your life from birth to death. It employs over 2 million people in over 700 different functions. It is responsible for a quarter of all government expenditure. It also

has a vital role in coordinating the action of other bodies and citizens in localities. In the next three sections of this lecture I will examine the attempt to establish more effective internal management in local authorities, the drive to improve service delivery and the search for better forms of partnership. These have been the great themes of the reform efforts of the last decade or so. The question to be addressed in each is whether the reforms have worked.

2. The search for more effective leadership

The clear assumption in the English context is that leadership makes a difference. A lot of effort was made from the 1970s to develop a clearer and stronger capacity for managerial leadership. Local authorities were encouraged to appoint a clear top permanent official- usually called the chief executive- and to appoint a series of executive directors to form a tight managerial team around that executive. At a lower level service heads were recommended to be put in place for each key function so that they could oversee the day-to-day operation of services and programmes. There has been a great increase in the level of managerial training has occurred and a lot of effort has been put into providing managers with guidelines and examples of best practice.

The push to make more streamlined and focused the political leadership of authorities came to the fore as an issue of debate and discussion in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Eventually in a change was mandated by legislation (The Local Government Act 2000) for all larger municipalities in England (those with a population over 85,000). All authorities were required to provide a separate political executive. Those authorities that served populations of less than 85,000 were allowed to keep their existing system of committee-based governance and were labeled as alternative arrangements authorities. All of the more substantial high spending parts of English local government were caught within the orbit of the Act.

The overwhelming majority of authorities (all but 3 per cent) that had to change adopted the leader-cabinet form that allowed for a separate cabinet in which political executive powers or decision-making were to be based and for that cabinet to be headed by a leader. The cabinet in turn was expected to work closely with an executive group of elite officials and managers.

However the Act also allowed for a more radical institutional option for establishing leadership, namely the prospect of providing for a separately elected mayor supported by a cabinet serving at the will of the mayor (known as the mayor-cabinet or mayoral system). The mayor though shares executive functions with appointed officials and the system could best be characterized as a weak version of the mayoral form of governance. Under England's mayor and cabinet system alongside the directly elected mayor a wider group of councillors is also elected to the council. From that group, the mayor asks a small number of councillors to serve her or him in a cabinet and to take on the leadership of the local authority. These cabinet members can be dismissed on the decision of the mayor. The mayor, unlike in some other countries, does not have direct sway over the administration of the council which remains independently headed by a non-political official, usually called the chief executive, appointed by the whole of the council. Crucially, however, executive authority for making day-to-day decisions, within a policy framework and budget set by the council, remains ultimately in the hands of the mayor. This constitutional factor gives the mayor the capacity for considerable influence. Moreover both the policy framework and budget are substantially driven by the mayor, although approved by the wider elected council.

In the leader-cabinet form the position is more complicated. The strongest formal contrast with the mayoral model is with political executive power being given to a collective cabinet rather a single person. The cabinet can be chosen by the council or the council can restrict itself to choosing the leader, allowing the leader to then choose the cabinet members. Formally, all serve at the will of the council. However under this system distinctive and separate decision making powers can be given to the leader and individual cabinet members. Broadly the distinction between the leader-cabinet and mayor-cabinet model rests on the location of political executive powers, in the latter it is with the directly elected mayor that formal and informal authority resides and in the former case the emphasis ultimately is on the collective responsibility of the cabinet.

As noted earlier that collective form of decision making proved far more attractive than the mayoral model to the bulk of existing councillors and as a result most local authorities voted to adopt the cabinet leader form. Over 4 out of 5 councils went for the model. Only a dozen authorities adopted the mayor cabinet model

Yet using evidence from our research at Manchester University (www.elgnce.org.uk) we can show that after three years of operation the introduction of mayors is viewed in a more positive light than the move to the leader-cabinet system. Among insiders - councillors, officers and partners within the local system or with a close connection to it - the assessment of mayoral authorities is positive.

Exhibit 2.1 indicates that officers, councillors and stakeholders in mayoral authorities are much more satisfied with the new system than their counterparts in other management arrangement authorities. Overall the mayoral system gets over two positive judgements for every negative one from these insiders. In non-mayoral authorities positive assessments are virtually matched by negative ones.

Exhibit 2.1: Views of executive arrangements by non-mayoral and mayoral authorities – combined sample

| | Non-Mayors | Mayors |
|--|------------|--------|
| The new system is a significant improvement | 11 | 24 |
| The new system is to some extent an improvement | 29 | 34 |
| The new system has made little difference | 10 | 3 |
| The new system has some disadvantages | 18 | 12 |
| Introducing the new system was a retrograde step | 16 | 13 |
| No experience of the past system/don't know | 17 | 14 |
| (base) | 1,376 | 146 |

Kendall's tau b
 p. < .001

Exhibit 2.2 shows that judged against a range of more detailed performance criteria the mayoral authorities perform better than the other authorities. In particular mayoral authorities stand out in terms of the qualities of urban leadership identified earlier in the paper. They are more visible and prominent (offering stronger, more visible leadership, quicker decisions), outward-looking (public more involved although form a weak base, better relations with partners) and open (easier for women and ethnic minorities to be involved) and less partisan (domination by parties of decision-making seen as less strong).

Exhibit 2.2: Detailed assessment of different executive arrangements

| <i>Agree/strongly agree that...</i> | Leader-cabinet% | Mayor % | Base | Statistical significance |
|---|-----------------|---------|------|--------------------------|
| Decision-making is quicker | 45 | 61 | 1464 | ** |
| The role of leader has become stronger | 68 | 79 | 1474 | *** |
| The leader of the council has a higher public profile | 59 | 82 | 1478 | *** |
| It is easy to find out who has made specific decisions | 40 | 48 | 1477 | ** |
| The public is more involved in decision-making | 15 | 30 | 1482 | *** |
| The council is better at dealing with cross-cutting issues | 38 | 48 | 1481 | ** |
| The council's relations with partners has improved | 43 | 57 | 1456 | *** |
| It is easier to find out about council policy | 49 | 59 | 1503 | * |
| Backbench members are more engaged | 10 | 12 | 1509 | n/s |
| Political parties dominate decision-making | 47 | 29 | 1504 | *** |
| It is easier for women to become involved in council business | 22 | 34 | 1501 | *** |
| It is easier for ethnic minorities to become involved in council business | 19 | 34 | 1495 | *** |
| Issues of ethical conduct have a higher profile | 40 | 43 | 1491 | n/s |

Kendall's tau b

n/s= non significant difference, *=p. < .05, **=p.<.01, ***=p. <. 001

Mayoral authorities judged by several of the answers in Exhibit 2.2 appear in the opinion of insiders to be more effective at outward-looking functions, both in terms of dealing with cross-cutting issues and more particularly improving relations with partners. Our extensive interviews and wider qualitative work give further support to the sense that mayoral authorities are seen as offering a successful governance model that is outward facing. All the mayoral authorities reported speedier decision making and that the targeting of resources on priority areas was facilitated by the mayoral system. A perception of successful partnership work was shared in all the mayoral authorities. One

mayor summed up the relationship with partners by saying ‘I have no power just influence – they take the calls because I have the mandate’.

Associated with this were positive views in the mayoral authorities about the extent of transparency of decision making. One chief officer described this by saying ‘the community is aware of what the mayor is doing’. There is a sense of openness about mayoral authorities that comes through in the finding reported in Exhibit 2.2 that when mayoral authorities are compared to others nearly twice as many insiders think that it is easier for the public to find out about decisions. In addition although there is still some way to go it appears that mayoral authorities are open to the engagement of women and ethnic minorities. Finally mayoral authorities get credit for being seen as less dominated by partisan politics than other systems. Our findings suggests that among insiders only 3 out of 10 see mayoral authorities as dominated by party politics whereas 5 out of 10 make that judgement about non-mayoral authorities. Our interviews confirm a picture in which in mayoral authorities less time is spent by mayors in sustaining party politics and that most mayors have made a concerted effort to place themselves beyond partisan politics to a degree.

So far I have given you some evidence to suggest that mayors may be providing a more effective form of political leadership. But now I want you to think why that might be.

Plainly not all mayors are as successful as each other and not all will display the qualities of urban leadership that have been identified as perhaps those most appropriate to the demands of the 21st century. Context factors may undermine their efforts or a lack of

skills may make them unwilling or unable to deliver that form of leadership. Moreover some leaders in the leader cabinet model will display the characteristics of the leadership style using the context and their capabilities to their advantage. However it is one thing to concede that in any particular case leadership style is combination of structural and contingent factors and another to argue as some appear to come close to that in the end constitutional form does not matter or is in some way subservient to deeper institutional processes unavailable to rational manipulation.

The position I take is that constitutional change can work by giving players a new set of constraints and incentives to steer their behaviour. In order to develop our analysis we identify two institutional factors affecting leaders: the constraints on their decision-making authority and their relationship with their followers. Exhibits 2.3 and 2.4 contrast the position of the mayor with that a council leader under the English mayor-council and leader-cabinet systems.

Exhibit 2. 3: Structural differences: powers and capacities of leaders

| | Mayoral | ‘Leader-Cabinet’ |
|---|--|---|
| Budget and associated policy framework | Council can only reject mayors proposals with a 2/3 majority. A majority of 50% plus 1 is required to adopt the budget and policy framework. | Council can reject with simple majority, and adopt an alternative with simple majority |
| Operational decisions | Mayor is given individual power to make decisions | Council members’ choice as expressed in the constitution about whether decisions are made by individuals in executive or whether they have to be collective |
| Selection of cabinet and portfolios | Mayor | Cabinet may be voted in by full council, or leader may have power to choose cabinet and portfolios |

Exhibit 2.4: Structural differences: relationship with followers

| | Directly-Elected Mayor | Leader (in Leader-Cabinet) |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Principals | Electorate | <i>Councillors</i> |
| Principals’ link between goals and preferences | Relatively flexible | <i>Relatively fixed</i> |
| Principals’ monitoring effort | Loose | <i>Potentially Tight</i> |
| Period before punishment/reward | <i>4 years</i> | <i>Yearly</i> |

The constitutions of mayoral authorities do put mayors at an advantage compared to other leaders. Broadly the argument that emerges from Exhibit 2.3 is that mayors are in stronger position compared to council leaders. They are freer to develop a visible and prominent leadership style. Exhibit 2.4 further suggests that mayors also have a different structural relationship with their followers that facilitates an open, outward-looking and less partisan style. Mayors have more freedom to maneuver than council leaders.

I have shown that there are some significant differences in those English authorities that opted for mayoral models as compared to other forms of political management. We have also presented a framework designed to help us understand why those differences occur. There is evidence that mayors with their greater decision-making authority and fewer veto constraints have provided a more visible and high profile impact on decision making. There is also evidence that mayors are turning outward to the electorate more than focusing on maintaining political support within the council. This in turn is explained by the structural nature of the leader-follower model that the mayoral authorities have in place compared to those in leader-cabinet authorities. The authority of the mayor and nature of her relationship with followers encourages the development of a less partisan and more open decision-making style. All this suggests that institutional design does make a difference.

But does that mean that we will get more mayors in English local government. The answer is that the White Paper that will be published in the autumn of 2006 is likely to make positive noises about the virtues of the mayoral model. But given its unpopularity

amongst existing politicians in English local government it would appear that the government will do anything other than exhort authorities to think about adopting the mayoral model or something near to it. As all of us involved in policy discussion know evidence and reason are only one of the ingredients in decision-making the political acceptably or otherwise of measure and the interests it supports or offends is also an important factor!

3.The challenge to improve service delivery

Improving the performance of public services presents an enormous. Over time the Labour government in power since 1997 has attempted to move towards a comprehensive system of performance management. It has not sought to prescribe a particular institutional response such as the Conservatives' compulsory competitive tendering scheme. Rather it has challenged local councils and other service providers to improve their performance through a locally managed system of review and restructuring. Yet centrally driven inspection and national performance indicators are seen as crucial to providing an information base on how service providers are responding to the challenge. A system of rewards and sanctions, again determined by national government, provides a further element in the performance management system. Training, organisational developmental, and peer and other support activity for managing change processes complete the circle.

The 1999 Local Government Act established the Best Value system that was the New Labour Government's first weapon in promoting service improvement. The system was designed to contrast with the previous Conservative's regime of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT). First Best Value applies to all local authority functions, whereas CCT applied to only a limited range of functions. Second the key mechanism in Best Value is the requirement to undertake a rolling performance review of all services rather than market testing of some services. Third market testing or eventual contracting out is not discouraged under Best Value but it

is a matter of local choice and it is only one way in which a new relationship might be forged with private or voluntary sector partners. Indeed if anything New Labour favours the creation of rather more long-term strategic partnerships with the private sector or other agencies. Further, whereas CCT made little allowance for consultation with users, such consultation is at the heart of Best Value. Finally Best Value is under-written by a new inspection service and powers of intervention for central government in the case of service failure.

The Government has also had strong support from 'arms length' national bodies- such as the Audit Commission and the Improvement and Development Agency- to provide support, information and challenge to local authorities. In short there has been a campaign to change the culture of local authorities and their perception of the way local services should be delivered. This 'soft' guidance has been backed by a rigorous process of audit and inspection has been undertaken in order to detect failure.

A systematic framework of regulation and information - gathering has been developed. The Government has taken legal powers to lay down a performance review framework and intervene in the case of failure both in relation to service delivery and also a failure of process, for example a failure to undertake any consultation with service users.

Labour's commitment to regulation, like that of the Conservative governments before them, reflects a loss of confidence in professional self-regulation and a concern that the accountabilities of local politics were not sufficiently robust to guarantee that public services would improve their performance. External regulation provides another route to follow.

The crucial change under New Labour has been the extension of a regulatory regime across the full range of local authority services focused on service improvement. Auditors have checked the financial regularity of local budgets and made some efforts at encouraging efficiency. This work is supervised and overseen by the Audit Commission. But it was only with the arrival of the Best Value inspectorate that all local council services can into the orbit of inspectors of service quality. Long-standing inspectorates such as those for the police and fire services have been encouraged under New Labour to revise and develop the depth of their inspections. The Social Services inspectorate, that was set up in 1985, has been given an enhanced remit to undertake its work investigating the performance of social care. The Office for Standards in Education established in 1992 has continued its substantial role. A new Benefit Fraud Inspectorate has been established. But the major new kid on the block established in 1999 is the Best Value Inspection Service, which operates under the wing of the Audit Commission.

A further twist in tail of performance management was provided by the introduction of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) from 2002 onwards. The introduction of CPA did not mean that Best Value was abolished. Rather its results were incorporated into a wider assessment. By taking the scores from Best Value assessments and adding a judgement about the managerial qualities of authorities gave the basis of an overall assessment. When the CPA scores for authorities started to come out there was some cynicism about how significant or important they were but soon they became the yardstick that most top managers and politicians in local government wanted to measure themselves against. As the CPA scores rolled out year on year so authorities made supreme efforts to get themselves into the top excellent or good categories.

The evidence is that the drive to service improvement has led to a better quality of service management and delivery in England. Best Value scores have improved as have CPA ratings. Local government can demonstrate efficiency savings in the production and delivery of a range of services. However there has been a significant cost in the process of challenge and change. The direct costs for running the inspection systems was estimated to be GBP600 million by 2001 the compliance costs for local councils and other bodies in terms of staff time and effort in preparing for inspections is considerable. So there is a debate to be had about whether the effort that goes into the inspection process from both sides of the fence is justified by the outcomes that are achieved.

Does external inspection deliver the improvements in service performance that would justify the costs involved? The judgement is very difficult to make. There is evidence of service improvement, although it unclear how far citizens would share that judgement. It is not easy to give a clear answer to just how much public service delivery has improved. And it has also proved very difficult to model what factors have been particularly important in driving service improvement. Local authorities have got the message about the need to strive for improvement and the cultural change in attitudes to delivery and service performance that the Government was looking for can reasonably be judged to have been achieved. But we are left in the somewhat unsatisfactory position that ways of managing and delivering services have improved but we are far less sure how much progress has been made and what is driving the progress that has been achieved.

The White Paper to be published this autumn is likely to propose a considerable reduction in the burden of inspection and the number of service targets that local authorities have to meet. It will also try to devise a more comprehensive and systematic set of freedoms that councils that consistently perform well should be able to obtain. National government has won the battle to get these issues addressed effectively in local government and now intends to ease off the pressure to a considerable degree.

4. Partnerships and joining up

The New Labour government elected in May 1997 commitment to joining up was initially expressed at the local level in the encouragement of a multitude of partnerships. Helen Sullivan and Chris Skelcher in *Working Across Boundaries (2002)* suggest that there are over 5500 individual partnership bodies at local and regional level created by government in the UK, with a direct spend GBP4.3 billion. Exhibit 4.1 provides some of the details of those bodies that are responsible for the larger elements of that spend, created during by New Labour between 1997-2001. There have been over a dozen different schemes backed, each carry a major spending commitment in excess of GBP50m in 2001/02. Many of the partnership initiatives focus on issues of deprivation and seek to target resources either at deprived neighbourhoods or at services directed towards the deprived. As Exhibit 4.1 shows the New Labour has in addition continued the large commitment to property based regeneration through the Single Regeneration Scheme (SRB) started under the Conservatives.

Exhibit 4.1: Local Multi-Agency Partnerships: Selected Examples

| Partnership Name | Start Date | Number | Identifiable funding 01/02 in GBP million | Purpose |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|--|--|
| Coalfields Programme | 1998 | - | 135 | Regeneration of coalfields |
| Crime and Disorder | 1998 | 376 | 160 | Tackle community safety and fear of crime |
| Early Years Development and Childcare | 1998 | 150 | 435 | Develop nursery provision and childcare |
| Health Action Zones | 1998 | 26 | 160 | Targeting health care and treatment |
| Healthy Living Cities | 1999 | - | 60 | Promoting health |
| Neighbourhood Renewal Fund | 2001 | 88 | 200 | Improve services in most deprived areas |
| New Deal for Communities | 1998 | 39 | 112 | Tackle deprivation in most deprived neighbourhoods |
| Sports Action Zones | 1999 | 30 | 75 | Promote sport in deprived communities |
| Sure Start | 1999 | 500 by 2004 | 284 | Promote development of children from deprived families |
| Single Regeneration Budget | 1994 | 900 | 700 | Regeneration in deprived communities |

Source: Adapted from Gerry Stoker, *Transforming Local Governance*, 2004

While the energy and pace of New Labour's drive to 'join up' governance has been impressive it did, especially in its first two or three years in office adopt a rather aggressive top-down style in its implementation. Ministers looked for 'quick wins' and launched initiative after initiative from the centre. This activity stimulated a syndrome in which managers feel swamped by the volume and variety of initiatives that they have to deal with. There is a lot of effort wasted in simply getting schemes off the ground and then trying to develop connections between all the different schemes. Indeed the Government has in part conceded the point the multiple central programmes have led to chaos more than co-ordination.

Another weakness of New Labour's initial approach to joining up at the local level is that it gave itself little real opportunity to discover what worked and what did not. In part to justify the central funding there were over hasty systems developed for the measurement of success. Evaluation needs to be undertaken above a four or five-year time period and there needs to specific provision for the lessons to be shared. That means there has to be a tolerance of the potential for failure, so schemes cannot be so identified with a minister that the only judgement that is allowed to be heard in public is a positive one. Joining up should encourage the taking of risks and the search for new solutions.

From 2001 a slightly more considered approach has developed. First a greater emphasis has been placed on local strategic partnerships to bring a more co-ordinated approach to a range of local partnerships. The local strategic partnership (LSPs) is a single, multi-agency body, which matches local authority boundaries and brings together at local level

representatives of the public, private, voluntary and community sectors plus local residents. There are broad categories of these LSPs. Some 88 concentrated in poorer areas receive funds from the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. The other 288 are funded usually by their local authorities and other public sector organisations. The early evaluations suggested that some worked as more effective partnerships than others. There have been difficulties in developing effective decision-making procedures within LSPs and in some cases in moving beyond talk to action. But most commentators seem to believe that we are better off with them rather without them since they do provide an umbrella for locality-based sharing and learning among a multitude of interests and organizations.

A second arrangement has been developed to provide a focus for vertical rather than horizontal coordination. They are Local Area Agreements(LAAs) and their task is to improve co-ordination between local authorities, local agencies of central government – Primary Care Trusts, Jobcentre Plus, Sure Start, Connexions – and their partners, to improve the quality and reduce the bureaucracy of local service delivery. LAAs work primarily through LSPs Government Offices for the Regions. They aim to set stretching targets for service improvement by joining put the efforts of a range of local agencies and the funding priorities and programmes of central government. Crucially according to the Government LAAs 'require central government departments to be more willing to let go of detailed day-to-day control of their programmes ... they will need to allow local authorities and their partners to decide jointly which priorities best reflect local circumstances.'

LAA's normally to be structured around some combination of 4 functional blocks:

- a. Children and young people
- b. Safer and stronger communities
- c. Healthier communities and older people
- d. Economic development and enterprise.

The first 21 pilot LAA's launched in 2004; 87 signed by end of 2005; all remaining LSP areas to be signed up by 2007. Early evaluations again suggest some teething troubles. The negotiation of LAA's appears to be very time consuming, The Government Offices are often unclear about their role and central government departments are sometimes reluctant to let go. But again the general opinion appears to be they are a step in the right direction.

Future developments and the New White Paper

The Government is about to publish a new 'White Paper' that will offer a statement about the future direction of its policy on local government. The White Paper is due to be published in the autumn of 2006. It is expected to contain four key themes. The first is to lessen the amount of inspection and direct oversight. Local government in the future should face less targets and less regulation. The second theme is to provide a range of mechanisms to empower communities by giving them more powers to challenge service providers, encouraging local councillors to champion their concerns and by providing

new opportunities for local citizens to collectively own community assets. Thirdly there will be measures to make it easier for local authorities to act as community's leaders and act as the key joining up agency in their localities by promoting the powers and positions of leaders and mayors and by requiring other public agencies to cooperate with their programmes and plans. Finally there is the possibility of a set of measures aimed at the major cities of England in order to establish more effective local control over transport, planning and economic development issues by allowing for a greater capacity to operate a city region level. The White Paper will leave aside the issue of the reform of local government finance as a separate report of an 'independent' inquiry into that issue is expected to report in December 2006. All in all the system looks set for further change.