

Double devolution – empowering neighbourhoods

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Is big always beautiful?

- UK has some of the largest units of local government in the world
- Introduced by 1969 Royal Commission – Redcliffe-Maud - that ignored its own research evidence on efficiency in its appendices! Still not clear about gains from size
- As a result since 1970s there has been the neglect of the neighbourhood level

Community Identity

- European and north American experience shows how important is the locale, the immediate neighbourhood, as a building block of democracy and for political recruitment – e.g. In France - Lille's 87 mayors – intensely jealous rivals, but representing communities, with direct contact with citizens, mediating with bureaucracies
- UK survey evidence shows up to three layers of identity: nation-city-neighbourhood – not what some local authorities mainly represent

Why we are cautious

- Partly selective experience – Tower Hamlets, Islington
- Hard to generalise from parishes as not representing urban areas
- Not clear what are neighbourhoods
- Most of all we think that people do not want more participation
- Have we become too busy and mobile to get involved with neighbourhoods?

Even the 2006 White paper is more cautious than expected

- No universal provision for community governance
- Champions neighbourhood management
- Extensions of existing powers of parishes
- Extension of parishes to urban areas, local authorities in charge of process
- A change in name

We should not be too cautious!

- Experiments of area committees under 2000 Act very important
- We underestimate the extent to which citizens are already involved in community governance
- David Walker, reviewing the JRF **Community participation: Who benefits?**, pours scorn on the self-selected one per cent that participate in community governance

But evidence of engagement from the 2005 Citizenship Survey:

- 13.7 per cent completed a questionnaire,
- 6 per cent attended a public meeting
- 4.6 per cent involved with a group set up to discuss local services and problems in the local area.
- 8.7 per cent involved with citizen governance overall, 4.1 doing this as their only form of participation
- Most doing it from 'A sense of involvement in the community'
- A lot more than the one per cent of 'usual suspects'!

How to get there

- More energy needed behind the current proposals
- Not just about more meetings
- What about the 75 per cent not involved?
- Practical and flexible arrangements can emerge – even for short terms problems, based say on street level?
- E-based networks/deliberation the key as internet use grows, which are hooked into better e-governance