UK Local Government and Public Participation: *A Discourse on Incompatibility*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the problematic relationship between local government and public participation. Specifically it considers why it is that the outcomes from participatory initiatives sponsored by local councils have had such little impact upon local policy and decision making.

It begins by organising the relevant literature into four conjectures which suggest that the relationship is either; transitional, incompatible, instrumental or resistive. The incompatibility conjecture is subsequently identified as being the most promising for further investigation.

Drawing on the assumptions of critical realism, Crawford and Ostrom's Institutional Grammar Tool and the conceptual framework developed by Bulpitt to analyse UK national élites, the thesis proceeds to build a theory of the incompatibility conjecture. This theory suggests that the Or Else motivational logics of holding together, winning elections and governing competence are emergent properties of the local political élite as a social structure. It is these logics, triggered by the characteristics of participatory initiatives, which shape the behaviours of local politicians.

This theory is then tested through three longitudinal case studies of co-governance initiatives in Merton, Bristol and Hull over a ten year period. The conclusion from this fieldwork is that the theory is broadly credible albeit with scope for greater subtlety to be added to the conceptual framework.

Overall the thesis presents a challenge to those who are optimistic about the potential of participatory initiatives to impact upon local policy and decision making. It suggests that, despite their best intentions, local politicians find that they are constrained when it comes to promoting the outcomes from such initiatives.

Theoretically innovative contributions are also made to a number of literatures including the conjectures approach, the Institutional Grammar Tool and élite theories of local politics. The case studies provide an empirical contribution to studies of local government and public participation.

Declarations and Statements

This work has not been previously accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

This thesis is the result of my own investigations except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by citations giving explicit references; a bibliography is appended.

I give consent for this thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed

Date

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1. Introduction

> Like a well-established, and well loved, music hall act, participation and local government are words often found in partnership.
>
> J.G. Bulpitt, Participation and Local Government: Territorial Democracy, 1972 (p. 281)

The relationship between UK local government and public participation presents a puzzle. While many local councils have invested in initiatives designed to foster public involvement outside of elections, these initiatives seldom, it seems, significantly influence the local policy process. The optimistic view, reflected in much of the policy and practice literature, is that this participation problem will be solved through experience, experimentation and innovation on the part of policy makers and practitioners; a participative future is a realistic prospect for UK local government (for example Prior *et al.* 1995; Bingham *et al.* 2005). An alternative view, less often expressed, is that there might be something in the very nature of modern local government that makes meaningful public participation, at least in respect of policy outcomes, an unachievable ambition; expectations should therefore be lowered (Pratchett 1999a; Wilson 1999). This thesis seeks to engage with this debate. In particular it seeks to explore the following question; why do the outcomes from participatory initiatives have such limited impact upon local policy and decision making?

Explaining why participatory initiatives have had such a limited impact on the local government policy process in the UK is important for a number of reasons. First and foremost this problem can be seen as emblematic of a wider

concern with the machinery of local government, its inability to meet the political needs of the public and the resulting disenchantment with formal politics as reflected in low level of turnout at elections. Indeed, it has been argued that it is this 'supply' side of political participation, rather than changing public attitudes, that is the real problem of modern political engagement and that 'democratic polities get the levels of participation they deserve' (Hay 2007, p. 155). Second, the ability of these initiatives to work effectively has a knock-on effect for a number of policy areas, some of which legally require participation or consultation to be achieved. Historic examples include Labour's Best Value regimes, regeneration funding and community planning. Finally, the success of these initiatives ultimately depends on their perceived efficacy with the public. While there are other benefits for participants and for local government, such as personal development, increased social capital and good publicity, it is the promise of changing policies and influencing decisions that draws participants in. As Stoker (2006, p. 193) argues: 'The biggest challenge in engaging the public is making sure that public authorities are geared up to respond, because without that no technique is going to be sustainable'.

Public participation in local government continues to be a live policy issue in the UK. All of the main national political parties continue to support the principle that local government should devolve power downwards to citizens and, at the same time, local councils continue to work with established participatory structures and continue to develop and design new innovations. Even in a time of severe financial constraint councils have recognised the need to involve the public in the difficult budgetary decisions that have to be made. The Coalition Government came to power in 2010 with a vision for a 'huge shift in power - from central Whitehall, to local public servants, and from

bureaucrats to communities and individuals' (Department for Communities and Local Government 2011, p. 11). While it may be too early to say how this commitment to decentralisation and democratic engagement has played out in practice, the problem of whether and how public participation can influence the local policy process remains centre stage.

At the heart of this thesis is a challenge to the orthodox position that local government is in transition toward a hybrid of representative and participatory democracy; conversely, the core argument of the thesis is that a credible case can be made for alternatives. It explores, theoretically and empirically, the conjecture that, due to the élite nature of local politics, local government and participatory initiatives are incompatible. Underpinning this research are the philosophical assumptions of critical realism which inform not only the research methods but also the structure of the thesis itself; theory building takes place before empirical fieldwork. This critical realist approach and its implications are elaborated toward the beginning of Chapter Three. This Chapter also draws down an institutionalist framework and a series of élite concepts that both provide significant contributions to the narrative of the thesis that follows.

Having identified the broad topic and touched upon some of the theoretical themes within the thesis, the purpose of this introductory chapter is threefold. First the problematic relationship between local government and public participation initiatives will be described in the historical context of the UK. Following this discussion of the intended academic contribution will be presented. Finally a chapter by chapter overview of the thesis will be set out.

1.1 Stating the Problem

The biggest difficulty in the relationship between UK local government and participatory initiatives, and the problem at the heart of this thesis, can be summed up in two words; outcome failure. Despite a genuine commitment to experiment with new ways of involving the public there appear to be few, if any, examples of initiatives having a significant effect on their respective local policy processes. While this may in part be due to an absence of meaningful evaluation (Wilson 1999), a trawl through the literature and an active search of practice by the author has found it difficult to identify examples of participatory initiatives making a significant impact on the local policy process. This suggests that such examples can be considered as collectors' items[1] and that outcome failure is the norm. Nor is this problem a new one. Indeed, it has a fifty year history and the purpose of this section is to provide some context by mapping that history. First, however, it is important to say a little about exactly what is meant by participatory initiatives.

Political participation in its most general sense implies a wide range of different activities such as voting, contacting public officials and attending protests (Brady *et al.* 1995; Birch 2001). The focus for this thesis, however, is upon non electoral *participatory initiatives* sponsored by local government, in other words; 'formal methods for involving citizens in the political decision-making process' (Smith 2005, p. 13). This is not a field that lacks diversity. Smith (2005), for example, highlights 57 types of innovation including;

[1] For example, evidence from Professor John Stewart to the Public Administration Committee for its report into Innovations into Citizen Participation in Government (2000) suggested that some citizens' jury exercises (unspecified) had made a difference.

consultative innovations such as focus groups or standing citizens' panels; deliberative innovations such as citizens' juries; co-governance innovations such as area forums or participatory budgeting; and direct democracy innovations such as referenda or citizens' assemblies. These are institutional arrangements, concerned with the relationship between citizens and political authority but excluding, for example, 'autonomous political activities by citizens within civil society, innovations that primarily engage voluntary groups rather than individuals, and democratic innovations within the workplace' (Smith 2005, p. 14).

UK local government has been sponsoring a variety of participatory initiatives for about 50 years. In the beginning the relationship was a passionate one. As Boaden *et al.* (1982, p. i) report; 'at some time in the mid-1960s "participation" became a vogue word'; by the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s there were a few years when 'no government report was complete without a section encouraging public participation'. It was in this atmosphere that local government initiated a first wave of innovations, particularly in the arena of planning. In the 1970s a new climate of public sector funding restrictions took hold and the relationship grew cooler. However, by the 1980s a new wave of decentralisation initiatives took root amongst a group of Labour and Liberal controlled councils that sought to provide an alternative to the consumerist approaches of the Conservative Government of the time (Burns *et al.* 1994).

By the late 1990s the tide had fully turned again and the modernisation agenda of the last Labour Government brought about a new boom in participatory activity. Indeed, the number and diversity of local government sponsored public participation initiatives increased significantly in the first

years of the Blair administration. This reflected a genuine commitment, sense of ownership and enthusiasm for innovation in respect of participation initiatives (Lowndes *et al.* 2001; Birch 2002; Smith 2005). Overall, as Lowndes *et al.* (2001, p. 205) suggest, it is possible to characterise the history of British local government as being 'littered with experiments in public participation and consultation'. The Conservative / Liberal Democrat Coalition Government that came to power in 2010 has introduced a new phase in the relationship between local government and public participation and, through its emphasis on 'localism', has introduced reforms that 'are designed to bring decision-making power to where people are already involved in their communities' as 'ultimately, the most accessible form of government is self-government' (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010, p. 11).

However, despite this 50 year relationship between UK local government and participatory initiatives, there has only been very limited evidence of any impact upon the local policy process. This reflects what Barnes *et al.* have described as 'a mismatch in intention and outcome' (2007, p. 29), or what Hoppe has described as a 'mismatch between promises and results' (2011, p. 174). In the early 1970s the many participatory experiments of the time 'left the big bureaucracies and centralised patterns of decision making largely undisturbed' (Burns *et al.* 1994, p. 16). Similarly, in the 1980s, public participation in the form of decentralization initiatives, also had an extremely limited impact (Hoggett 1995). More recent studies present a similar picture. Participation has been characterised as; an activity mainly 'done at the margins and not as part of the day job' (Stoker and Wilson 2004, p. 250). Initiatives can be characterised as superficial exercises for ticking boxes used to justify decisions that have already been made (INVOLVE 2005, p. 2); where 'members, officers and citizens frequently find it difficult to pinpoint specific service or

policy-related outcomes' (Wilson 1999, p. 253); and where 'very often attempts at public participation do not influence services and outcomes in the way participants wished' (Barnes *et al.* 2007, pp. 28-29). In summary, the available evidence suggests that participation appears not to have made any significant impact on decision-making (Nicholson 2005, p. 1).

Nor is the UK unique in this respect. Calls to deepen democracy and heightened interest in democratic innovations reflect internationally widespread concerns about the ability of traditional representative structures to connect with citizens (Fung and Wright 2003). At the same time the effectiveness of these innovations remains uncertain (King *et al.* 1998) and 'meaningful, authentic participation is rarely found' (Yang and Callahan 2007, p. 249). While the focus has shifted in recent years from government to governance and from institutional design to the role of civil society (Gaventa 2006), the facilitatory role of local government nevertheless remains central and its relationship with public participation remains problematic. The outcome failure associated with participatory initiatives can therefore be understood not only as a historically stubborn problem for UK local government but also as an issue of international concern.

Explaining the problematic relationship between UK local government and public participation is a challenge that touches on a number of aspects of political science and public administration. In order to meet that challenge a number of literatures will need to be considered. The purpose of the next section, therefore, is to briefly highlight those literatures and the contribution that this research intends to make to them.

1.2 Intended Contribution

This thesis explores the question of why the outcomes from participatory initiatives have such limited impact on local policy and decision making. It does this in two ways. First the thesis maps the theoretic landscape in order to contrast the orthodox view, that the participation problem will be solved through improved experience, experimentation and innovation, with a number of credible alternative positions. Second it will develop and test one of these alternative positions; specifically that participatory initiatives are incompatible with formal representative local democracy. The argument being that the élite nature of local government engenders institutional logics that constrain the behaviours of local politicians. In undertaking these two tasks the intention is to contribute to five interrelated literatures.

First and foremost, as might be expected, the thesis seeks to build on those studies that have taken a more critical view of the relationship. Second, in building and testing a theory of 'incompatibility' the intention is to offer a theoretic contribution on the topic of how formal and informal institutions shape political behaviour. Third, by building and testing a theory of incompatibility, the thesis also contributes to élite interpretations of local politics. Fourth, in providing three case studies the thesis makes an empirical contribution to local politics research. Finally, the thesis seeks to contribute to the practice literature concerned with how participatory initiatives might be made more effective. Each will be dealt with in turn.

While there is a broad and diverse literature dealing with public participation in politics there are relatively few accounts that deal specifically and critically with the relationship between participatory initiatives and local government. It is worth noting these studies as they provide the starting point

for this research. Three earlier works that provide a pessimistic view are Arnstein's *A Ladder of Citizen Participation* (1969), Cockburn's Marxist analysis in *The Local State* (1977) and Boaden *et al.*'s *Public Participation in Local Services* (1982). While still giving serious attention to the challenges involved, the two significant studies that provide more optimistic conclusions are *The Politics of Decentralisation* by Burns *et al.* (1994) and *Citizenship: Rights, Community and Participation* by Prior *et al.* (1995). Two more recent studies, both of which place institutions, formal and informal, at the centre of analysis, have also been important. These are *Local Political Participation: The Impact of Rules in Use* by Lowndes *et al.* (2006a) and *Power, Participation and Political Renewal* by Barnes *et al.* (2007).

This thesis seeks to build on this literature in two ways. First, while studies to date have approached the problematic relationship between local government and public participation from a range a different perspectives, there is no overarching account that provides a map of these different approaches. This thesis seeks to provide just such a map and this can be found in Chapter Two. Second, while there is broad consensus about what the challenges to participative initiatives are, both in terms of getting people to engage and in respect of running activities, there is less interest in what is happening at the outcome stage of the participatory process. There has been a lack of rigorous evaluation in the UK and elsewhere and very few studies have considered outcomes rather than process (Wilson 1999; Abelson *et al.* 2003; Carr 2004; Bickerstaff and Walker 2005, p. 2125; Burton 2009). As Beresford (2002) has argued, the wider political, social and institutional factors associated with participation activity have also tended to be neglected in a literature that has been more concerned with what makes good practice. While the input and activity stages of the relationship between local government and participatory

initiatives have been considered in depth, the outcome stage has been relatively neglected. Given the evidence pointing to 'outcome failure' this neglect is something that needs to be addressed and a gap that this thesis seeks to fill.

The second literature that this thesis seeks to contribute to is that concerned with theorising the behaviour of politicians and, in particular, the role played by formal and informal political institutions. For, if local politics is indeed incompatible with participatory initiatives, a theory needs to be presented that can show how this happens in practice. To build such a theory the thesis will draw on New Institutionalism and in particular the Institutional Grammar Tool proposed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995). While there is a developing literature around the theory and application of this tool and the wider Institutional Analysis and Development framework in which it sits (Ostrom 2005; McGinnis 2011), its use in local government has not previously been explored. Hence the 'grammar of local politics' developed in Chapter Three is offered as an original contribution to this literature. Underpinning the application of the Institutional Grammar Tool are the assumptions of critical realism. Pawson and Tilley's *Realistic Evaluation* (Pawson and Tilley 1997) is also an important text for this research in this context.

The third literature that this research intends to add value to is that concerned with interpretations of local politics. It offers an explicitly élite theory of local politics; an area of theory which has been to date relatively unexplored (Woods 1998). Specifically this thesis seeks to make an original contribution by adapting Jim Bulpitt's élite interpretation of national UK politics to provide analysis at the local level. This contribution is a novel interpretation of local politics, consistent with the assumption that local politics is incompatible with participatory initiatives. It is worthy of exploration given

the influence of Bulpitt's approach when it comes to interpreting elite politicians' behaviour at the national level. As with the contribution to the institutionalist literature, this Bulpittian interpretation of local politics can also be found in Chapter Three.

Fourthly, as well as investing in theory this thesis also aims to make an empirical contribution to local government research. Three in-depth longitudinal case studies of participatory initiatives in UK council settings, designed to test the theory set out in Chapter Three, are intended have value in their own right. These chapters complement recent large-n studies such as the MAELG [Municipal Assemblies in European Local Government] survey (Egner *et al.* 2013; Heinelt 2013c). They do this by providing 'an account of the institutional environment in which the action takes place and an account of the problem situation in which the role players find themselves' (Searing 1994, p. 17). In a broader sense the intention is to connect with an established, if perhaps neglected, tradition of local government case studies (Laffin 2008).

Finally, this thesis intends to add to the public administration literature in this area by providing advice for policy makers and practitioners. In this regard the research follows Stoker's (2012) argument that political science should be solution seeking as well as analytical. Suggestions are made as to the sanctions and incentives that might be offered to policy makers at the national level in order to improve the impact of participatory initiatives on the policy process. For practitioners the intention is to suggest how the design of initiatives might be improved as well as how the institutional environment might be made to be more conducive to better outcomes.

More broadly, in all of the areas referred to above, the intention is to offer conclusions that can be of international relevance. While the empirical

focus of the thesis is squarely on the UK, the failure of initiatives to impact upon local policy processes clearly extends to other countries seeking to enhance established local representative structures with additional participatory initiatives. The tensions between representative local democracy and more participative forms described above are internationally recognised and not limited to the UK (Fung and Wright 2003; Schaap 2012). European democracies in particular are experiencing surprisingly similar dilemmas and tensions and the potential for transferable research is clearly recognised (Daemen and Schaap 2012).

Having set out the central problem for the research and the intended contribution the next step is to explain exactly how this contribution will be elaborated. The next section, therefore, will set out the structure of the thesis; a map to help the reader to orientate themselves before engaging with the detailed content.

1.3 Thesis Structure

Overall the structure of the thesis conforms to what Dunleavy (2003, p. 61) describes as the compromise model (combining aspects of the 'focus down' and 'opening out' models). This means it 'focuses down' at the start by utilising a focused literature review, framed closely around the central research question. This is followed by a series of core chapters that contain the bulk of the thesis contribution. Two chapters then 'open out' the thesis at the end providing first a synthesis of the findings of the core chapters and second a theoretical 'broad view' discussion chapter to conclude. Furthermore the thesis reflects a critical realist framework. This means that the core chapters commence with a theory building chapter that is followed by a short methods

chapter and then three empirical chapters. The structure, which is explained in more detail below, is summarised by figure 1.

Figure 1 Thesis structure

The next Chapter (Two) provides a focused review of the literature that locates available explanations for the dysfunctional relationship between local government and public participation within a parsimonious theoretical framework built around four conjectures. This 'conjectures approach' is a heuristic means of highlighting a potentially problematic relationship between two fields of practice adopted from the work of Klijn and Skelcher (Klijn and Skelcher 2007). The four conjectures presented are the transitional, incompatibility, instrumental and resistivity conjectures. The chapter concludes by identifying the incompatibility conjecture as a potentially significant and credible theory that is both underdeveloped and untested. Exploring the credibility of this conjecture is established as the central concern of the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter Three builds the theory that the subsequent case study chapters are deigned to test. Drawing on the assumptions of critical realism and upon new institutionalism, in particular the Institutional Grammar Tool developed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995; Ostrom 2005), the chapter sets out the underpinning theoretic assumptions of the thesis. This is followed by a redescription of local politics, developed within the theoretic framework, using

the concepts proposed by Jim Bulpitt to interpret national politics in the UK. Bulpitt's work fits comfortably within the framework for, while he never explicitly identified himself as such, he can be closely aligned both with critical realism (Buller 1999) and with new institutionalism (Bradbury 2006). The final section of this chapter is a middle-range theory that builds on the work of the first two sections and incorporates available explanations from the literature, to propose three institutional mechanisms that explain the responses of local politicians to participatory initiatives.

The five chapters that follow provide the empirical substance of the thesis. Chapter Four is a short chapter that prepares the way for the three case studies by discussing the use of the case study method, the case study selections and the data collection methods. An overview of the data collected is also provided. Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the longitudinal case studies used to test and refine the theory presented in Chapter Three. Each chapter presents the research findings and discusses the implications for the theory in respect of those findings. Each of the cases focuses on a co-governance initiative as theory suggests that this is the type of participatory innovation most likely to be influential in the local policy process. The first case study looks at the Community Forums in Merton. This was selected as a typical case with Merton being one of the many local councils to introduce area forums as part of the modernisation reforms introduced by the Labour Government at the end of the 1990s. The second and third case studies look at the Neighbourhood Partnerships in Bristol and the Ward Forums in Hull. These were both selected as examples of where participatory initiatives, unlike Merton, had been embedded as part of 'normal' political structures. The case studies were also chosen to reflect the range of mainstream party politics with the Conservative,

Liberal Democrat and Labour parties in power respectively in Merton, Bristol and Hull.

Chapter Eight provides an analysis of the overall empirical findings across the three case studies and a reflection on the theory in the light of these findings. Specifically it returns to the institutional mechanisms hypothesised at the end of Chapter Three and considers them in the light of the three case study chapters. The aim of Chapter Nine is to summarise the new knowledge that has been gained from the process of researching the thesis and to provide a discussion of the wider themes raised, possible directions for further research and implications for policy and practice; the '*so what?'* and the '*what now?'*

The purpose of this first introductory chapter has been to set up the thesis by establishing the problem, indicating the intended contribution and providing a route map for the reader. As suggested above, the first task is to locate the orthodox analysis along with the alternative positions within the relevant literature. That will be the focus of the next chapter.

2 Local government and Participatory Initiatives: Explaining the Relationship[2]

Rory: "Everyone needs explanations for things. You see things around you and you want to know how and why things happen. There's no real evidence so you have to fall back on conjecture."

BBC Scotland, *The Crow Road (*Episode Four), 1986

There is no comprehensive theoretical overview of the relationship between UK local government and the participatory initiatives that it sponsors. While there is no shortage of explanations, these are often partial and exist beyond the literatures of local government and public participation. Other places where explanations can be found, for example, include the literatures concerned with democratic theory, state theory and institutional theory. Research studies that deal specifically with the relationship between participatory initiatives and local government are few and none provide a satisfying overview of the theoretic landscape. The researcher is presented with a smorgasbord of choices rather than a carefully constructed menu.

This is a field that has been more concerned with practice than with the broader questions of context and impact. As noted previously, the wider political, social and institutional factors associated with participation activity

[2] The material in this chapter has been published as: McKenna, D. 2011 'UK Local Government and Public Participation: Using Conjectures to Explain the Relationship', *Public Administration*, 89, 3.

have tended to be neglected as 'a much greater interest has developed in the "technicalities" of participation reflected in the production of a rapidly growing body of "how to do it" manuals, courses and consultants' (Beresford 2002, p. 265). Furthermore the institutional constraints acting upon initiatives have been under researched (Hoppe 2011). At the same time there has been a lack of rigorous evaluation in respect of policy impact as opposed to process (Wilson 1999; Abelson *et al.* 2003; Carr 2004; Bickerstaff and Walker 2005; Burton 2009). Interest has tended to focus on the practicalities of bringing the public into participatory initiatives or the mechanics of different types of initiatives. The issue of outcome failure has, by and large, been neglected.

A further weakness of the literature is that many theoretical assumptions are left implicit. So, for example, while some explanations have pointed to the operation of local political élites as a cause of the problematic nature of the relationship between local government and participation (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000; Copus 2007), it is not made clear how this term is being used. As Woods (1998) notes, the term élite has been 'remarkably unproblematised' and can be associated with a wide range of assumptions and critiques ranging from the pluralist to the Marxist to the poststructuralist. Without knowing these assumptions it is difficult to assess what the implications for policy and practice arising from research might be and any theoretical fault lines that exist in the literature will remain hidden. While some explanations may come with associated assumptions about the role of local government in the wider state, the motivation of the public or their capability to participate, often they do not.

There are of course important exceptions; studies that provide critical and theoretically located analysis of the tensions between representative and participative democracy. Working in the context of the enthusiasm for

participation of the UK New Labour government of the late 1990s, Wilson (1999) and Pratchett (1999a), for example, draw upon democratic theory to discuss why more participation may not equate to more democracy. Newman (2001) covers a similar area but focuses attention on the role of power and institutions as do Bickerstaff and Walker (2005). Barnes *et al.* (2007), while focusing on local governance rather than government, provide a more detailed exploration of these themes from a theoretically diverse and largely poststructuralist perspective and pay particular attention to the different discourses surrounding participation. Prior to New Labour the most significant accounts are provided by Burns *et al.* (1994) who assess the potential of decentralisation initiatives to foster greater empowerment for citizens, Boaden *et al.* (1982), who explore the way in which the tensions between a 'citizen' and an 'élite' perspective play out across different thematic areas such as planning and education, and by Cockburn (1977) who provides a Marxist account. Going back even further, the original attempt to assess this topic belongs to Bulpitt (1972) whose discussion of participation and local government was offered as a counterweight to the uncritical orthodoxy surrounding public participation in local government following its first boom in the late 60s. None of these accounts, however, covered all of the theoretical ground in question. So, for example, Cockburn's work, while well known, is touched on only very lightly, if at all, in the subsequent studies.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to survey the theoretic terrain and provide a map of explanations for outcome failure. It does this by organising the available literature against four original conjectures that between them provide all of the plausible explanations as to why the relationship between UK local government and participatory initiatives is dysfunctional. The Chapter proceeds as follows. First the conjectures approach, originally

utilised by Klijn and Skelcher (2007), is described. Following this the transitional conjecture, in other words the orthodox position that local government is moving toward a hybrid form that incorporates representative and participative features, is fleshed out. This conjecture suggests that outcome failure can be overcome through experience, experimentation and innovation. Three more pessimistic alternative conjectures are then described. The incompatibility conjecture suggests that the relationship between representative and participative democracy is doomed to failure owing to the élite nature of the former. The instrumental conjecture is a Marxist account that suggests that initiatives were only ever intended to be used as tools to manage the urban working class. The resistivity conjecture suggests that outcome failure occurs as a consequence of entrenched institutional frameworks. Before describing these conjectures, however it is worth highlighting some of the common ground between them and some of the lessons from the wider participation literature.

2.1 Lessons from the Wider Participation Literature

While the task of reviewing the broader participation literature is beyond the scope of this thesis, two broad conclusions can be drawn that are common to all the conjectures. The first of these is that it is difficult to get people to participate in initiatives. The second is that it is difficult to run initiatives. These relate broadly to what Hoppe calls input and throughput problems (2011). The purpose of this short section is to briefly consider each in turn.

The 'input' side of the relationship between local government and public participation is characterised by general public disengagement from formal politics, low levels of electoral participation in comparison with national government, worryingly low levels of awareness of what local government actually does and low levels of public trust in local politicians and political

institutions (Pratchett and Wilson 1996; Pratchett 2004; Power Inquiry 2006; Lyons 2007). There is also widespread recognition of the importance of social economic status, the material and social resources available to individuals, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, social capital, in determining the levels at which people will engage (Brady *et al.* 1995; Lowndes *et al.* 2006a; John 2007). The effects of formal and informal institutional rules have also been found to cause significant variations in engagement between otherwise similar areas (Lowndes *et al.* 2006a). The formality and complexity of local government institutions also present a challenge to participation and is likely to act as a deterrent. As Pratchett (2004) argues, local politics can be compared to jazz, a specialism accessible only to the few. Finally there is broad acknowledgement of the role that the perceived efficacy of participation has in an individual's decision on whether to participate (Pratchett 2004; Stoker 2006).

A second general consideration relates to the difficulty inherent in the 'activity' element of the relationship. In other words the practical problems associated with running participatory initiatives. This can relate to facilitation, the challenging nature of participative processes or the need for additional resources and specialist support (King *et al.* 1998). As Hoppe (2011) suggests, selecting and attracting participants at the input stage raises a number of challenges associated with the plurality and representativeness of those involved as well as with the power relationships within initiatives. Furthermore, despite a 'well stocked tool kit of methods' there is no well developed methodological consensus within the practitioner community (2011, p. 177). The facilitation of participatory initiatives is unsurprisingly recognised as a skilled and evolving professional practice (for example Bingham *et al.* 2005).

Having outlined the considerations that are common to each of the conjectures it is almost time to describe the conjectures themselves in order to understand the differences between them. The rest of this chapter will use the conjectures approach to provide a map of the theoretic landscape within which different explanations for outcome failure can be placed. The starting point is to say a little about the conjectures approach as a framework of analysis.

2.2 Using Conjectures to Explain the Relationship

The conjectures approach is adapted from the work of Klijn and Skelcher (2007) who use four conjectures (complementarity, transitional, incompatible and instrumental) to describe the possible relationships between representative democracy and governance networks where:

> Conjectures are tentative theories designed to offer provisional solutions to problems. The value of a conjecture is to generate fresh thinking, investigation and insight. The conjectures are heuristic tools to structure the discussion … they organize the literature … and can also be used to highlight particular themes or tensions that impact on theory or practice. (Klijn and Skelcher 2007, p. 589)

Conjectures can be understood as *a priori* theoretical framing devices that between them provide the universe of possibilities within which explanations can be located (Jeffares and Skelcher 2009). They provide a framework of analysis that can be used to illuminate the relationship between two arenas of practice, which confronts actors in their day to day experience, but can be problematized in terms of theory. As well as providing a theory map the conjectures have two further important benefits. First, by providing an overview, the conjectures allow 'everyday' explanations to be located within a theoretical context so that implications for policy and practice can be more

easily identified. Second, they reveal the theoretical fault lines so that conflicting positions can be made explicit and explored. The conjectures approach has the potential to be used more widely as a theoretical tool although, to this author's knowledge, this is the first application of this conjectures approach to a problem other than that tackled by Klijn and Skelcher.

Building from Klijn and Skelcher's approach four conjectures have been developed and are presented below. The transitional conjecture represents the UK government position and proposes that the old form of local government is being replaced, albeit gradually, by a hybrid of representative and participative democracy. The incompatibility conjecture reflects the opposing position; that these two forms of local democracy can never be effectively combined. The 'instrumental' conjecture, as used by Klijn and Skelcher, has been strengthened by making much more explicit its Marxist foundations and ensuring that the wider socio-economic explanations, which Marxist explanations represent, can be brought onto the map. The fourth 'resistivity' conjecture is entirely new. It flows from a poststructuralist approach which suggests that attention should be given to micro level explanations. The four conjectures are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Explaining the relationship between local government and public participation initiatives: Four conjectures

Conjecture	Analysis of local government	View of the public	Characterization of participatory initiatives	Explanation of why outcome failure happens	Prospects for achieving outcomes
Transitional	An important democratic institution that is necessarily representative and participatory	An active citizenry with political rights and complex needs	A genuine and necessary attempt to engage with citizens	Mechanisms linking initiatives to decision making are not yet in place	Good – through learning and innovation by local government
Incompatibility	A necessarily élite institution in complex modern society that must be representative but not participative	Unable to contribute meaningfully to policy and decision making	Often genuine attempts to engage with citizens that have mainly symbolic value for local political élites	Initiatives have limited democratic value within a representative structure – unwanted outcomes are rejected	Extremely limited – without structural change intermediate bodies may have to be used or expectations lowered
Instrumental	An institution which administers economic and social policies on behalf of the central state	Collective consumers of local services who need to be 'managed'	Pro-active management tools used to gather information and to deal with protest	Corporate élites have no desire for initiatives to influence policy	Nonexistent – outcomes cannot be achieved in future – however initiatives can be used to challenge the state
Resistivity	Only one node within a complex network of local governance	Constructed by officials in many different ways	The embodiment of new participatory discourses that are vulnerable to existing institutional frameworks	Entrenched institutional frameworks operate to resist the outcomes from initiatives	Mixed – existing frameworks may be challenged, however directing participation through external bodies may be more effective

While conjectures are inspired by a reading of the relevant literature 'they are, in the first place, a construction with an internal logic' (Klijn and Skelcher 2007, p. 589). Importantly, the identification of common internal elements allows comparison between conjectures to be developed and what 'binds and what divides' them to be identified. In this case propositions have been used to structure each of the conjectures linked to the following five themes:

a) Analysis of local government

b) View of the public

c) Characterization of participatory initiatives

d) Explanation of why 'outcome failure' happens

e) Prospects for achieving outcomes

Each conjecture builds from significant evidence, positions and arguments within the literature but also provides additional new structure and theoretical modelling. At the same time, following Klijn and Skelcher, it is not claimed that cited literature can be assigned to a single conjecture as in many cases authors have made a broad contribution or summarized the views of others. The design of the propositions and the way in which they build into conjectures is an original construction.

Having set out the approach the next step is to detail each of the four conjectures that seek to explain the dysfunctional relationship between local government and public participation initiatives. That is the purpose of the next four sections.

2.3 The Transitional Conjecture

This conjecture argues that local government is in transition between a purely representative form of local democracy and a new hybrid version that enhances representative structures with participative initiatives. Local government is active in the process of change and this is evidenced by the good practice that exists in many local councils and the proliferation in participative initiatives sponsored by local government over recent years (Lowndes *et al.* 2001; Birch 2002; DCLG 2006). This conjecture starts from the proposition that:

a. Local government is an important democratic institution that is necessarily representative and participatory

This conjecture builds upon a liberal tradition which values local government as an efficient provider of services (Sharpe 1970; Chandler 2008). Local government's importance within the national democratic system lies in its closeness to the citizenry which allows it both to engage and educate the public. Experience of citizenship provided at the local level provides a benefit for the whole political system as this is the arena where good political habits can be fostered. First and foremost local government is a representative institution and it is 'the most effective device for reconciling the requirements of popular control and political equality with the exigencies of time and the conditions of the modern territorial state' (Beetham 1992, p. 41). Furthermore, 'the principles which apply to it do not differ in any respect from those applicable to the national representation' (Mill 1958, p. 215).

Local government, however, also needs to embrace public participation. If it is to be an institution of representative *democracy*, as opposed to simply an institution of representative *government*, then it needs to be engaged with an

active citizen body (Beetham 1996). This is 'most likely to be achieved through the development of participatory democracy' (Stewart and Stoker 1988, p. 23). Furthermore, public participation is a key element of local government's community leadership role which sees it working beyond its traditional service areas in pursuit of wider community wellbeing (Sullivan 2004). The notion of governance reflects a pluralist polity in which a range of different agencies operate; local government achieves its aims by steering and coordination. By strengthening local government's wider democratic legitimacy, participation gives it added authority when working in partnership with other local agencies (Sullivan 2001).

b. The public are an active citizenry with political rights and complex needs

As argued by Prior *et al.* (1995), local government's relationship with the public is underpinned by a concept of citizenship which builds from Marshall's framework of legal, political and social rights which are historically variable and subject to change over time. It rejects both the consumerist and republican models of citizenship; the former for its corrosive effects on social wellbeing and the latter for its inherent dangers for individual freedom. This is an 'interactive political citizenship' which sees citizens as active contributors to policy making (pp. 20-21). The public, as the citizenry, is a distinct sector of a plural polity which exists outside of government institutions and its relationship with local government can be characterized as a partnership. At the same time, the citizenry has a complex set of needs and identities which need to be respected and responded to by government. Rights are not abstract but historically specific so that while the presumption is for an active mode of citizenship, this will always be dependent on the interests and attitudes prevalent at any one time. The onus is therefore on government rather than

citizens to actively promote and support citizenship. This view of the public is broadly optimistic about the willingness and ability of people to engage in politics if institutions are set up correctly. It is consistent, therefore, with arguments that see barriers to political participation as a 'supply' rather than a 'demand' side problem (Stoker 2006; Hay 2007).

c. Participatory initiatives are a genuine and necessary attempt to engage with citizens

Participatory initiatives fulfil many of the participative needs of local government. They fill the gaps between elections and extend the deliberative capacity of representative structures (Prior *et al.* 1995). They strengthen legitimacy, responsiveness and representativeness (Pratchett 1999b). As well as supporting the political function of local government, initiatives also benefit the service delivery aspects of local government. These benefits include better quality of services, increased responsiveness to the needs of citizens, increased social cohesion, community capacity building, responsible citizens and stronger accountability (Prior *et al.* 1995; DETR 1998; Newman 2001; INVOLVE 2005).

d. Outcome failure happens because mechanisms linking initiatives to decision making are not yet in place

This conjecture links outcome failure to the challenges of welding participative initiatives onto a representative organisation. Political and organizational barriers such as the attitudes of councillors and officers are important obstacles, as are the competing and sometimes restrictive demands of other central policy imperatives which limit room for policy manoeuvre and the resources to support participation. However, the most significant cause of outcome failure is an as yet unresolved problem of institutional design, in other words:

> ...mechanisms have to be developed to integrate the issues and concerns raised in participatory forums into the mainstream of local authority decision making. (Stewart and Stoker 1988, p. 24)

The introduction of these mechanisms represents the final stage of the transition from the old form of democracy to a new hybrid form.

e. There are good prospects for achieving outcomes in future through learning and innovation by local government

For this conjecture the prospects for achieving outcomes are good although it recognizes that achieving meaningful participation continues to be a challenging and complex activity. While a commitment to learning, innovation and a range of approaches is required, the process is one of 'change and development from within existing structures and institutions, and which builds on elements of participative practice that already exist' (Prior *et al.* 1995, p. 172). As delivering participation is within the scope of local government a no-change approach is required from central government because 'there are times when it is better to do nothing and let past changes develop through experience' (Stewart 2003, p. 251). In fact the practical demonstration of participation by local government is the 'best argument' for its continued development (Stewart 1989). Local government, left to its own devices will, over time, overcome the many obstacles and serious challenges that exist because:

> There is a substantial body of learning within public sector organisations about how to develop more open and participative forms of governance and service delivery. The sheet of paper with which we can start to rethink citizenship practice is not, in fact, blank. (Prior *et al.* 1995, p. 168)

Hence the experience, experimentation and commitment required to ensure that, over time, initiatives will influence local policy and decision making are already in place.

This conjecture very much represents the orthodox position that, if not always made explicit, underpins much of policy and practice in respect of public participation. There are, however, equally credible alternative positions. Starting with the incompatibility conjecture, three such positions will be set out below.

2.4 The Incompatibility Conjecture

Drawing on élite theories of democracy, this conjecture argues that public participation is fundamentally incompatible with representative government. It highlights the problems associated with any attempt to construct a hybrid democratic form. It starts from the proposition that:

a. Local government is a necessarily élite institution in complex modern society that must be representative but not participative

For this conjecture only elected representative local government is democratically appropriate for modern society given its large scale and complex nature. Following from the arguments of Schumpeter (2008), the demands of government require that an élite group is able to dedicate itself to the policy process and provide leadership for government. In these terms representative democracy is:

> ...that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote. (Schumpeter 2008, p. 269)

For Schumpeter, therefore, while many mistakenly believe that representative democracy seeks to ascertain and act on the general will or common good of the people, the actual purpose of representative democracy is purely instrumental; it is to select which political élite will govern. Regular elections give the public the opportunity to choose between competing élites and, at the same time, require élites to tailor their policies towards the wishes of the electorate if they are to acquire their support. Participation outside of elections is unwanted as it limits the effectiveness of the policy making élite by reducing their room to operate and by destabilizing the policy process. If there is a role for participatory initiatives it is to represent sectional interests. Élites may well choose to associate themselves with such initiatives in order to improve their offer to the electorate. Once in power, however, élites will govern as they see fit and can derive little benefit from public participation.

As urban regime theory has suggested, government élites are more likely to privilege business interests over public participation once in power as their ultimate aim is economic growth (Davies 2002). Hence the notion of governance in this context refers to public-private networks that extend the influence of local political élites. This understanding of élite power has its roots in the US community power debates of the 1950s and 1960s that sought to determine who governs in a given locality (Hunter 1953; Dahl 1961). Power is taken to be a limited commodity held in the hands of a few; while local political élites remain dominant, they nevertheless need to work with other economic and social élites.

b. The public are unable to contribute meaningfully to policy and decision making

Despite the power they wield through elections the public are unable to contribute meaningfully to policy and decision making. This inability has two

aspects; apathy and capability. First, as local élites recognize, citizens are disinterested in formal politics and, from a political perspective, exist in a 'natural state of apathy' (Copus 2004, p. 275). The majority of the public are perfectly happy with the 'division of labour' associated with local representative democracy and this is evidenced by the way in which an 'indifferent and disinterested citizenry' has been perfectly willing to accept a decline in local democratic practice and the diminishing role of local government (Wilson 1999; Pratchett 2004). As predicted by public choice theory, narrow economic interests dominate within the local political arena so that:

> Democracy may be a highly regarded and laudable concept in principle, but for most voters, it appears, it is considerably less important than a low council tax and efficient service provision. (Pratchett and Wilson 1996, p. 231)

These arguments about the prevailing political culture echo the findings of Almond and Verba that only a small section of the citizenry is likely to be actively participating in local politics (Almond and Verba 1963; Pratchett 2004). The introduction of participatory initiatives into a representative system will only privilege sectional interests and reproduce patterns of social inequality with the more articulate and wealthy better able to further their own ends (Lowndes 1995; Leach and Wingfield 1999).

The second aspect of citizen inability to contribute meaningfully to policy and decision making is an argument about capability. As Schumpeter suggests, citizens are emotional, short term and easily influenced in their thinking and thus cannot be trusted with important matters of policy:

> Thus the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he

> would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again. (Schumpeter 2008, p. 262)

Local politicians nevertheless know that their holding of power is closely bound up with the preferences of the local electorate and they are therefore driven to present themselves to the public in a way that they consider will meet with public approval. While national political preferences are known to be the major determinant of local elections, local political élites perceive that local issues also have some influence and it seems 'at least in the minds of officers and councillors that local factors are considered to be of some importance' (Stoker 1991, p. 53).

c. Participatory initiatives are often genuine attempts to engage with citizens but they have mainly symbolic value for local political élites

While participatory initiatives cannot have a genuine democratic role, the proliferation of new initiatives is driven by a belief, albeit a mistaken one, that they can improve democracy (Pratchett 1999a, p. 632). While some council officers make genuine efforts to support participatory initiatives, for local political élites the value of initiatives will be primarily symbolic. Initiatives are supported because élites believe that the public find the idea of participation attractive even if they do not participate in practice. Supporting participation, therefore, has a public relations, and therefore an electoral, benefit. Élite support is possible because élites view initiatives as benign, especially the consultative forms, and are happy to work with them as long as they retain the final say (Copus 2007; Pilet and Steyvers 2007). Outside of the policy process social and service benefits are also recognized including those relating to education, social cohesion and increased social capital for citizens (Lowndes 1995).

d. Outcome failure happens because initiatives have limited democratic value within a representative structure - unwanted outcomes are rejected

Despite the good intentions of the officials that support them, the outcomes of participative initiatives can only be given a relatively low democratic weight within any decision making process set in a representative framework. When encountering the outcomes of initiatives, policy makers will be faced with a series of difficult practical challenges that flow from the fundamental differences between representative and participatory democracy. These include; how to take account of the limited 'expertise' of participants; how to navigate problems of accountability; how to incorporate and 'balance' different types of initiative; how to negate the in-built bias of initiatives that have been sponsored from the top down; and how to counter the influence of more affluent and articulate social groups. At best participatory initiatives are difficult to place within a representative framework and at worst they can compromise the legitimate democratic process. It is for these reasons that more participation cannot be simply equated with more democracy and why participatory initiatives may ultimately be 'an exercise in chasing shadows' (Pratchett 1999a; Wilson 1999).

Beyond any technical difficulties, when local political élites are presented with recommendations from initiatives they will reject any that conflict with their own preferences and policies. This plays out in two main ways. First, the local political group demands loyalty from councillors in a way that citizen engagement is unable to challenge (Gyford 1991; Leach and Wingfield 1999; Copus 2004). Second, public participation, while occasionally tolerated and promoted superficially, cannot be genuinely embraced by the local political élites who 'prefer local democracy to remain representative in nature so as to

ensure continued *élite* control' (Copus 2007, p. 273). The way in which local politicians feel that their status as representatives is threatened by participation has been well documented (Leach and Wingfield 1999; Wilson 1999; Klijn and Koppenjan 2000; Steyvers *et al.* 2007). Politicians respond to these threats by failing to provide support for ongoing initiatives and by refusing to reflect the outcomes of initiatives in the formal decision making process (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000).

e. The prospects for achieving outcomes are extremely limited without structural change – intermediate bodies may have to be used or expectations lowered

For this conjecture the prospects for achieving outcomes are bleak without fundamental changes to local representative democracy. These changes might include the introduction of powerful legal measures such as recall elections and referenda, a new constitutional settlement between central and local government or radical changes to the culture and dominance of national political parties (Copus 2004; 2006). Ultimately a substantial reworking of democratic institutions in line with principles of citizen governance may be required (Box 1998; Sullivan 2001). As Pratchett (2004) suggests, initiatives may have more of an impact if they are located away from local government so that participation could be mediated through intermediary organisations, such as the media or issue and community groups. However, the institutions of local government may simply need to be 'more selective in the way in which they engage the public, and to have more realistic expectations about the levels of political participation that exist' (2004, p. 228).

2.5 The Instrumental Conjecture

This conjecture draws on Marxist theory to describe the way in which local government uses participatory initiatives cynically as a means of managing the urban population. It provides a macro social-economic explanation and starts from the proposition that:

a. *Local government is an institution which administers economic and social policies on behalf of the central state*

For this conjecture the liberal idea of governmental neutrality is rejected. Instead the state is understood as a vehicle whose role is to 'create the conditions for capital accumulation through the production of profit' and which is 'engaged in the continuing struggle between classes which forms the dynamic of social change' (Hampton 1991, p. 240). The state is 'the chief provider of collective consumption' and 'the manager and regulator of the urban system' (Geddes 2009, p. 59). Here the concept of collective consumption, developed by Castells (1977), is an important one. It can be understood as 'the consumption of commodities whose consumption isn't assured by capital: affordable housing, mass transit systems, public schools, sewage and garbage facilities, hospitals, playgrounds and parks, even clean air' (Merrifield 2002, p. 120). Local government fulfils many of the functions required for collective consumption and can therefore be characterized as the *local state* acting as an extension of the national state (Cockburn 1977). This relationship between the local and national state is, however, open to debate. Different opinions exist about the degree to which local government is either explicitly directed by central government or simply carries out its role as a necessary consequence of the economic and social conditions it operates within (Pickvance 1995).

This conjecture characterises network governance as a superficial aspect of capitalism. While networks of organisations may provide a powerful means for managing the local state; the argument that these networks represent a new mode of organising is a simply an ideological facet of neolibralism. Network governance does not change the underlying structure of the capitalist economy (Davies 2011).

b. The public are collective consumers of local services who need to be managed

This conjecture understands the public principally as the recipients of services such as housing, social services and leisure services, which reproduce the working class in the interests of capitalism. The provision of these services, however, gives rise to a conflict of interest between the state and the urban working class. The state will seek, particularly in times of economic crisis, to reduce the cost of such services and this will lead to the urban population becoming 'increasingly dissatisfied over local Council services that they receive at home – as well as being increasingly militant at work' (Cockburn 1977, p. 117). Local government's role in providing these services has, therefore, the consequence of politicizing important aspects of everyday life (Geddes 2009). As a consequence, the urban population present a problem of management to local government both through their demands and their protests.

c. Participatory initiatives are pro-active management tools used to gather information and to deal with protest

Participatory initiatives, within this conjecture, can be seen as 'tender' instruments which operate alongside 'tougher' corporate management approaches (Cockburn 1977). As well as providing important intelligence about the local population, participation allows local government to shape public perceptions and can be utilized as a public relations vehicle that seeks to

engineer support for pre determined policies, as tokenistic window dressing or as a way to divert attention from unpopular policies (Arnstein 1969; Saunders 1983; Lowndes and Wilson 2001, p. 637). As Beresford observes:

> Participatory initiatives frequently serve to obstruct rather than increase people's involvement, being used to tokenise and co-opt people, delay decisions and actions and to legitimise predetermined agendas and decisions. This seems to have been particularly true of consumerist approaches to participation, where data collection rather than empowerment is the primary aim. To date it has been this approach to participation that has dominated and this may help account for the widespread distrust of and disillusionment with participation that has developed. (Beresford 2002, p. 279)

Communication in participatory processes can be seen as 'flowing one way' - from the administrative professional to the citizen with information 'managed, controlled, and manipulated' (King *et al.* 1998, p. 322). While the rhetoric of participation suggests empowerment, participatory initiatives are in fact 'more or less compatible with traditional top–down decision-making processes and in their current form can be interpreted as part of a system of domination rather than emancipation' (Bickerstaff and Walker 2005, pp. 2139-2140).

Participation, along with community development initiatives, also helps local government to manage protest (Saunders 1983; Hampton 1991). While it may not be possible to neutralize conflict entirely local government ensures that it is 'moderated and converted, wherever possible, onto a style of governance' (Cockburn 1977, p. 117). Small amounts of conflict can even help support the status quo by defusing situations that might otherwise become more serious and by creating the impression that democracy is a legitimate forum for protest.

d. Outcome failure happens because corporate élites have no desire for initiatives to influence policy

For this conjecture the mismatch in intention and outcome for participation in the policy process is 'designed in' as a confidence trick which aims to provide legitimacy for government (Arnstein 1969; Cockburn 1977). It is not surprising, therefore, that the impact of participatory initiatives on the policy process is difficult to detect.

e. The prospects for achieving outcomes are nonexistent – however initiatives can be used to challenge the state

Unsurprisingly, prescriptions for public participation within local government are limited within this conjecture. From a Marxist perspective participation is, however, not all bad for the urban working class as it can be a way of voicing demands and of building collective consciousness and protest. Participation and community development initiatives have 'not always worked out in the best interest of councils' and, as a result of these initiatives, many community workers and other council employees have 'gone native' and sided with the local working class against the local council (Cockburn 1977, p. 117). For the local state public participation may at times be a necessary but risky strategy. Ultimately, however, participative initiatives that present a real challenge to the local state either cease to be participatory initiatives or cease to exist altogether (Saunders 1983).

2.6 The Resistivity Conjecture

This conjecture draws on strands of poststructuralist theory and proposes that pre-existing institutional frameworks act to resist the operation and impact of participative initiatives. However, this resistance cannot be

generalized and can only be understood at the micro level. Within this conjecture emphasis is placed on the way in which the meanings and frameworks upon which actors draw for their thought and action are constructed through discourse (Finlayson and Martin 2006a).

New institutional theory is a framework that can be used to explain the behaviour of local government actors in this context (Lowndes 1996; 2001; Scott 2001). Institutions are regarded as 'multifaceted, durable social structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources', they are 'relatively resistant to change' and 'they tend to be transmitted across generations, to be maintained and reproduced' (Scott 2001, p. 49). Rules (formal and informal) and norms guide action so that, when confronted with a new participatory initiative, 'actors draw on their resources to interpret and respond to it based upon pre-existing rules and pre-existing logics of appropriate behaviour' (Sullivan *et al.* 2003, p. 35). Alternatively, new discourses are generated that marginalize initiatives by, for example, emphasizing particular understandings of what representative means or of what it means to be a member of the public (Barnes *et al.* 2007). The word 'resistivity' is used to convey the way in which entrenched institutional frameworks act to oppose the transmission of the new norms of public participation. 'Resistivity' is borrowed from physical science where it refers to the extent to which a material opposes the flow of an electrical current.

a. Local government is only one node within a complex network of local governance

Local government must be understood as part of a fluid structure of governance, as 'just one nodal point in a complex network of interrelating elements' (Finlayson and Martin 2006b, p. 30). This flows from a

poststructuralist rejection of the notion of the state as a single site of power and sovereignty. Analysis is instead focused upon the diffuse nature of power, the unstructured nature of local governance and the 'diverse range of agencies, apparatuses and practices producing varied mechanisms of control and varied forms of knowledge' (Finlayson and Martin 2006a, p. 167). The unpredictable nature of local governance has important implications for understanding the relationship between local government and public participation. It reinforces the need to analyse the 'micro physics' of the relationship within each unique social and political context.

b. The public are constructed by officials in many different ways

As social reality is constituted by discourse so the public cannot be treated as a 'pre-given entity' with 'a neatly bundled set of needs or interests that can be expressed in a rational process of debate' (Barnes *et al.* 2007, p. 63). The concept of 'the public' is instead a social construction that can be defined and redefined through discourse, ideologies and institutional practice. This view, in contrast to rational models of behaviour, places importance upon the way in which the idea of the public is understood by professionals and how this understanding influences the practice of participation. Not only is the idea of 'the public' socially constructed by professionals but, following on from Foucauldian notion of 'governmentality', it can be argued that participation also has a constitutive effect on participants, making them more 'governable' through the discursive practice of officials, capturing them in government fields of power (Barnes *et al.* 2007).

c. Participatory initiatives are the embodiment of new participatory discourses that are vulnerable to existing institutional frameworks

The number and diversity of participatory initiatives is a consequence of the various national policy discourses and objectives which have prompted them to be set up. It also suggests that the old bureaucracies are being replaced by a new form of 'more open, collaborative and innovative public policy system' (Barnes *et al.* 2007, p. 186). In this sense, initiatives must be regarded as genuine attempts to introduce new forms of governance. However, as initiatives come up against the old institutions of local government, dynamics of resistance may begin to take hold as support is withdrawn, rationales are changed or the attention switched to more appealing participatory projects. The internal dynamics of initiatives may be even more vulnerable to existing institutional frameworks, particularly where rules are framed exclusively by local government actors. In these instances the old rules and norms can be so strongly entrenched that they 'effectively imprison all participants, officials and the public alike' (Barnes *et al.* 2007, p. 192). While these effects can be observed they cannot be assumed. The dynamics of participatory initiatives need to be assessed in their specific contexts and according to the rules applied by actors in any particular time as 'separate and distinct logics of appropriate action can operate in different parts of the same organisation and across different communities' (Sullivan *et al.* 2003, p. 42).

d. Outcome failure happens because entrenched institutional frameworks operate to resist the outcomes from initiatives

The policy impact of participatory initiatives is delimited by the effects of existing institutional frameworks. So, for example, local politicians, who are able to maintain their influence through their use and control of discourse

(Woods 1998), reinforce political norms associated with representative democracy which often run counter to the norms of participation. Similarly, in terms of the service provider role of local government, officers will marginalize initiatives by reinforcing norms of professional expertise and of organisational necessity. New norms of public involvement, service user empowerment and local deliberation do not displace these 'old' institutions but rather are overlaid on top of them (Barnes *et al.* 2004, p. 217). In response these pre-existing frameworks foster processes of 'institutional deflection, acommodation and incorporation' reflected in practice by a failure to provide adequate resources for initiatives, the questioning of the legitimacy of citizen groups and strongly held concerns about the validity and legitimacy of participatory initiatives (Sullivan *et al.* 2003, p. 39).

e. The prospects for outcomes are mixed – existing frameworks may be challenged, however directing participation through external bodies may be more effective

Institutions are not fixed and can be changed by the strategic actions of individuals (Lowndes 1996). So, despite entrenched institutional frameworks, the possibility for participative initiatives to achieve outcomes still remains but will depend on individuals, both inside and outside of local government, having the capacity 'to challenge dominant rules and norms and to question the ways in which the rules of the game are defined' (Barnes *et al.* 2007). If this is to happen;

> …public bodies need to be prepared to do what is necessary to make the most of the potential of public participation including addressing institutional inertia and tackling the power relationship between public bodies and public participants'. (Barnes *et al.* 2007, p. 30)

This implies not just challenging old institutions but fostering 'the new linguistic and symbolic resources from which such challenges might flow' (Barnes *et al.* 2007, p. 201). Consistent mobilization strategies in this context can make a difference to the institutions associated with public participation and new rules can be shaped and sustained where there is a willingness to do so by politicians and officials. This has been demonstrated by some local councils who have been able to shape the 'participation game' and create an institutional environment which encourages greater *levels* of participation (Lowndes *et al.* 2006a). Importantly, however, new initiatives are more likely to be successful when they are semi autonomous and located and/or established through voluntary groups (Barnes *et al.* 2007); in other words at arm's length from the institutional effects of local government.

2.7 Selecting the Incompatibility Conjecture

What the conjectures presented above suggest is that, while the orthodox transitional conjecture remains entirely defensible, three alternative conjectures are equally credible. Conjectures are not, however, full blown theories and while they are perfectly presentable in their own terms each requires further development and testing for their credibility to be validated. Any one of the three alternative conjectures could, therefore, provide a focus for the remainder of this thesis. Indeed, each provides plenty of scope to be developed and tested. However, in the interests of ensuring that the thesis remains manageable, only one has been selected; the incompatibility conjecture. The purpose of this short section is to elaborate that choice.

The first reason for selecting the incompatibility conjecture is that it is the one most directly in conversation with the transitional conjecture. It presents

the 'participation problem' as a problem of local politics and of democratic theory rather than as a wider socio-economic problem (instrumental conjecture) or as an institutionalist problem (resistivity conjecture). The incompatibility conjecture is, theoretically speaking, in a similar neighbourhood to the transitional conjecture.

The second reason is that the identification of the 'participation problem' as a feature of local politics seems well supported. Within the European context, for example, it has been observed that, when bringing citizens and other groups into processes of interactive decision making, the 'sanctioning and implementing of the results in "normal" political decision-making procedures and arenas is apparently problematic' (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000, p. 367). Politicians 'seldom or never abdicate their pivotal role in general local governance (Steyvers *et al.* 2007, p. 123) and, while local politicians are happy to work with participatory initiatives, they will only do so as long as initiatives are benign and as long as they retain the final say (Copus 2007; Pilet and Steyvers 2007). Furthermore, where councillors engage directly in participatory initiatives their influence can have negative effects (Newman 2001; Fung and Wright 2003). These observations point towards the political arena as a source of difficulty for public participation and suggest that this is territory worth exploring further.

Finally, the arena of local politics is one of particular interest to the author. One of the motivations for undertaking this research was to gain a greater understanding of the behaviours and motivations of local politicians. Testing and developing the incompatibility conjecture, with its focus on the local political élite, presented an opportunity to explore this further.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an original framework for analysing the problematic relationship between local government and public participation. It has drawn a parsimonious theory map of four conjectures, each of which is theoretically coherent and empirically defendable and each of which links explanations for poor outcomes to distinct wider currents of theory. The broader added value of this approach will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Overall this thesis seeks to explore why it is that the outcomes from participatory initiatives have had such limited impact upon local policy and decision making in the UK. In answering this question the aim is to shed light on the question of whether the orthodox position; that the 'participation problem' could be solved through improved experience, experimentation and innovation, might be challenged by credible alternatives in general and by the incompatibility conjecture in particular.

The remainder of this thesis therefore, will seek to contribute to the understanding of the dysfunctional relationship between UK local government and public participation initiatives by developing and testing the incompatibility conjecture. Consistent with the critical realist approach adopted here, the first part of this process is theory building. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

3. Theorising the Incompatibility Conjecture[3]

Local politicians, like all other politicians, passionately want to endure.

W. Eric Jackson, Local Government in England and in Wales, 1945 (p. 142)

Élite theory suggests that contemporary local government in modern complex societies such as the UK is fundamentally incompatible with participatory forms of democracy. Participatory initiatives, while often genuine attempts to engage the public, can only have limited democratic value within a representative structure. Local political élites, according to this theory, will ensure that the outcomes from participatory initiatives have limited value within the decision making process. This behaviour is not a matter of choice; it is structured by the political environment that local politicians operate within.

The implications of this conjecture, if correct, are significant. For policy makers and practitioners it suggests that their efforts to set up and run participatory initiatives that have genuine impact will continue to be in vain. For the public that participate in these initiatives also it means that, in terms of influencing policy at least, their time will be wasted. While plausible, the incompatibility conjecture is nevertheless theoretically under developed and empirically untested. It represents an under explored area of knowledge with

[3] Some of the material in this chapter has been published as: McKenna, D. 2012. 'Local politicians' attitudes towards participatory initiatives: a Bulpittian perspective', *Public Money & Management*, 32.

potential benefits. Even if the conjecture is disproved, research in this area may help to uncover ways to improve the influence of participatory initiatives. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to develop and present an original theory of the incompatibility conjecture that can be empirically tested in the field work chapters that follow.

While the literatures associated with the incompatibility conjecture highlighted in the previous chapter provide a valuable starting point, further theory building is necessary for two reasons. The first is that, to provide a satisfying account of the incompatibility conjecture, it is necessary to show exactly how the élite structures of local politics shape the behaviours of individual politicians when they are faced with the outcomes of participatory initiatives. Such an account must demonstrate that strong forces are in operation and that actors cannot easily choose to act differently. While the motivations of local politicians such as the need to win votes, gain office and achieve policy aims are discussed in the relevant literatures (for example Strøm 1997), these accounts lack precision and theoretic depth.

A second reason why further theory building is necessary is that the élite interpretations of politics from which the incompatibility conjecture is drawn are largely concerned with national rather than local politics. While local politics has many similarities with national politics there are nevertheless important differences that need to be addressed. A credible theory of the incompatibility conjecture, therefore, has to deal effectively with these differences.

Underpinning the theory building presented here are the philosophical assumptions of critical realism. These assumptions, associated primarily with the work of Roy Bhaskar (Blaikie 2000), have two important implications worth

noting. First, for critical realists, theory building comes before empirical research (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Blaikie 2000; Sayer 2000). The Humean concept of explanation that induces general laws from observed regularities is rejected. Instead critical realists seek to identify causal mechanisms, arising from social structures, and are concerned to determine in what circumstances that they produce the regularities that they are interested in. The unobservable nature of causal mechanisms means that they can only be known by inference. Researchers seeking to explain social phenomena must therefore start by building theories about these causal mechanisms that can subsequently be rejected or refined in the light of empirical testing. This theory-first approach is reflected in the overall structure of this thesis.

The second implication of critical realism for this research is that theory building starts with the abstract and descends to the concrete at which point testable hypotheses can be established (Danermark *et al.* 2002). Critical realist assumptions imply a research process that draws on both abductive and retroductive modes of inference in order to build satisfying explanatory theory from the top down (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Blaikie 2000; Danermark *et al.* 2002). This is therefore the structure applied to the theory building presented in this Chapter. A fuller description of the critical realist assumptions utilised here, along with their implications, can be found at ***APPENDIX A***.

In developing the theory two additional sets of ideas are utilised; Crawford and Ostrom's Institutional Grammar Tool (1995; Ostrom 2005) and the élite interpretation of UK national politics offered by Jim Bulpitt (John 2010). The institutional 'grammar of political behaviour' described in the first section is derived from the former and the élite re-description of local politics and the concept of the local governing code, explored in the second and third sections,

are derived from the latter. The first task, however, is to introduce the 'Or Else' motivational logic. This is a pivotal aspect of the theory for it represents the causal mechanism that links a given social structure, such as the local political élite, to the behaviour of political actors.

3.1 Linking Structure to Behaviour: The Or Else Motivational Logic

Or Else motivational logics are powerful constraints on local political actors. They are clearly understood sanctions that bridge social structure and political behaviour. Or Else motivational logics provide a means for explaining councillor responses to participatory initiatives and they are central to the credibility of the theory being constructed here.

The term 'Or Else' was first coined by Crawford and Ostrom in their article *A Grammar of Institutions* (1995) to describe a sanction associated with an institutional rule. Rules, along with norms and strategies, are one of three possible types of institution proposed by Crawford and Ostrom in order to organise a diversity of institutional concepts within the literature. It is this Grammar (also referred to as the Institutional Grammar Tool) that provides the conceptual foundations for the institutional analysis utilised for this research.

While the broad thrust of Ostrom's work on institutions has been appreciated in the wider politics literature there have been few empirical applications of the Institutional Grammar Tool albeit with the odd exception (for example Siddiki *et al.* 2011). At the same time, while the case for an institutionalist analysis underpinned by critical realist assumptions has been made (Leca and Naccache 2006), these assumptions have not yet been applied to the Institutional Grammar Tool. The development of the Tool within a political context using critical realist assumptions for this research is, therefore,

an original contribution. A fuller elaboration of the Institutional Grammar Tool, including a description of the syntax associated with it, can be found at ***APPENDIX B***.

It is important to note that the Institutional Grammar Tool, with its distinction between rules, norms and strategies, is not the only approach to analysing institutions. Scott (2001), for example, distinguishes between cultural conventions, norms, cognitive frames and practices. For Lowndes and Roberts (2013), on the other hand, a distinction is made between rules, practices and narratives. Nevertheless, while alternatives could have been utilised for this research, the Institutional Grammar Tool was selected both for the satisfying coherence of its conceptual components and for the precise way it captures institutions.

Table 2 An illustrative example of a strategy, norm and rule

Behaviour	**Trigger**	**Motivational Logic**	
A member should vote according to the opinion of the party group	If there should be a conflict between a member's own opinion, the opinion of the party group in the council or the opinion of the voters	**In order to** ensure that decision making is effective	**= Strategy**
		As it is right that members act as partisans	**= Norm**
		Or else the member will be disciplined	**= Rule**

By way of a summary Table 2 illustrates how institutions can be captured as institutional statements and separated into strategies, norms and rules. The example used is taken from the MAELG survey and will be familiar to many local government researchers (Egner *et al.* 2013; Heinelt 2013c). Each of these three types of institutional statement implies a different type of motivational logic and it is the differences in motivational logics that differentiate strategies, norms and rules.

The purpose of the rest of this section is to further elaborate the framework illustrated in Table 2. It will do this in three stages; first by describing the concept of the motivational logic and locating it within Crawford and Ostrom's original scheme; second by explaining what is special about the Or Else motivational logic in the political arena; and third by saying something about two motivational logics that provide alternatives to the Or Else.

3.1.1 Defining Motivational Logics

Motivational logics are a component of institutional statements. These statements are written statements that represent (but are not the same as) formal or informal institutions (Crawford and Ostrom 1995). The Institutional Grammar Tool provides a clear syntactic structure, consisting of six components arranged in logical order, for capturing institutional statements. The approach taken here is to present this syntactic structure in simplified form. Institutional statements are split instead into three components; the *behaviour* that the researcher is seeking to explain; the *trigger* that specifies in what circumstances the behaviour will happen; and the *motivational logic* that underpins the behaviour. As can be seen from figure 2, the trigger is associated with a given problem setting whereas the motivational logic may derive externally.

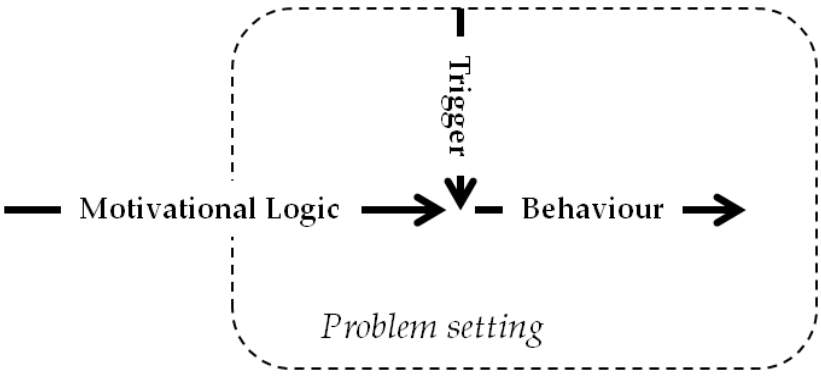


Figure 2 Behaviours, triggers and motivational logics

Motivational logics parallel Mills' (1940) concept of vocabularies of motive. They represent 'accepted justifications for present, future, or past programs or acts':

> When an agent vocalizes or imputes motives, he is not trying to describe his experienced social action. He is not merely stating "reasons." He is influencing others-and himself. Often he is finding new "reasons" which will mediate action. (Mills 1940, p. 907)

Vocabularies of motive must be understood in context and cannot be abstracted. They are 'of no value apart from the delimited societal situations for which they are the appropriate vocabularies. They must be situated' (Mills 1940, p. 913).

In critical realist terms motivational logics parallel institutional logics. As Leca and Naccache (2006) have argued, the ontological assumptions of critical realism are entirely compatible with institutional analysis and provide the latter with theoretic depth and explanatory power. While actors interact with institutions that both shape and are shaped by them, these institutions are at the same time structured by institutional logics which provide the basis of organization and legitimacy thus, 'whilst institutions are the rules of the game,

institutional logics are the underlying principles of the game' (Leca and Naccache 2006, p. 632).

3.1.2 The 'Or Else' Motivational Logic

The Or Else is one type of motivational logic (more will be said about the logics associated with strategies and norms in the sub section that follows). As noted above, the Or Else is a sanction associated with an institutional rule. Indeed, within the framework of the Institutional Grammar Tool it is the presence of the Or Else that makes an institution a rule (see ***APPENDIX B***). What then defines the Or Else motivational logic?

Ostrom has provided three criteria that institutional statements must meet if they are to be understood as rules with 'Or Else' logics:

> Rules must be enforced and there must be a collective understanding of the range of punishments and clearly assigned authority and procedures for imposing them.
>
> Rules must be monitored by specialised individuals or by other actors and there must be a collective understanding of these arrangements. Those that monitor may be the same as those that enforce but this does not have to be the case.
>
> The Or Else must be crafted in an arena suitable for that purpose such as a legislature or a court for example. (Ostrom 2005, p. 150)

It is worth noting at this stage that, in the political context, there are types of sanction that fit these criteria such as those associated with loss of vote, office and policy. These sanctions will be recognisable to politics scholars as conceptions of political motivation, associated primarily with parties, but also with candidates, derived largely from rational choice theory (Strøm 1990). Specifying the exact nature of these sanctions is central to the theory building

that follows and will be dealt with in detail when the concept of the local political élite is developed later in the chapter.

3.1.3 Alternative Motivational Logics

The Or Else is not the only type of motivational logic. A central tenet of the Institutional Grammar Tool is that all institutional statements can be divided between three types. These are *shared strategies* that describe the collective actions that are seen as sensible in given situations, *norms* that describe shared strategies that are accompanied by a sense of obligation and *rules* that describe norms associated with enforceable sanctions. The way in which strategies, norms and rules are constructed by the Institutional Grammar Tool makes this claim logically defendable (see ***APPENDIX B***). As a consequence of this distinction it is possible to identify two further types of motivational logic; the In Order To and the As It Is Right That. These are associated with strategies and norms respectively.

The motivational logic for a strategy is technical and relates to the effectiveness of the activity that is the object of behaviour. Hence they are 'In Order To' logics. A defining characteristic of the motivational logics associated with strategies is that they arise from the problem setting in which the strategy can be found. So, for example, Councillors might be concerned with the ability of a given participatory initiative to provide conclusions that are representative of the wider community. Suspending the initiative pending further work might be done In Order To ensure that the initiative is effective.

The motivational logic for a norm is obligatory and relates to the appropriateness of behaviour, hence the As It Is Right That label. These are obligatory logics that derive from personal, social or ideological preferences

that actors bring with them into an institutional action setting; they are external to the problem setting and arise from wider socio-economic frameworks. Representative role preferences such as trustee, delegate and politico can be included in this category. Councillors, for example, might reject the outcomes from participatory initiatives As It Is Right That councillors trust their own judgement.

The Institutional Grammar Tool, then, has two important benefits for this research. First it provides a precise and consistent means of describing institutions. The further step, taken here, of dividing institutional statements into only three components; behaviours, triggers and rules, further serves to ensure that the Tool has ease of use. Second, when the Tool is aligned with the assumptions of critical realism, it provides a means of explaining councillor behaviour and, more significantly, through the Or Else motivational logic, a means of linking structure to political actions. This leads on to a second claim of the incompatibility theory; that the Or Else motivational logics that shape the responses of councillors to participatory initiatives are emergent properties of the local political élite as opposed to general properties of political life. This will be the focus of the next section.

3.2 Or Else Motivational Logics and the Local Political Élite

An important part of the critical realist theory building process is the redescription or reconceptualisation of known phenomena using new conceptual frameworks, integrating existing theory where possible (Danermark *et al.* 2002). For critical realist research a great deal depends on the accurate conceptualisation of the social objects that give rise to causal mechanisms (2000, p. 19; Smith 2010; Bygstad and Munkvold 2011). In building a theory of the

incompatibility conjecture, therefore, it is important to be clear about the characteristics and properties of the local political élite.

The purpose of this section is to elaborate the claim that three Or Else motivational logics in particular can be associated with the local political élite; the need to hold together, the need to win elections and the need to achieve governing competence. To do this it draws on Bulpitt's conceptual framework for analysing national politics in the UK. Bulpitt's aim was to 'clarify the key components of the system of governance, to understand the nature of institutional political culture and to explore the key assumptions guiding the exercise of authority and power across the entirety of a nation state' (Bradbury and John 2010, p. 296). In order to achieve this Bulpitt established a number of linked concepts that he developed in a small number of key texts (Bulpitt 1986; 1995; 1996; 2008). The result was a parsimonious framework for understanding politics and a novel new language for describing it (Bradbury 2010).

It is important to note that the use of élite theory is not straightforward. This is particularly the case for local politics as local political élites remain a relatively unexplored theoretic sub field (Woods 1998). While having a long history, élite theory has been less favoured in recent years, in part due to overstated claims linked to the approach and the indiscriminate use of the term (Scott 2008). This ambiguity of élite theory has resulted in a field where varied definitions have 'played havoc with the analysis of research problems' and where 'different labels are used to refer to the same concept and different concepts are covered by the same label' (Zuckerman 1977, p. 327). If treated carefully, however, the assumptions of élite theory can still be used to inform research (Scott 2008).

This section will proceed in three stages. First it will establish from a Bulpittian perspective how the local political élite can be defined. Second it will deal with the problem of élite unity and show how tensions within local political élites underpin the importance of the 'holding together' Or Else motivational logic. Third it will show how the élite governing objectives proposed by Bulpitt, namely winning elections and achieving governing competence can also be captured as Or Else motivational logics.

3.2.1 Defining the Local Political Élite

The first task of a Bulpittian analysis is to locate the élite at the centre of government. For Bulpitt it was a small community of senior ministers and civil servants, referred to as either the 'centre' or the 'court', that manipulated the levers of state power. Within this community lay a small and secretive inner centre 'closed to the public and even to the media, 'an "efficient" secret understood by a few' (John 2010, pp. 347-348). There are, of course, important differences between national and local politics, and the re-description of local politics using a Bulpittian framework is not without its challenges.

At the local level it is the ruling party group that most closely resembles Bulpitt's inner centre. A ruling group typically comprises of a manageable 25 to 35 members, more manageable than the 300 plus members of parliament that national élites will typically have to work with, and it fulfils important élite characteristics such as a clearly defined membership and the ability to operate in 'exclusive back-region spaces' (Woods 1998, p. 2108). Cabinet style decision making has been introduced into local government and, while a case may be made for the cabinet as the centre of power, it is at least as credible to suggest that the party group meeting retains its status as the primary decision maker over both cabinet and scrutiny meetings (Stoker *et al.* 2003).

For Bulpitt the central élite were not a fixed entity and the ruling party group cannot be considered as the only candidate for the inner circle. Copus (2004), for example, suggests that the local political élite also includes senior party officials and members. The idea of a 'local court', comprising of senior politicians and managers, otherwise known as a 'joint', or 'corporate', élite, has also been widely used in local government research and theory (Wilson 1989). As Gains notes, given the right conditions of stability, there are examples to be found of councils where 'senior officers clearly are working much more closely with a smaller group of leading councillors' (Gains 2009, p. 62). However, as Gains (2009) also argues, local senior officers are different to their civil service equivalents. They feel a strong responsibility to deliver central policy agendas even at the expense of local priorities and, at the same time, retain a strong sense of serving the whole council, not just the executive. Nevertheless, the relationships between senior officers and politicians have the potential to create tensions and difficulties for the inner circle.

The choice of equating the local political élite with the ruling party group is nevertheless defensible. As Woods argues, élites have three defining characteristics. First they have 'privileged access to, or control over, particular resources which may be mobilised in the exercise of power or influence'. Second members are 'linked by a network of social or professional relations, performed in exclusive back-region spaces, which may be used for recruitment, or the transmission of influence or patronage'. Third 'élites are socially and discursively constructed as an élite, either by themselves or by others' (Woods 1998, p. 2108). For local political élites all three characteristics apply. The party group meeting in particular can be identified both as the 'back-region' space that allows the élite to manage its affairs and formulate policies but also as the focus for the discursive construction of the élite.

If they are to be properly defined, élites must also be clearly differentiated from other influential groups and relationships with these other groups clearly understood (Scott 2008). In this respect three groups are particularly important for the local political élite. The first comprises the senior echelons of local authority management who work closely alongside them and alongside the executive councillors in particular. This relationship with senior management is extremely important for the local political élite and may be close on a day to day basis. The second group is the wider membership of the political party including the members and officials who, whilst not able to participate in all of the work of the local political élite, may nevertheless have important influence not least in determining the selection and de-selection of candidates for elections. The third important relationship for the local political élite is with the national political élite although this relationship is perhaps the most difficult of the three. In contrast to many other European countries, local political élites in the UK have been historically insulated from national élites who may in turn regard their local counterparts as parochial and less competent (Cole and John 2001).

3.2.2 Local Political Élites as Unitary Actors

The 'holding and exercise of power' and the role of collective agency in this regard is at the heart of the élite concept (Scott 2008). This is true for local political élites as it is for any others. If party groups are to function effectively, indeed if they are to be considered as an élite group at all, they must demonstrate behavioural cohesion (Frey 1985). Bulpitt 'followed the assumptions of élite theorists in asserting the existence of a cohesive élite group within the state with coherent aims' (Bradbury 2010, p. 325). Following Bulpitt, the working assumption here is that the local political élite will behave in a

rationally self interested and unified way (Buller 1999, p. 695). Furthermore it is assumed that the élite will have relative autonomy to act, that rationality is 'bounded' and that the élite will 'satisfice'; choosing those options which are 'good enough' for its purposes and, at the same time, deviating as little as possible from existing routines and practices (Bulpitt 1988, pp. 185-186). If Bulpitt's conceptual framework is to be translated into local politics, however, both the cohesiveness and the exercise of power by the élite need to be examined in the local context.

This issue of internal dynamics is critical for any élite understanding of local politics. Ultimately, if the behavioural cohesion of the ruling group breaks down then it can no longer be said to be an élite group. Variations in internal dynamics may hinder the capacity of the group to act effectively or cause group preferences to change. In terms of decision making, for example, Dunleavy (1980) notes that there are two types of party group. The more collegiate, which operate on majority rule, and the more tightly managed and clique dominated. Within groups there may also be differences in the extent to which individuals subscribe to the direction being taken. Individual rebels or minority factions, where they exist, may seek to be subversive. Finally, there may also be variations in the extent to which individual councillors within the ruling group are able to align their personal role preferences to the preferences of the élite as a whole. Newton (1976), for example, notes a number of different options that individual councillors might have when interpreting their roles. These include; trustee verses delegate representation; ward verses citywide focus; policy verses casework focus; and specialist versus generalist issue focus. Whilst these role preferences may be entirely consistent with the attitudes and preferences of the group, at other times there may be discord.

The idea of wholly unified local political élites is therefore an abstract notion unlikely to be reflected in reality. Rather there will be degrees of unity with some groups more cohesive than others. Collective action is therefore a very practical issue for the leadership of local political élites as party groups can be undermined by rivalries and factions and councillors can have different views about what their roles should be (Newton 1976; Copus 2004). The need to hold the group together can therefore be considered as a property of the local political élite as a social structure; as an 'Or Else' motivational logic that structures behaviour. Two further 'Or Else' logics flow from a Bulpittian analysis; the need to win elections and maintain governing competence. These are discussed in the next sub section.

3.2.3 Local Statecraft: Winning Elections and Maintaining Governing Competence

A further significant aspect of Bulpitt's élite analysis is his 'statecraft interpretation'. Statecraft, which has been an important and influential contribution to political analysis in the UK (Buller 1999), is a set of linked concepts which were used by Bulpitt to explain the behaviour of national élites, most notably the first Thatcher government of the early 80s (Bulpitt 1986). Bulpitt put forward statecraft as an alternative to interpretations which suggested that this government was driven by ideology, acting on behalf of capitalist interests or concerned primarily with maintaining policy consistency (Bulpitt 1986). Instead Bulpitt argued that the behaviour of this Thatcher government, or any national power élite, needed to be understood as a product of the need of political parties to gain and maintain power. Bulpitt described statecraft in the following way:

> What is statecraft? The crude answer is that it is the art of winning elections and achieving some necessary degree of governing competence in office. It is

> not synonymous with, though it may be related to, pragmatism or expediency. It is concerned primarily to resolve the electoral and governing problems facing a party at any particular time. As a result it is concerned as much with the 'how' as the 'what' of politics. (Bulpitt 1986, p. 21)

Statecraft is an institutional phenomenon. It refers to 'the dynamic character to governance and way in which a certain kind of institutional intelligence accumulates over time' (John 2008, p. 5). Buller summarises it like this:

> In short, Statecraft is about the relationship between ideas and political practice; it is about short-term politicking or tactical manoeuvring. However, it is something more than these things. It is concerned with the possibilities for longer-term reflection, calculation and action within the structural constraints faced by any political leadership in office. (Buller 1999, p. 695)

Statecraft draws together a number of core concepts. In his last iteration of statecraft Bulpitt described it as having three main dimensions:

> These are: (a) the governing objectives; (b) the governing code – a set of relatively coherent principles or rules underlying policies and policy related behaviour and (c) polity management – a set of political support mechanisms designed to protect and promote the code and objectives. (Bulpitt 1996, p. 1097)

Winning elections is, unsurprisingly, a central concern for local political élites. If not a matter of life and death election results certainly make the difference between political sickness and health. Losing an election will mean losing control of the formal levers of power as well as the trappings and benefits of office. For the majority of élites in power any long term planning includes consideration of how the next election will be won. Even if the importance of national issues in local elections is acknowledged by those

standing as councillors, many will still feel that local campaigning can make a difference (Stoker 1991).

Once elected achieving a degree of governing competence is far from straight forward. This need to achieve governing competence is regarded by Bulpitt as the most significant aspect of statecraft. It refers to a party's perceived ability, when in power, to make the right policy choices and in particular to avoid policies which are difficult to implement (Bulpitt 1986). There are two main forms of power associated with élites; c*oercive influence*, linked primarily with formal and administrative power 'depends on the rational calculations made by agents and operates through punishments and rewards'; and *persuasive influence*, linked more with informal strategies, 'depends on the offering of arguments, appeals and reasons that lead subalterns to believe that it is appropriate to act in one way or another' (Scott 2008, p. 30). Coercive influence is exercised through formal control of council decision making structures which includes council meetings, cabinet meetings and other committees such as planning. In settings outside of the council such as community groups, political party meetings and external organisations, however, power, will be exercised through persuasive influence. It is in these arenas that interpersonal relationships and extended networks become important. For local political élites the 'key aim of the party locally is to secure positions of power or a voice in any arena that presents itself' (Copus 2004, p. 59).

In summary, this Bulpittian redescripton of the local political élite suggests that three 'Or Else' logics can be identified as properties of the local political élite as a social structure; the need to hold together, to win elections and to maintain governing competence. These logics are, however, abstract in

as far as their influence on the ground can only be understood in a given local context. What is required, therefore, is a means of describing how these 'Or Else' logics might play out in any given locality. This is the task of the next section.

3.3 The Local Governing Code

As critical realists stress the importance of specifying the context in which causal mechanisms are able to operate, so new institutionalists highlight the importance of locality in capturing institutional effects. Lowndes *et al.* (2006a) have argued that institutions are malleable and political actors can have decisive influence from one locality to another (see also Carmichael 1994).

From a Bulpittian perspective the concept that captures the most salient elements of the locality effect is the local governing code. This refers to the decisions that local political élites make about how they will hold the group together, win elections and achieve governing competence. These codes, which reflect the political environment in which local political élites operate, are the prisms through which the Or Else logics associated with the local political élite are translated into behaviours. Researchers cannot, therefore, explain councillor behaviour in a given locality without reference to the local governing code.

The purpose of this section, therefore, is to elaborate the claim, stated at the start of this chapter, that the 'Or Else' associated with local political élites can only be understood in the context of locally adopted governing codes. It does this by performing three tasks. First, by drawing on Stoker's (1991) portraits of political parties, it describes a method of classification. Six

governing code variables, divided between electoral strategies and power models are then discussed in the two sections that follow.

3.3.1 Differentiating Local Governing Codes

The local governing code concept is a local adaptation of Bulpitt's original governing code; a component of his interpretation of UK national élite politics. Bulpitt's governing code is 'something less than a philosophy of government and yet more than a collection of specific policies. It relates to the accepted rules of statecraft as employed over time by political élites' (Bulpitt 2008, p. 70 note). The governing code can be regarded as an institution able to adapt to new circumstances and to influence the behaviour of actors over significant periods of time (Bradbury 2006). Unlike the governing objectives, governing codes are not fixed. They can vary according to time and space and continue as long as they are viable. The role of context here is crucial. Governing codes are responses to the perceived governing problems of political élites and can be highly sensitive to changes in the political environment. Significant shocks or structural changes can cause the end of one regime and herald the start of another. While more limited in their options than their national counterparts, local political élites still have room for manoeuvre. Consistent with a critical realist approach, neither structure nor agency are privileged nor are they conflated (Leca and Naccache 2006). As Saunders suggests; power involves 'choice within structural constraints' (Saunders 1976, p. 33). Local political élites make their own governing codes but not in circumstances of their own choosing.

Table 3 Portraits of local political parties adapted from Stoker (1991)

Traditionalists (Conservative)	Rural social élite. Defend the local area and interests. Provide paternalistic care of the less well off. Localist – resent central intervention. Trust officers to make decisions. Anti 'party politics'. Seek low rates
Municipal Socialists (Labour)	Working class. Seek expanded range of services for local government. Paternalistic. Seek best public provision to those who elected them. Set policy guidelines, find resources and look after individual concerns. Look to officer structure to 'run the machine'
Urban Ideologues (Conservative)	Promote new managerialism in council business. Openly disagree with traditionalists. Believe in narrow role for local government delivering only what private sector can't – no strategic role. Have disrespect for all officers. Want to contribute to national debates rather than talk to local issues
Urban Left (Labour)	Campaigning role for local government to challenge national government /established interests. Involvement of a wide range of community interest groups. Less willing to pass over management to officers. Decentralising. Professional status with working class links e.g. with trade unions
Suburban Managerialists (Conservative)	Take a direct hand in managing council business and giving oversight to council affairs. Will shake up structures and bring in new talent. Loyal to officers who go along with reforms. Believe in the strategic role of the council. Clearly labelled as conservatives. Some anti centralism.
Urban Managerialists (Labour)	Similar background to urban left. Local government has a wider economic / tackling poverty role. Seek customer friendly service delivery. Gradual reform with good management and efficiency. Business and voluntary sector partners. Less interested in radical political gestures and campaigns

The scheme of classifying local governing codes used here is an original construction that elaborates Bulpitt's conceptual framework. Specifically it draws on the portraits of local political parties provided by Stoker (1991). These portraits, summarised in Table 3, illustrate the 'diversity and divisions within local activists and councillors of the same party' (Stoker 1991, p. 49). They also

highlight the similarities between factions of different parties. Labour's *Urban Managerialist*s, for example, may have more in common with the Conservative *Suburban Managerialists* than with the *Urban Left* of their own party. What these portraits provide is a starting point for highlighting a common menu of approaches that analysts can select from when characterising local political élites.

From these portraits it is possible to derive a set of six variables that can be used to describe a governing code in any given locality. Following Bulpitt's governing objectives of winning elections and maintaining governing competence these variables can be divided between those concerned with elections strategies and those that relate to power models. These variables, summarised in Table 4, are elaborated in the two sub sections that follow.

Table 4 Variables of the local governing code

Electoral Strategy Decisions	
Party Politics	Partisan / Apolitical
Electoral Target	Constituency / Catch All
Electoral Arena	National / Local / Sub local
Power Model Options	
Centre Relationship	Collaboration / Autonomy / Acquiescence
Council Services	Delegation / Direct Management / Devolution / Disposal
Governance	Autonomy / Strategic / Alliance

3.4.2 Electoral Strategy Variables

The first set of variables refer to the electoral strategy, as the problem of how to win the next election is a primary concern for local political élites.

When devising such strategies, which may or may not be written down, élites will take into account local circumstances, their beliefs about the local electorate and their own political preferences. While the detail of electoral strategies will be highly localised the broad options will be the same across councils. There are three main decisions for élites to make. First, local political élites may wish to consider the role of party politics in their electoral strategy. More traditionally local politics has tended to be 'anti politics' and local élites may consider that the public still finds this kind of campaigning distasteful. As Dunleavy suggests, local political leadership can be either '...cued into the development of non local adversarial politics and partisan ideologies, or bent on depoliticising issues and developing administrative- bureaucratic solutions' (Dunleavy 1980, p. 144). This reflects a preference to exclude issues that are outside the mainstream of party politics and cannot be used to highlight differences between parties. Second, élites must decide who should be the focus of their strategy. In the post war period up to the 1980s a constituency focus was the norm with élites seeking support from their most obvious supporters by ensuring that council policies met specific interests and by vigorously pursuing casework. So, for example, the Conservative *traditionalists* kept rates low and the *municipal socialists* invested in public housing. More recently élites have taken more of a 'catch all' approach and to seek to demonstrate good management and efficiency in public service in order to have the widest appeal, while at the same time avoiding the kind of radical political gestures that might put off voters. The Labour *urban managerialists* and Conservative *suburban managerialists* are both examples of this approach.

Third, local political élites must decide in which political arena they wish to pitch their electoral message. Whilst the dominant influence of national politics will lead some to believe that campaigns on local issues do not make a

big difference, others believe that locality, or even neighbourhood issues, may still be decisive in the minds of the voters (Stoker 1991, p. 53). So, for example, the Conservative *urban ideologues* or the Labour *urban left*, have pitched themselves very much into the national political arena seeing themselves either as trailblazers for central government policies or as campaigners against them. Élites may instead place focus attention upon the local arena, campaigning on their record in improving local services and conditions, and will be at pains to show that they are first and foremost defending the local area and its interests. The Labour *urban managerialists* and the Conservative *traditionalists* are examples of this. Finally, some, such as the 'Focus' liberal democrats, pay greatest attention to fighting campaigns at the community level (Stoker 1991).

3.3.3 Power Model Variables

The second dimension of a local governing code after the electoral strategy refers to the power models that the élite choose to adopt in order to address their perceived governing problems. The term 'power model' is borrowed directly from Bulpitt who used it to describe four possible centre governing codes reflecting different approaches to centre–periphery relations. Bradbury summarises them like this:

> First, [Bulpitt] suggested a central autonomy model, which resulted from successful peripheralization to local collaborators of what the centre considered to be low politics to allow it to concentrate on what it considered to be high politics. Second, he conceived a model of capital city bargaining in which centre governing had to accept that peripheral interests were stronger and had penetrated the centre, resulting in the need for constant negotiation. Third, he suggested the central authority model in which the centre has achieved considerable voluntary acquiescence. Finally, he proposed a coercive power model, in which the centre can only govern through continuous intervention and threats. (Bradbury 2010, p. 327)

Another significant Bulpittian idea, linked to the concept of power models, is that élites, being far from all powerful, will seek to concentrate their limited resources on the issues that matter most to them. Bulpitt utilised the distinction between high and low politics where the former referred to matters of economic policy, defence and foreign policy and the latter to social and welfare issues (Bradbury and John 2010). Where central élites seek to gain autonomy from matters of low politics this can be understood as a form of a depoliticisation; itself a potentially important aspect of statecraft (Buller and Flinders 2005). While local political élites do not have matters of foreign policy or high finance to deal with they will have issues such as local transport policy and budget setting that they will wish to dedicate their full attention to. Similarly, in terms of 'low politics', many local political élites will be keen to pass on responsibility for issues such as local planning decisions or low level environmental issues to council officers or to councillors acting at community level.

While Bulpitt's power models are concerned with the centre-periphery relationship, there are three different governing problems facing local political élites: the relationship with the national centre; the relationship with the local authority as a service provider; and the relationship with those aspects of local governance that do not fall under direct local government control. Each will be considered in turn.

The relationship with the national centre provides both opportunities for influence and risks for local political élites. They may adopt a centre collaboration model, particularly if their party is in power, and seek to gain influence, or potential future influence, by proactively collaborating with the centre and implementing national policies. Such collaboration, as illustrated by

the *urban ideologues*, for example, may win special concessions from national government or even national roles for members of the local élite. It is the other side of what Bulpitt described as the 'centre authority' model with local politicians acting as 'unofficial field agents of the centre' (Bulpitt 2008, p. 64). Alternatively local élites may adopt a local autonomy model and seek to insulate themselves from the top down control of central government. This may mean greater freedom to pursue local electoral strategies or the ability to exercise greater influence in their locality due to the increased credibility that an independent stance can bring. Both the conservative *traditionalists* and the *urban left* are examples of this approach. Naturally the centre will be happy with this position if it adopts Bulpitt's 'centre autonomy' model as long as areas of 'high politics' are unaffected. If the centre adopts a different view, however, this may lead to conflict. Finally, local political élites may decide that there is no advantage to be gained by either collaborating with, or working against, central government and that influence is more likely to be gained by directing energy elsewhere. In this case local political élites will simply remain passive and follow a local acquiescence model. In some ways this is the other side of Bulpitt's 'central coercion' model although, as Bulpitt suggested, the centre does not really have the capacity to force its will upon local political élites unless they remain passive. The last centre power model proposed by Bulpitt was the 'capital city bargaining model'. The local corollary of this might be a 'centre bargaining' model; however, local political élites appear to have neither the intention nor the capacity to follow a policy of constant negotiation with the centre; at least no obvious examples offer themselves.

The second governing problem that local political élites must address is their relationship with the local authority as a service provider. Just as Bulpitt describes the way in which the centre can seek to gain autonomy from

problems of 'low' politics, so local political élites may adopt a delegation model in respect of council services. Conservative *traditionalists* and *municipal socialists* provide examples of this approach. They wish to retain overall control but the day-to-day running of services is seen as a distraction and best done by council officers. Others, however, such as *urban* and *suburban managerialists* may adopt a direct management model. Day to day involvement in council services can provide a source of legitimacy and influence for councillors who take on the role of elected managers (Copus 2006, p. 5). Another strategy, favoured by the *urban left* and some liberal democrat councils, is to devolve responsibility for some services down to community level allowing greater control for councillors in their local communities. One advantage of this strategy is to lock down influence over services in areas which may be party strongholds thereby providing a base for influence even if overall control of the councils should change hands. This strategy may be particularly appropriate in closely contested councils that regularly change political control. Finally élites, such as the Conservative *urban ideologues* may follow a disposal model. This means moving services out of direct public sector control through, for example, the contracting out of services such as refuse collection. This ensures that the day-to-day problems of running services are at arm's length from the élite.

The final governing problem is that of local governance. For some the local council will be the only legitimate source of influence in a local area. This reflects an 'insistence on the local authority's monopoly of legitimate action concerning services it administers' (Dunleavy 1980, p. 147). They prefer local government to remain autonomous and distinct. Others, such as the *suburban managerialists*, see an opportunity in local government working more strategically and may see partnerships as potential arenas for extending influence. This is a model of leadership that recognises that there is 'great

diffusion of responsibility for collective service provision' and that 'effective collaboration with other agencies—public, private, and nonprofit—through various kinds of local partnerships to achieved shared ends' is a necessity (Hambleton and Sweeting 2004, p. 482). Local political élites can also decide to extend their influence by forming alliances through local networks with local interest groups. These can fall under a number of categories including burgher networks of magistrates, senior party members and associated social élites, business networks and community interest groups possibly including trade unions (Dunleavy 1980). As part of this strategy the local council can be used as a platform for building wider political campaigns as was the case with the *urban left* for example.

In summary, the local governing code is a means of describing the different choices that local political élites are able to make. Furthermore it provides a parsimonious means for placing the strategies, norms rules of daily political life within a single conceptual structure. As Bradbury notes, part of the value of Bulpitt's work is the fact that he 'promoted an innovative language for analysing how state actors would manage socio-spatial dilemmas' (Bradbury 2010, p. 327). In the same way the local governing code concept presented here suggests a language for describing the locality effect for local politics. While Stoker's portraits of political parties may be 25 years old, the six governing code variables that they suggest remain valid and can be used to capture new local political strains as they emerge.

From a Bulpittian perspective, when asked to consider a design or management issue relating to a participatory initiative, councillors will be guided by their local governing code. Somewhere at the back of their minds will be the 'Or Else' logics of holding together, winning elections and

maintaining governing competence. It is in this context that councillors will assess the perceived problems and opportunities associated with the initiative in question.

So far this chapter has established that Or Else motivational logics can be used to explain the behaviours of local politicians. Following this three specific OR Else motivational logics, associated with the local political élite as a social structure, have then been described. These are the logics of holding together, winning elections and maintaining governing competence. The argument in this section has been that these OR Else logics will be translated through the prevailing local governing code and will therefore play out differently in different localities.

It is now time to bring the theory building to the most concrete level by specifying what happens in the problem setting of interest to this research; the arena of participatory initiatives. By building on what has come before, and by utilising the findings from the relevant literature, it is possible to suggest three categories of institutional rule that explain the responses of local politicians to participatory in initiatives. Elaborating these three rules will be the purpose of the next section.

3.4 Three Proposed Institutional Rules

The purpose of this chapter has been to build a theory of the incompatibility conjecture underpinned by the assumptions of critical realism. Everything is now in place for the last claim of the theory to be elaborated; that three categories of institutional rule can be inferred as best explanations for councillors' responses to participatory initiatives; the party unity, representative status and councillor utility rules.

The inference of these three categories of institutional rule draws upon both the earlier claims of this chapter and findings from the relevant research literature referred to in the first two chapters. Each rule reflects at least one of the three Or Else motivational logics associated with the local political élite that have previously been identified. These are the Or Else logics of holding together, winning elections and governing competence. By drawing on findings from the relevant local government literature the intention is to take account of what is already known about what happens in this particular problem setting. To ensure theoretic depth and sensitivity the critical realist researcher should draw on available theories and integrate them where possible (Bygstad and Munkvold 2011, p. 6). Furthermore, as Searing has argued in the context of political role research, analysis needs to be *situated*. In other words, what is needed is 'an account of the problem situation in which the role players find themselves' (Searing 1994, p. 17).

The three categories of institutional rule are set out in Table 5. Following the framework established earlier in the chapter (see Table 2), each rule is broken down into three linked components; the behaviour, the trigger that sparks the behaviour and the motivational logic that shapes the behaviour. Given the need to understand institutional rules in context, these rules can only be regarded as approximations. Analysis at this level is an example of middle-range theory for, while all theories comprise abstractions 'theories should be abstract enough to allow them to be applied to different social phenomena, but also concrete and specific enough to allow testing against empirical data' (Danermark *et al.* 2002, p. 126). To put this another way, these rules are well informed hypotheses that provide the researcher with something to look for (Blaikie 2000).

Table 5 Three expected institutional rules

	Behaviour	**Trigger**	**Motivational Logic(s)**
Party Unity	Councillors must limit the ability of participatory initiatives to make proposals counter to the policy of the party group	When participatory initiatives have the potential to create a crisis of representation	Or else it will be harder to hold the group together Or else the ability to win elections will be reduced
Representative Status	Councillors must limit the influence of participatory initiatives within the local policy and decision making process	When participatory initiatives are dominated by small numbers of unelected individuals	Or Else the ability to govern will be undermined
Councillor Utility	Councillors must limit the role of participatory initiatives	When participatory initiatives are perceived as sidelining councillors and 'getting things done'	Or else the ability to win elections will be reduced

Each of these rules will now be elaborated in turn. First, however, it is important to discuss the behaviours that are being shaped by these institutional rules.

3.4.1 Expected Behaviours

In general terms, élite activity to limit the outcomes from participatory initiatives can be understood as 'non decision making'. As Bachrach and Baratz (1962) argue, formal decision making processes are the mezzanine floor under which the true informal foundations of decision making can be found. Élites use their influence to ensure a mobilisation of bias within the organisation to

ensure that potentially contentious issues are subject to non-decision making in other words:

> Non decision making can be defined as 'the extent to which and the manner in which the status quo oriented persons and groups influence those community values and those political institutions …which tend to limit the scope of actual decision-making to "safe" issues. (Bachrach and Baratz 1962, p. 952)

Non decision making has been observed in respect of participatory initiatives. Newman *et al.* (2004), for example, have observed strategies of what they term deflection, accommodation and incorporation:

> There were many accounts of issues raised but not being taken up, and of the time-lag between issues being raised and any response being received. This was often construed as 'fobbing off' – what might be interpreted as a process of deflection. This was sometimes combined with a process of accommodation – the appearance of response to the views of deliberative forums, but a lack of anything tangible in terms of outcomes ...We can also see suggestions of a process of incorporation whereby citizens were drawn into an organisation's own discourses and institutional practices through repeated cycles of exchange. (Newman *et al.* 2004, pp. 213-214)

This literature suggests a number of points of intervention where the councillor behaviours that limit the impact of participatory initiatives might take place. Behaviours may occur during the design or the management of participatory initiatives or both. They may take place before meetings in the agenda planning stage, during meetings and after meetings during the reporting stage. Councillors are also able to influence the design of any of these stages, in other words, the agenda setting mechanism, the rules under which initiatives operate and the mechanism through which they report. These possible points of intervention are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6 Points of intervention for non decision making

	Design	**Management**
Pre meeting	Agenda mechanism	Agenda management
Meeting	Operating Rules	Meeting management
Post meeting	Reporting mechanism	Reporting management

Having proposed the councillor behaviours that might limit the impact of participatory initiatives on the local policy and decision making process, the next sub section will elaborate the three rules proposed as explanations for those behaviours.

3.5.1 The Party Unity Rule

The 'party unity' rule applies when councillors believe that initiatives have the potential to put the cohesion of the group under stress or limit its ability to deliver its policies. Councillors aim to avoid situations where the outcomes from initiatives are in conflict with the official policies of the ruling group (Copus 2004). These types of conflict, if they were to happen in formal decision making forums, would cause particular discomfort for councillors who would find their loyalty torn between the wishes of their constituents, expressed through participatory initiatives, and the interests of their party group. This discomfort would be amplified if the cause of this 'crisis of representation' was an initiative supported by the party group in the first place!

Party unity can be understood as an important aspect of the local governing code and an integral aspect of party group custom and practice. The strength of the institution of party unity is reflected in the fact that it retains its influence even when parties are in opposition or when large majorities make

the prospect of losing votes unlikely (Copus 2004). As public theatres of representation initiatives may also be seen as electoral liabilities. They may provide public platforms for other parties or for political 'troublemakers'. Furthermore, councillors, like their national counterparts, have an 'intense desire' to avoid public displays of party dissent and disunity and 'strongly subscribe to the notion that a divided group loses elections' (Copus 2004, p. 115).

In a similar vein initiatives may be regarded as limiting decision making. If local political élites are to be free to concentrate on the matters that they deem to be high politics, they will not want to see participatory initiatives that feed recommendations, supported by the community but not by the party group, directly into the policy process. They are anxious that 'their manoeuvring room to reject or amend policy proposals will be restricted' (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000, p. 369).

3.5.2 The Representative Status Rule

The 'representative status' rule is triggered when councillors perceive that initiatives provide a platform for small numbers of unelected members of the public. This matters because both the formal and informal influence of local councillors is bound up with their elected status; allowing unelected elements to operate unchallenged with the local decision making process is perceived as undermining this status. Governing competence for local political élites is largely a matter of their persuasive influence and this is in turn a question of legitimacy. Legitimacy can be understood as an 'empirical matter involving the attitudes of the populace toward the government' which should be based upon a widely shared acceptance of the current system (Waskan 1998, p. 32). It is in the interest of the political élite to promote and maintain the dominance of the

current representative system as this is the foundation of their legitimacy and their exercise of persuasive power.

For the local political élite, governing competence is closely tied up with what Stewart and Stoker (1988) have termed 'the monopoly of the representative principle' and what Klijn and Koppenjan call the 'primacy of politics' (2000). Local politicians will be unlikely to support initiatives that seem to promote alternative versions of how formal local politics should work.

3.4.3 The Councillor Utility Rule

The third hypothesised rule is that of 'councillor utility'. Councillors must demonstrate their practical value to the public and not allow participatory initiatives to be set up that diminish or undermine their usefulness such as those that focus on service improvements, for example. This rule is underpinned by the assumption that voters are more likely to support local politicians in elections if they can perceive direct practical benefits. The majority of the public has little to do with formal local politics outside of elections and is interested primarily in 'low council tax and efficient service provision' (Pratchett and Wilson 1996).

In contrast to the desire of national élites to focus on high politics, councillor activity is very much focused on the 'low' matters of administration and management so that councillors spend much of their time 'immersed in the details of service quality, administration and delivery' (Copus 2006). Engaging the public on wider policy issues, whilst these may be important for the councillor, is seen as ultimately a fruitless activity in terms of maintaining and exercising the power of the local political élite. A ruling political group therefore seeks to demonstrate that it has 'got things done' at election time and

will set its priorities accordingly at the beginning of its term. Behaviours flow from the sense that those overseeing services are elected; 'whilst councillors can, and do, bring a broadly political view to the work they undertake, the councillor as the elected manager, rather than active and powerful politician, is very much the norm' (Copus 2004, p. 20). If participatory initiatives are set up to duplicate this role they are taking away an important source of electoral benefit.

3.4.3 Why local political élites support participatory initiatives

While some features of participatory initiatives can create difficulties for local political élites any theory needs to explain why they are initiated and maintained at all. In Bulpittian terms, this is possible, not because of any ideological preference, but because local political élites can use these initiatives to benefit their management of the local polity.

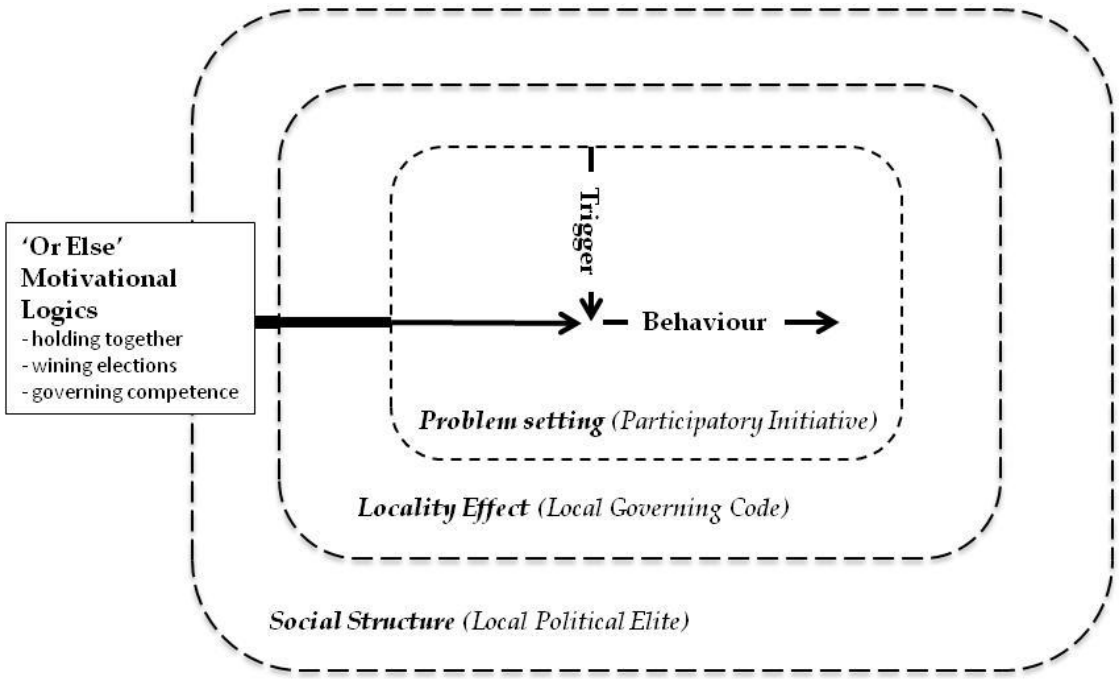
First, participatory initiatives are perceived to have an electoral benefit if they provide opportunities for *positive public relations*. They provide evidence that élites are listening to the electorate, may make difficult decisions more legitimate in the eyes of the public and provide useful intelligence about public perceptions (Boaden *et al.* 1982). Second, some initiatives may be seen as a way of increasing the influence of the élite by *enhancing their legitimacy*. This may be the case if initiatives can themselves be justified as legitimate within the terms of what is perceived as 'normal politics' by, for example, having a clear role for councillors, having formal committee status or having sufficient numbers of the public involved. In these circumstances they can be beneficial for local political élites by enhancing council structures without providing an implicit challenge to the system upon which their influence is based.

Furthermore, evidence of public engagement may give the local political élite extra leverage and legitimacy when seeking to influence those outside of the council although the outcomes from initiatives are only likely to be pursued when they coincide with the views of the élite (Copus 2010). Some types of initiative may also be useful for élites who wish to *devolve responsibility* for matters that they perceive to be low politics. As well as freeing up capacity for the élite to focus on their priorities, such initiatives can help build credibility, and hence electoral support, for councillors in their local communities.

3.5 Summary of the Theoretic Model

In order to help the reader, this short section sets out a summary of the different theoretic elements discussed in the chapter and shows how they link together. This summary is represented by figure x below.

Figure 3 Summary of the theoretic model



The starting point for the theory is that Or Else motivational logics are powerful constraints on local political actors. Derived from Crawford and Ostrom's Institutional Grammar Tool, they are clearly understood sanctions that derive from a social structure. It is these Or Else logics that shape councillor responses to participatory initiatives. In critical realist terms these Or Else motivational logics are explanatory mechanisms that while 'real' are unobservable. Or Else motivational logics are not the only constraints on the behaviour of actors, their significance lies in their association with a given social structure rather than say normative or rational concerns.

In the context of this research the Or Else motivational logics that shape the responses of councillors to participatory initiatives are emergent properties of the local political élite, specifically the need to hold together, the need to win elections and the need to achieve governing competence. These logics have been derived from a Bulpittian interpretation of local politics.

Crucially from an institutionalist, critical realist and a Bulpittian perspective, 'Or Else' motivational logics can only be understood in the context of a given locality. In the context of formal local politics they are translated through the *local governing codes* adopted by local political élites. This concept is also an adaptation of the work of Jim Bulpitt.

Finally, the behaviours of actors can only be understood within a given problem setting for it is in this setting that the trigger for any given behaviour can be found. In the context of this research the problem setting is that of participatory initiatives and it is from those initiatives that the trigger for any behaviour can be found. Combinations of Or Else logics (as translated through local governing codes), triggers and behaviours can be captured by researchers as institutional statements. Here three institutional statements have been

inferred as the best explanations for councillors' responses to participatory initiatives; the party unity, representative status and councillor utility rules.

3.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to build a credible theory of the incompatibility conjecture. It has added to the literature elaborated in the previous chapter in two ways. Through the use of institutional statements it has provided an explanation as to how the élite structures of local politics shape the behaviours of individual politicians when they are faced with the outcomes of participatory initiatives. It has also shown how élite assumptions, previously applied in the main to national politics can be applied at the local level.

More specifically the theory has been underpinned with the philosophical assumptions of critical realism and with the analytical framework of new institutionalism, specifically Crawford and Ostrom's Institutional Grammar Tool. Upon these foundations a redescription of local politics has been elaborated. Drawing on the work of Jim Bulpitt the local political élite has been theorised and the local governing code established as a conceptual means of capturing the locality effect within local politics. Following this, three institutional rules triggered by participatory initiatives and shaped by 'Or Else' logics derived from the local political élite as a social structure have been posited. According to the theory as it stands it is the party unity, representative status and councillor utility rules that can explain the limiting behaviours of councillors and how the incompatibility conjecture might do its work.

In elaborating these three institutional rules it is important that the researcher does not become blind to alternative explanations or to the possibility that there are certain contexts in which the rules will not operate and

hence that the incompatibility conjecture does not hold. As suggested earlier in the chapter, the influence of strategies and norms represent alternative explanations for councillor responses to participatory initiatives; explanations that do not refer to 'Or Else' logics and therefore do not necessarily support the incompatibility conjecture. The research as it progresses, therefore, is open to these possibilities. There is no reason, of course, why strategies, norms and rules cannot coexist and be mutually reinforcing. Indeed, rules underpinned by norms are more likely to be effective.

The initial theory building has now come to an end. It is now time to explore the central claims of the theory in empirical settings. The thesis will now proceed as follows. Three case study chapters (Five, Six and Seven) will examine the responses of councillors to participatory initiatives in three council settings namely Merton, Bristol and Hull. Each will seek evidence for the institutional rules suggested by the theory and explore the behaviours, triggers and 'Or Else' logics in play. At the same time evidence for alternative explanations, namely shared strategies and norms will be sought. The implications for the theory will then be discussed in a findings chapter (Eight). First, however, it is important to set up this field work. That will be the task of the next chapter.

4. Using Case Studies to Test and Refine the Theory

> Basically, the method of research was to read the available literature on the subject, both the general literature and that applying to the particular case studies (which was relatively little), to read all local papers for the relevant period, and to conduct a series of interviews with people actively involved in politics in the towns studied.
>
> J.G. Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government, 1967 (p. vi)*

Critical realist research begins with puzzling events and seeks to explain them through a process that starts with abstract theory, moves to empirical testing before returning once again to the abstract (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Danermark *et al.* 2002). Similarly, institutionalism 'worries backwards and forwards between theory and empirical exploration in an iterative fashion' (Lowndes and Roberts 2013, p. 20). While critical realist research is relaxed about methods (Sayer 2000) the choice here is to use the case study method. A case study is an empirical inquiry that 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident' (Yin 2009, p. 18). As a method it can be understood as an intensive approach that 'focuses on individual agents in context using interviews, ethnography and qualitative analysis, asks the question "what produces change?", employs causal groups, produces causal explanations which are, however, limited to the situation studied so that testing is by corroboration' (Easton 2010, p. 123). The case study method, then, lends itself particularly well to critical realist research and to the study of 'relatively clearly bounded but complex phenomena' (Easton 2010, p.

123). It is for these reasons that the case study method has been chosen to empirically test and refine the theory of the incompatibility conjecture set out in the last chapter.

For critical realist research the empirical testing and refining of theories is a central element of the research process. Given that causal mechanisms are tendencies of social structures that may not always be activated and given also that social systems are complex and open, the aim of theory testing cannot be falsification. Instead four distinct processes are at work. First there is a process of *credibility checking*; in other words comparing the claims of the theory with case study observations and the views of local actors. The aim is to assess the extent of credibility but also to consider how the theory might be changed to make it more credible. The second process is one of *actuality checking*. For critical realists the actual refers to what happens when the powers of social structures are activated (Sayer 2000, p. 12). By examining what eventuates in different contexts the researcher has an opportunity to check for the existence of hypothesised institutional rules, to learn about variations of those rules and to discover new rules. At the same time the relationships between institutional rules, local governing codes and different participatory initiatives can be examined.

A third process is one of *alternative checking*; asking whether shared strategies and norms might be credible explanations for councillor behaviour alongside or instead of the institutional rules suggested by the theory. A fourth and final process is one of *exception checking*; by drawing on observation and the views of local actors the researcher can seek to test the limits of the theory and identify situations where it does not apply. Situations might be found, for example, where councillor responses support rather than limit the impact of

outcomes from participatory initiatives within the policy process. The researcher is also looking for possible sources of interference with the local governing code or successful interventions in the participatory problem setting from, for example, national government, political parties or public pressure.

The case study method allows institutional rules to be studied in context. Clearly of interest are those institutional rules responsible for the behaviour of local politicians in respect of participatory initiatives, the aspects of participatory initiatives that trigger these behaviours and the Or Else logics that shape them. Three rules in particular are expected to be found; the party unity, representative status and councillor utility rules. In looking for these institutions, however, the intention is also to identify other institutional explanations such as strategies and norms. As well as seeking to test and refine the more concrete claims of the theory of the incompatibility conjecture, the case studies provide an opportunity to consider the more abstract claims relating to the influence of local governing codes and the properties of the local political élite.

It is worth also noting at this stage how the impact of outcomes from participatory initiatives has been described in the case studies. In the absence of an available scheme the approach taken here draws on Burton's (2009) two strands of participation namely the level or scope of the decision and the relationship between those who participate and those who ultimately decide. From these strands two distinctions can be made; between local and strategic outcomes; and between influential and decisive outcomes. High value outcomes will be both strategic and decisive whereas outcomes that are local and influential will be found at the lower end of the scale. Strategically

influential and locally decisive outcomes will be found somewhere in between. A fuller description of this scheme can be found at ***APPENDIX C***.

In order to test and refine the theory three longitudinal case studies were undertaken in Merton, Bristol and Hull. The purpose of this short chapter is to prepare the ground for case study chapters that follow by performing three tasks. The first is to justify the choice of these three cases, the second to set out the national policy context and the third is to provide a discussion of the data collection methods; specifically the use of interviews and a survey tool.

4.1 Case Study Selection

Multiple case studies provide a means of generating richer conclusions and allow the institutional mechanisms posited by theory to be examined in different contexts. As Danermark *et al.* explain:

> Studies with the aim of describing, by means of retroduction, the fundamental conditions for anything to be what it is may well be organised as comparative case studies. The researcher chooses to study a number of cases which are all assumed to manifest the structure she wishes to describe, but which are all different in other aspects.... What makes it so productive to compare different cases is... that comparison provides an empirical foundation for retroduction, a foundation to sort out contingent differences in order to arrive at the common and more universal. (Danermark *et al.* 2002, p. 105)

Consistent with critical realist explanation, case studies are not concerned with generating 'statistical generalisation' but instead are able to generate 'analytical generalisation'. If two or more cases support a theory, but not a rival theory, replication can be claimed (Yin 2009).

To support comparability, and to limit the number of variables between cases, selection was also guided by a number of common characteristics. Each of the cases was an English urban unitary authority with the smallest having a population of 200,000 and the largest 430,000. Each was operating a leader and cabinet decision making arrangement. Each of the three cases centred on a co-governance initiative that had been initiated under the modernisation programme of the Labour Government of the late 1990s. Given their central role for councillors, co-governance initiatives, such as area committees or participatory budgeting, provide the most likely possibility for extending public participation in a meaningful way and hence have the greatest potential to test the incompatibility conjecture. They ensure a pivotal role for local politicians and that the principles of 'normal' local politics remain fundamentally unchallenged. While they may limit decision making in some respects they benefit public relations, enhance legitimacy and also present a very useful means for devolving issues of 'low politics' to backbenchers; leaving the inner circle free to concentrate on the issues they consider to be of greatest importance.

A further aspect of case selection intended to provide a strong test to the theory was that of political competition. All of the cases also experienced changes in political control during the life time of the participatory initiatives in question. As Lowndes *et al.* found from their case study research across eight different areas including Merton and Hull:

> ...long periods of political stability tended to entrench political élites and reduce the opportunities for community participation. Where there was strong competition between parties (or even between factions within the same party) there were more attempts to reach out to communities and establish an understanding of local needs' (Lowndes *et al.* 2002, p. 3)

Differences between the cases are also important as they provide a strong test for the theory. Here a number of significant differences can be noted (Table 7). An important aspect of a Bulpittian approach to local politics is a rejection of ideology as a meaningful determinant of political behaviour. For this reason three cases were selected that had different party political control with Merton being Conservative controlled at the time of the fieldwork, Bristol Liberal Democrat controlled and Hull Labour controlled. This provided a second dimension of comparison to understand the effects of ideology or otherwise. While the co-governance initiatives had much in common they also presented significant differences and these are also noted in Table 7. While Merton's area forums were the least formal arrangement in terms of council decision making, the arrangement in Bristol was the most explicitly a feature of the council's committee structures. Linked to this last point, the degree to which the decision making structures of the council were devolved also had an important bearing on the way in which the co-governance initiatives operated. It is important to note, therefore, that while Bristol and Hull councils placed their initiatives within devolved decision making structures; this was not the case in Merton.

Table 7 Differences between the three cases

Council	**Merton**	**Bristol**	**Hull**
Cabinet control (during fieldwork)	Conservative	Liberal Democrat	Labour
Co-governance Initiative	Area forums on 'natural' geographies	Area committees operating within public and partnership meetings supported by neighbourhood forums	Area forums operating within ward boundaries operating in the context of (but not formally linked to) area committees
Devolved governance	No	Yes	Yes

The selection of cases in a multiple case study does not have to be decided all at once; the experience of the first can guide subsequent choices (Robson 2002, p. 183). Here the first case, Merton, was selected as a council that had adopted the most common form of participatory initiative in the context of the Labour government's modernisation reforms; the area forum. One of the key findings from the Merton Case study was that the participatory initiative in question was operating very much outside of what was considered to be normal politics. The studies in Bristol and Hull were subsequently chosen as cases where participatory initiatives were embedded within the formal structures of the Council and specifically embedded within devolved decision making arrangements.

A further practical consideration for case selection was the availability of relevant historic research. This was particularly important given the intention to undertake longitudinal studies able to plot change over a 10-15 year period. Two of the case studies, Merton and Hull, for example, had previously been researched as part of a project looking at public participation could be shaped by formal and informal institutional rules (Lowndes *et al.* 2002; Lowndes *et al.* 2006a; Lowndes *et al.* 2006b). Bristol's neighbourhood governance arrangements have been of interest to a number of scholars, most recently Davies and Pill (2012b; 2012a). In addition all of the studies offered internal studies and reports such as those coming from scrutiny committees.

In each case access was gained following a request emailed to the council's chief executive. This request explained the purpose of the research, information about the researcher, including that their full time employment was as a local government employee, and offered the researcher's own chief executive as a referee. In order to help facilitate access an offer was made to

provide some feedback from the research to the Council thereby providing an additional incentive. Six councils were approached in total with three declining research access.

4.2 National Policy Context

In order to establish the context for the three case studies it is important to say something about the national policy prevailing at the time in respect of local government and public participation. The action for the case studies takes place in a period that starts in early years of the 1997 Labour Government and ends in the early years of the 2010 Coalition Government. Each of the studies is at least 10 years long and each concludes in the period following the election of the Coalition Government in May 2010. The purpose of this short section, therefore, is to provide the reader with an understanding of the main aspects of relevant national policy during this time.

The 1997-2010 Labour Government maintained a strong interest in local government reform throughout all of its three terms. Atkinson illustrates this interest like this:

> White papers, green papers, pre-policy announcements, press releases, symposiums, consultations, parliamentary bills and Acts of Parliament rolled off the policy conveyor belt at an ever-increasing speed. The policy process became overloaded with an endless stream of initiatives. These included double devolution, directly elected mayors, community empowerment action packs, local assemblies, local strategic partnerships and multi-area agreements. Just as you thought you might have got to grips with the agenda, there was yet another policy announcement. It brings to mind those ubiquitous fairground ducks. As fast as you shoot them down, more simply pop up! (Atkinson 2010, p. 425)

As noted in Chapter One, the upsurge in local government sponsored participatory initiatives in the late 1990s was encouraged by the first Labour Government elected in 1997. Indeed, public participation can be considered as an underpinning principle of much of Labour's local government modernisation agenda during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Newman 2001). While expressing a general aspiration to see consultation and participation embedded into the culture of all councils, the Labour Government also introduced formal requirements to involve the public into specific policy areas such as community planning and best value. Alongside these requirements was a recognition that there would be a need for councils 'to develop and adopt effective tools for engaging with local people' (Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions 1998, p. 30).

The fostering of greater public participation reflected the twin objectives of improving local service delivery and renewing local democracy (Barnes *et al.* 2007). Building on the consumerist approaches of the previous Conservative governments, Labour saw public engagement as a means of raising service standards and of meeting local needs more effectively. Participation was, however, seen as more than a benefit for service delivery and was regarded as central to the Government's aspiration to renew local democracy (Lowndes *et al.* 1998). It was seen as a way of increasing the legitimacy of local politicians and thereby enhancing their community leadership role.

While Labour's first term in office was a time of comprehensive and relentless reform for local government, the second term (2001-2005) saw a period of consolidation. As Pratchett has argued, this period also saw a change in emphasis:

> A focus on enhancing political participation in local government and strengthening democratic structures appears to have been replaced by a much stronger emphasis on service delivery. (Pratchett 2002, p. 332)

A further narrative, developed during the final term of the Labour Government (2005-2-10) was that of 'double devolution' (Atkinson 2010). This signaled a continuing interest in pushing power downwards to communities although, with the exception of the 'duty to involve', introduced in 2008, little concrete in policy terms seems to have emerged. The 'duty to involve', a requirement that the public should be involved in decisions that affected them, itself seems to have had a limited impact (Atkinson 2010).

By 2008 the global financial crisis meant that fiscal tightening became the order of the day. In this context the overarching concern for local government in the years that followed was managing a severe reduction in government grant. This, allied to the election of the Coalition Government in 2010 meant a sea change for national policy as it related to local government and public participation.

The approach of the Coalition Government was markedly different to that of Labour. Their commitment to localism led to the removal of a range of duties and requirements upon local government including community planning and the duty to involve. As Lowndes and Pratchett (2012) have argued, there were also import differences when it came to participation. First the Coalition has sought to encourage aggregative rather than deliberative participation. This means a preference for voting mechanisms such as referenda where people take part as individuals rather than initiatives such as citizens juries and forums where people engage collectively. Second the Coalition sees participation as a zero-sum activity where civil society activity is

regarded as a preferred alternative to state activity in contrast to the positive-sum conception held by Labour which saw the interaction of local government and public as producing something greater than the sum of its parts. Hence the participatory initiatives fostered by the policy of the Labour Government can be seen as running counter to Coalition Government policy in significant ways.

In summary, then, the early period for each of the case studies saw a national policy context that had a strong emphasis on local government reform and sought to encourage the development of participatory initiatives in order to improve service delivery and renew local democracy. While the Labour Government maintained its advocacy of public participation in its second and third terms, at least in its overall narrative, the emphasis shifted from democracy towards service delivery. By 2010, however, the national policy was no longer supportive of local government investing in participatory initiatives. This was in part due a more hands-off approach, in part due to a tightening in public finances and in part due to a consciously different conception of how the public and local government should interact.

4.3 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection methods for the cases were informed by the critical realist assumptions underpinning the research, the élite nature of those being researched and the aim of uncovering evidence of shared institutions. While the bulk of data is likely to be collected through interviews (Sobh and Perry 2006; Easton 2010), critical realists recognise that the knowledge that these participants hold of the world is necessarily partial and needs to be tested against other sources of evidence (Leca and Naccache 2006).

Field work involving élite actors shares a similar set of concerns. Élites have privileged access to information and will have their own concerns about how this information is shared. Unlike many other areas of fieldwork where the 'balance of knowledge and expertise is usually in favour of the interviewer' the situation may be reversed for élite interviews (Burnham *et al.* 2008, p. 231). The primary source of data is likely to be from interviews as this is the most appropriate technique to explore 'the shared assumptions and meanings that inform these private worlds'. It is important, however, not to base fieldwork entirely on this and 'élite interviewers must be prepared to explore the world of the respondent sympathetically without being captured by it' (ibid. 2008, p. 247). This is why 'other sources and techniques such as archives, materials on the internet and observation at meetings' should also be used in line with the 'principle of triangulation' (ibid. 2008, p. 232).

The primary purpose of the fieldwork was to validate the existence of the institutional rules, captured as institutional statements, posited by the theory in Chapter Three. From an institutionalist perspective the key question 'is whether or not that a statement found amongst the written statements or oral traditions is really a shared institutional statement that participants know and use' (Ostrom 2005, p. 172). These 'know and use' conditions are important as is the level of precision with which the researcher can confidently record those institutional statements. As fieldwork will not always lead to the easy identification of simple and clear institutions in use 'empirical researchers of institutions usually must develop appropriate summaries of the complex morass of legal, written, or oral statements that are relevant to the action situation being analysed' (Ostrom 2005, p. 173). Again, as with critical realist and élite research, institutional research requires that the evidence gathered from participants is enriched with other sources. Here, for example, interview

evidence has been supplemented with data from a survey and from relevant documents.

An overview of the field work activity and data collected is provided in Table 8. In total 28 interviews were conducted including 15 with councillors, 11 with officers and 2 with participants external to the council in question (one from the voluntary sector and one from the police).

Table 8 Summary of the fieldwork activity and data collected

Case	**Merton**	**Bristol**	**Hull**
Fieldwork conducted	October 2009 – July 2010	October 2010 – March 2011	February – March 2013
Semi Structured Interviews	Councillors (5) Officers (4)	Councillors (5) Officers (3) External (1)	Councillors (5) Officers (4) External (1)
Survey Responses	28 (47%)	52 (74%)	32 (53%)

In addition to the interviews and the survey instrument contextual data was collected for each case. This included written material such as; any research relevant to the case being studied; any relevant documents such as council reports, minutes, agendas or papers linked to the operation of the participatory initiatives; and electronic media such as webpages, blogs or social media messages such as those found on twitter. For each of the case studies some scene setting activity was conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the participatory initiative in question and to provide context for the interviews and surveys. This activity included informal meetings with relevant officers and councillors, either face to face or by phone, and observation of at least one of the meetings of the initiative in question.

4.2.1 Semi structured interviews

Following a realist approach the aim of the interviews was not to gather objective information about the interviewees as subjects but to employ them as co-researchers. In realist research it is the theory that is the subject of the interview and the interviewee is there to help the interview test and develop that theory. As Pawson and Tilley argue, '...the researcher's theory is the subject matter of the interview and the interviewee is there to confirm or falsify, and above all, to refine that theory' (Pawson and Tilley 1997, p. 159). Within interviews, therefore, the interviewer is required to spend time explaining the theory in question so that the interviewee has a reasonable chance of contributing to it. The interviewer is less concerned with consistency and neutrality and more concerned with building a dialogue, what Pawson and Tilley refer to as the *teacher-learner function* (1997, p. 165).

This co-researcher approach to interviewing is also consistent with researching élites as:

> ... if one is interested in actor's perceptions of the world in which they live, the way in which they construct their world and the shared assumptions that shape it, there is much to be said for the model of the élite interview as an extended conversation. (Burnham *et al.* 2008, p. 246)

In selecting and conducting interviews attention was also paid to what Pawson and Tilley describe as the *division of expertise* (Pawson and Tilley 1997, p. 160). This means being aware of who knows what and placing collected data in this context. So, for example, for each of the case studies interviews were conducted with councillors involved in setting policy for participatory initiatives, councillors directly participating in the initiatives, officers leading on

policy and officers providing support. In this way the theories being tested were subject to testing from a number of different perspectives.

The 15 interviews conducted with councillors included interviews with Conservative (4), Labour (5), Liberal Democrat (4) and Independent (2) councillors. These included cabinet members (4, with at least one in each case), committee chairs (2) and chairs of participatory initiatives (2). Interviewees were granted anonymity and the interviews have been cited in the text accordingly. A schedule of the completed interviews, including the coding scheme, can be found at ***APPENDIX D***.

Completed interviews were transcribed and coded using NVIVO software. The procedure for coding realist interview data is different to that used in other paradigms; the codes used were based on the conceptual framework rather than drawn from the raw data itself (Sobh and Perry 2006). For this reason suitable open questions were used during interviews to provide an opportunity to pick up any important aspects not covered by the conceptual framework. Where new aspects did arise new codes were added.

The interviews were divided into two parts. The first five questions were asked about the participatory initiative and were designed to elicit some general attitudes and opinions. In particular the questions prompted interviewees to explore the relationship between decision making processes and the initiatives, any perceived differences in councillor responses, whether along party lines or otherwise, and what made the initiatives more or less attractive to councillors. In the second part of the interview the theory was shared and the interviewee invited to comment on different aspects of the theory. The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and saved into mp3 format prior to being transcribed. The author has retained copies of both. Brief notes were

also taken during the interviews. An example of the interview script used for the interviews is attached at ***APPENDIX E.***

Overall, the experience of conducting the interviews was a positive one. In terms of logistics it was helpful to have an officer in each council who was willing to help with the practicalities of organisation such as agreeing times and booking rooms. One challenging aspect, however, was that of sharing theory. As noted above, within a critical realist frame, interviews are used for theory testing and refinement through a dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. Getting interviewees 'up to speed' was, however, not straightforward. At least, within the limited time available, spending time on explaining the theory seemed a poor use of that time. After the first round of interviews in Merton, after which this problem was evident, a series of statements were instead presented to the interviewees and used to prompt discussion. Although this worked reasonably well, the challenge of theory sharing in interviews is one that could be given more attention.

4.2.2 Survey instrument

The third and final set of data collected was through a survey instrument intended to capture the opinions of councillors. The survey was designed by the author following the completion of the interviews in the Merton case study. This allowed insights from those interviews to be incorporated. A first draft of the questionnaire was piloted with two councillors from the author's own council following which minor amendments were made.

Like the interview, the survey was designed in two parts. The first part included general questions about councillors, influence and participatory democracy. A second set of questions was designed to meet the local needs of

each case study and to gather additional data about councillor attitudes and behaviours towards the participatory initiative in that case. As far as possible these questions were also used consistently between case studies to allow comparisons between the studies to be made. The survey for each case included the same eight questions under the following headings:

1. How councillors can make the biggest difference
2. The most effective strategies for councillors
3. The most important requirements for local democracy
4. The most important considerations for the public when they vote in local elections
5. What to do when there is a councillor crisis of representation.
6. The main role of the co-governance initiative
7. Councillor attitudes towards the co-governance initiative
8. The minimum/ maximum level of public attendance for the co-governance initiative

Questions one to five were intended to capture councillor attitudes towards power, democracy and elections. Question two, added after the Merton interviews, was designed to differentiate between those councillors who saw community politics as the way to exercise influence and those who preferred to work at a borough level through their party. Questions three and five were taken from the MAELG survey; a pan European survey of councillors (see Egner *et al.* 2013; Heinelt 2013c), to allow the possibility for comparisons to be made with this large-n data set. These questions dealt with the democratic preferences of councillors and councillor crises of representation, in other

words how they would vote if there were a conflict between the councillor, the community and their party group. Questions six to eight were designed to elicit councillor attitudes towards the particular co-governance initiative being studied.

In each case one or two additional local questions were added in order to provide feedback for the respective council. In Bristol, for example, an extra question about councillor training needs in respect of the Neighbourhood Partnerships was added. These questions have not been included in the results. For each survey respondent data was collected including age, gender, party affiliation, length of service as a councillor and the perceived affluence of the community represented (Table 9).

The survey was distributed in each case both through an online survey tool (Survey Monkey) and via hard copies. The hard copies were sent directly to individual councillors and collected though the respective councillor support teams. A sample hard copy questionnaire can be found at ***APPENDIX F***. Up to three email reminders were sent in order to encourage take up. From the survey a total of 112 responses were collected from the 190 councillors across the three cases; giving an overall response rate of 59% and individual response rates of 47% (Merton), 74% (Bristol) and 53% (Hull). The survey generated both qualitative and quantitative data with the former being analysed alongside the interview data using NVIVO and the latter being analysed using SPSS. A summary of respondents can be found in Table 9.

There were two challenges associated with collecting data via the survey. The first was that of response rate. While the return, particularly in Bristol, was good it could have been improved given the small population sizes involved. However, the authors own work experience suggests that, given the busy lives

of councillors, it is hard to get responses to this type of questionnaire. Offering both online and paper options worked well and it was relatively easy to make the two options work together. One strategy that could have been used was to give out questionnaires in council meetings and ask for them to be filled out there and then. This has been successful in the author's own work. However, it was considered too intrusive for this research and unlikely to be supported by the respective councils.

Table 9 Survey respondents

		Frequency	*Percent*
Age	Under 35	15	13.3
	35-50	17	15.0
	50-65	45	39.8
	Over 65	24	21.2
	Did not answer	11	9.8
	Total	112	100
Gender	Female	33	29.2
	Male	68	60.2
	Did not answer	11	9.8
	Total	101	100
Party	Conservative	21	18.6
	Labour	45	39.8
	Liberal Democrat	29	25.7
	Independent	5	4.4
	Green	1	.9
	Did not answer	11	9.8
	Total	101	100
Experience	5 years	45	39.8
	5-10 years	27	23.9
	10-15 years	10	8.8
	Over 15 years	19	16.8
	Did not answer	11	9.8
	Total	101	100

Role	Cabinet member	13	11.5
	Committee chair or vice chair	23	20.4
	Backbencher	63	55.8
	Did not answer	13	11.6
	Total	99	100
Ward	Very affluent	5	4.4
	Fairly affluent	27	23.9
	Neither affluent nor deprived	33	29.2
	Fairly deprived	22	19.5
	Very deprived	14	12.4
	Did not answer	11	9.8
	Total	101	100
Ruling group	Ruling group	48	42.5
	Opposition	53	46.9
	Did not answer	11	9.8
	Total	101	89.4

The second challenge was that of councillors viewing questions as being 'wrong' and either refusing to complete them, ticking multiple options when the survey required only one to be ticked or rewriting them and answering these new questions. While this affected only a small number of questions (and particularly Question 9; the MAELG question on voting behaviour), given the small populations involved, this was nevertheless a concern. Again, the author is familiar with this from his own work environment. One likely explanation is that councillors are used to critically evaluating and scrutinising reports and can approach surveys in a similar way. Whether questions were unanswered or rewritten these responses could not be included in the analysis and this accounts for the gaps in some response Tables, provided in the case study chapters, between the responses for individual questions and the overall response rates. It is not clear how this could be addressed in similar research in future.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the fieldwork conducted for the research. In doing so it has discussed the choice of the case study method, the national policy context, the selection of the three cases and the data collection methods used. In addition it has provided an audit of the fieldwork and some discussion of the challenges encountered. The scene is now set for the three case study chapters.

Before moving on, however, it is worth pointing to some limitations. The first concerns the extent of the data collected. In total nine or ten interviews were conducted in each case and just over half of these were with councillors. While this evidence cannot be considered as unsubstantial, neither can it be regarded as fully comprehensive. It is also worth noting that the small population sizes for the surveys mean that the results cannot be regarded as a precise statistical representation of the population as a whole without a sample approaching 100% (Krejcie and Morgan 1970). The second point relates to the mode of reasoning used to draw conclusions from the evidence and in particular to suggest the existence of the institutional rules. A combination of retroduction and abduction is used to infer the existence of social phenomena that are otherwise not directly observable. Hence, while evidence is marshalled in the three case studies to support the validity of the claims made, these claims are dependent on the judgement of the researcher.

The following three chapters present the three case studies starting with Merton before moving onto Bristol and Hull. Each has been structured in the same way to support comparison between the three. Each is organised into sections designed to support the testing and refining of the theory set out in

Chapter Three. Each section is therefore structured around the following five questions:

- What is the political context in the given locality and specifically the notable features of the local governing code?
- What is the story of the participatory initiative and how has it changed over time?
- What impact has the initiative had on local policy and decision making?
- What councillor behaviours have limited the impact of the initiative?
- What institutional rules are in evidence?

These longer sections dealing with the institutional rules in evidence are broken down into sub sections in order to consider a number of sub questions namely:

- What characteristics of the initiative have triggered councillor behaviours?
- To what extent have 'Or Else' logics associated with the local political élite shaped the behaviours in question?
- Are the party unity, representative status or councillor utility rules present as expected?
- Could other institutional mechanisms be responsible for councillor behaviours?

While each case study forms part of the central narrative of the thesis, each has also been constructed in a way that allows it to be read independently. The intention is that each can be a resource in its own right.

5. Local Politics and Merton's Community Forums

> Community Forums are a way for you to get your voice heard and challenge local public services. The Community Forums help people who live, work and learn in Merton make sure that the Council and other agencies in the borough know about their concerns and aspirations for their community. www.merton.gov.uk (accessed 7th December 2010)

> Want to get involved with local decisions? Why not come along to Merton's community forums next week. *Tweet by Merton Council* (@Merton_Council - 26th November 2010: 10.51)

The modernisation reforms associated with the Local Government Act 2000 encouraged local councils to enhance public engagement through the use of decentralised forms of decision making such as area forums and area committees (Sullivan 2003). By 2004 around 22 per cent of local councils in England and Wales had some form of area committee and 54 per cent had some form of area forum (Local Government Association 2004). One of the councils to adopt area forums at this time was Merton, a South West London borough, who decided to introduce them in 2001 (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2007, p. 7). Area forums, in a number of different incarnations, continued to operate in Merton until at least 2011. In 2008 they were rebranded as Community Forums and, for the three years following this, they received their highest level of political and financial support. However, in 2010 they were scaled back significantly as part of the Council's programme of budget savings (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2009a, p. 1).

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse Merton's experiences of area forums in order to test the theory that participatory initiatives such as the forums are incompatible with representative local politics. This theory suggests that councillors will work to ensure that the outcomes from participatory initiatives, such as the Community Forums, will always have limited value within the local policy process. These behaviours are not necessarily the result of conscious choices; indeed, many councillors have acted as enthusiastic champions of these initiatives, but rather these behaviours are a consequence of the structure of élite local politics and the formal and informal institutions associated with it. Three institutional rules in particular are suggested as explanations for the limited impact of participatory initiatives; the party unity, representative status and councillor utility rules. These rules, the theory suggests, are underpinned by three Or Else motivational logics; the need to hold the group together, the need to win elections and the need to maintain governing competence. Uncovering evidence for these rules, and for the Or Else motivational logics that underpin them, is therefore an important aspect of testing whether participatory initiatives such as the Community Forums are indeed incompatible with representative local politics.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, a short overview of local politics in Merton will be provided in order to highlight both the political context and the most important characteristics of the local governing codes of the local political élites. The local governing code refers to the decisions made by local political élites in respect of election strategies and how they will maintain power. Second the 10 year history of the Community Forums will be discussed in order to identify their defining characteristics and how they have changed over time. Central to this story is a concern over the levels of public attendance and a debate over whether the forums should be developed into more formal

area committees (they never were). The third section will assess their impact on local policy and decision making and conclude that it has been very limited.

The fourth section will present the seven institutional rules found to be in evidence. In line with Ostrom and Crawford's Institutional Grammar Tool (Crawford and Ostrom 1995; Ostrom 2005), each will be presented as an institutional statement comprising of a behaviour, trigger and Or Else motivational logic. Five of the institutional rules found to be in evidence reflected the three rules posited prior to the case study, two were not predicted. This section also discusses the degree to which alternative motivational logics, other that the Or Else, might offer alternative or complementary explanations for councillor responses to the Forums. First, however, it is important to understand the main characteristics of local politics in the borough. This is the focus of the first section.

5.1 Local Politics and Governing Codes in Merton

Merton is a borough in the south west of London with a population of about 210,000. In 2001, the census recorded that 25% of the population of the Borough was from an ethnic minority. The most deprived wards within the Borough are in the south and east where unemployment rates, educational attainment and the quality of health are relatively poor. The most affluent wards are in the north and west of the Borough. The political geography of Merton is similar with Conservative councillors largely representing the more affluent northern wards and Labour councillors representing the south. By London standards deprivation and crime are relatively low.

Labour took the Borough from the Conservatives in 1990 and by 1998 held 39 of the 60 seats. This majority declined over the following years, falling

to four at the 2002 election with Labour losing the Council to no overall control in 2006. At this point the Conservatives, having exactly half of the seats on the Council, were able to form a minority administration that was viable due to the support of the three-strong independent group who represented one ward and who held the chair for the Council's scrutiny committee during the time of the fieldwork. After the election in 2010 the Council remained in no overall control. However, as the largest party, with 28 seats, Labour was again able to form an administration. This arrangement was again made possible through the informal support of the small independent group.

Case study research that looked at politics and public participation in the borough in the early 2000s found a 'general absence of any effective politics' and an unwillingness to follow through in practice even when enthusiastically adopting central government inspired initiatives. As researchers at the time noted; 'if member support is present, initiatives tend to find favour, but without sustained support they tend to fade from the agenda' (Lowndes *et al.* 2006b, p. 20). Merton, while far from being the best example of a council supporting participatory initiatives at this time, was also perhaps not the worst; 'it is not that Merton actively discourages participation, but that relatively old fashioned, inward-looking politicians and officers do little to encourage it' (Lowndes *et al.* 2006b, p. 22).

This traditional and staid version of local politics also coloured the prevailing local governing codes. In terms of election strategies these were influenced to a large degree by the north-south divide between the Labour and Conservative heartlands. The line in between was effectively the battle front that would be pushed backwards or forwards from election to election. There was, however, a noticeable split of about 50/50, pointed to by the interviewees,

between ward based activists who saw the sub-local community as their electoral arena, and 'party people' with day jobs in central London, much more interested in national issues. This suggests a tension within the groups that needed to be managed.

In terms of the variables set out in Chapter Three (Table 4, p. 68), the electoral strategy decisions of the local political élites can be characterised as follows. First, the élites were highly partisan, rather than apolitical, in their campaigning. Second, they preferred a catch-all approach rather than appealing primarily to their natural constituencies albeit within the confines of the political geography of the borough noted previously. Finally their focus was on both the national and sub-local electoral arenas depending on the attitudes of the councillors involved. There was less evidence that the local, in other words borough wide, arena was of the same significance.

In terms of power models, the defining characteristic was a centralised approach to party management by both of the main political groups. Perhaps also a consequence of the electoral geography of the borough, this centralised approach was reflected in a preference for centralised decision making so, while much was delegated to officers, the majority of decisions were taken at the centre and decentralised service delivery was not considered. Attitudes to central government changed over the ten years of the case study. The positive response to central government policy initiatives shown by the then Labour administration in the early 2000s gave way to scepticism towards central government displayed by all parties by the later period of the study. All the councillors interviewed, for example, were clear that central government should let local government get on with it. Finally, while Merton has an established voluntary sector there was no history of effective strategic

coordination between the Council and voluntary and community groups (Lowndes *et al.* 2006b). There was no evidence during the course of the fieldwork that the political leadership of the Council saw organisations within the voluntary sector as strategic rather than operational partners.

In terms of the local governing code variables (Table 4, p. 68), it is possible to describe the power model options followed by the local political élites in Merton as follows. First, at the time of the fieldwork at least they opted for an autonomy relationship with central government as opposed to one of collaboration or acquiescence. Second, their approach to council services was one of delegation to officers rather than direct management, devolution or disposal. Finally, their approach to governance was one of autonomy rather than one of strategic leadership or of building alliances with local interest groups.

Having discussed the broad context of local politics and the prevailing local governing codes in Merton, the next section will provide a ten year history of the Community Forums. This will cover the period from 2001 to 2011 broken down into three distinct phases highlighting their prehistory, rise and decline.

5.2 The History of the Community Forums 2001-11

The history of the Community Forums can be traced through three distinct phases which are described in this section. The Community Forums grew out of the Borough's Area Forums which were set up in response to the Labour Government's modernisation agenda in 2001. During 2006 and 2007 there was a period of reassessment when the concept of the Community Forum was introduced. Along with the new name, this was when the Council decided to grant new resources for support and to introduce a new focus on

recognisable geographies rather than on council ward boundaries. The three years between 2008 and 2011 marked a third phase when the Community Forums operated in their new form until they were scaled back in 2011 as part of a very difficult budget round for the Borough.

5.2.1 The Area Forums (2001-2006)

The precursors of the Community Forums, the Area Forums, were introduced as part of a model constitution that was published alongside the Local Government Act 2000. They were seen by councils as an alternative to, or a stepping stone toward, area committees which, unlike area forums, were given formal decision making powers. While there was no legal requirement to introduce area forums there were nevertheless clear indications from central government that consequences would follow if local councils failed in modernise in line with the Labour Government's policy agenda (Pearce and Mawson 2003, p. 54).

It was in this context that the Labour controlled Merton Council introduced area forums in 2001. These Area Forums were established, however, very much on the principle of 'safety first'. The scrutiny review that recommended that area forums, rather than area committees should be established, stressed the need for forums to be conducted in 'a non-political environment as one of the guiding principles' (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2007, p. 11). In addition, the Labour administration decided that the forums should be chaired by members of the ruling group. This was done in order to reduce the risk of exploitation by political opponents.

Following the scrutiny review, four area forums were set up 'to take on an advisory and consultative role, without delegated powers or budgets'

(Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2007, p. 7). The overall perceptions of those interviewed were that the Area Forums between 2001 and 2006 were an ineffective 'talking shop' geared mainly to top down communications by the Council:

> So we had (four) area forums for the Borough, that they were ineffective, nothing happened as a result of it, people didn't come and there was a lot of disaffection, particularly amongst members, so from within the Council, particularly amongst members, but externally, clearly no-one either knew about them or thought they were any good, because they didn't turn up. *Officer H*

It was in this context that the new Conservative administration that came to power in 2006 decided that changes had to be made.

5.2.2 The Community Forums in Transition (2006-2008)

Soon after taking control, the Conservative Cabinet increased the number of forums from four to six and introduced cross party chairing by local, rather than executive councillors. In the context of widespread dissatisfaction with the Forums, a scrutiny review was also set up in 2006 to consider whether they should be dispensed with, continued, or replaced by area committees.

It was following this review that the Community Forums were established in June 2008 as part of a clear commitment to encourage public participation:

> "As a result of carrying out this review we believe that **local people in Merton should be given more power to influence the decisions that shape their neighbourhood**." (Bold in original) (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2007, p. 5)

However, the review also highlighted significant concerns. First, low levels of public attendance were a particular worry. A general average

attendance of 13-15 people at meetings was noted but so was a wide variation with some meetings having as few as four members of the public participating. Solutions suggested at the time included moving the time of meetings and holding them away from council buildings. Proposals to change the boundaries of the Forums to fit better with community rather than council ward boundaries were recommended, as was the change of name from Area Forums to Community Forums. Publicity was another stated concern with more imaginative and 'non council' designs for posters suggested as improvements. The third concern was that the Area Forums were ineffective at dealing with the issues raised in them. Many issues identified at meetings were not responded to and feedback to participants was inadequate. The report highlighted the risk associated with this namely that the Forums might be seen simply as 'talking shops'. Clearer reporting mechanisms and feedback between meetings were proposed as ways to address this. The final concern was that there were insufficient resources. The report therefore recommended that increased support was made available and a dedicated budget provided for development activities. Significantly the new officer resource for the Forums was expected to have a policy and development role beyond the administrative support provided up to that point.

Regardless of the proposed changes, the review stopped short of recommending that further responsibilities, such as for planning or budgets, were given to the Forums. Once again, the option of area committees was also ruled out although this was retained as a long term goal. Underpinning this decision not to move to area committees were some of the concerns noted earlier such as; the low levels of attendance; the potential for inconsistency in decision-making between different parts of the Borough; concerns about politicising decisions; the potential increase in pressure on ward councillors

from vociferous but possibly unrepresentative groups; the resources required to implement devolved decision-making; the availability of resources; and an anxiety about the implications of devolving decisions downwards:

> … there was a big debate about, you know, do you have them as consultative forums or issue raising forums, or do you make them decision making forums, so the more kind of area committee, formal area committee type model? We erred away from the area committee model, I think predominantly because of a resourcing issue. *Officer H*

> Initially, the proposal was that they would consider giving small budgets to those groups to actually decide upon and at one point, I think it was floated they might actually devolve planning or some planning decisions, those kinds of issues. That didn't find a majority in the Council interestingly and it didn't find a majority particularly in the ruling group at the time, which was a bit counter-intuitive because all those working on it, including the members who had promoted it, assumed that all members would think it was a good idea as the devolution of power. *Officer F*

Evidently, while the idea of a more influential role for the Forums had its champions, they were not able to win the day once the issue had been opened up for serious discussion amongst the political groups. Nevertheless, following this review, the Forums were able to operate on a much firmer footing.

5.2.2 The Community Forums at their Peak (2008-2011)

From 2008 the five new Community Forums began to operate with their new geographies and new support. These new Forums were described in this way to the public:

> Community Forums are a way for you to get your voice heard and challenge local public services. The Community Forums help people who live, work and

> learn in Merton make sure that the Council and other agencies in the borough know about their concerns and aspirations for their community.
>
> The Community Forums meet four times a year in community venues. Local people are encouraged to put forward issues for the Chair to consider for the next meeting's agenda. Meetings may also include short presentations on new developments in the local area from public agencies such as the Council, the Police or NHS, followed by discussion. Members of the public can share their views on these issues, along with any other concerns or ideas for improvements for their communities.
>
> Get involved
>
> The meetings are chaired by local councillors, but the Community Forums are for local people – anyone with an interest in the local area is invited to attend these free meetings. Issues raised at Community Forum meetings are taken up by the responsible organisation to follow up and report back on how problems are solved. *www.merton.gov.uk/communityforums - accessed 12th July 2010*

At the time of the fieldwork (October 2009 – July 2010) there was genuine support for the Forums amongst officers and councillors. Generally discussion centred on 'how can they be improved?' rather than 'should they continue?' The opportunity for councillors to engage directly with the public in a semi-official setting was regarded as a good thing as was their role in gathering 'intelligence' about public concerns. The role of the Forums in helping to decide the use of Section 106 planning monies was also seen as a positive. Officers involved with the Forums regarded the new arrangements as a genuine opportunity to increase public involvement:

> The big thing for us was to change the agenda setting and hand that over to the punters as much as possible, so that what was on the agenda reflected what they wanted to talk about, what they wanted to find out about and in the cases where they wanted to hold people to account, get those people in front of them,

> so that they could do that and change the atmosphere. Within a couple of meetings, the same people who were sending emails to the Chief Exec to say how poor the forums were, were sending emails to say, actually, I really like this now, this is what we were asking for. *Officer I*

In June 2009 a review of the first year of the Community Forums was conducted by the support officers and endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission (2009a). The review concluded that the majority of attendees were satisfied with the Forums although there were still concerns about how issues raised were being resolved and feedback that people were keen to have more control over how the Forums worked. On the issue of numbers, the average attendance of 23 people per meeting for the year was felt to be 'acceptable', albeit with significant variation between areas and concerns about a domination of 'white over 50's'. Overall the conclusion was that 'a great deal of progress has been made in the first year of the Community Forums, but more needs to be done' (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2009a, p. 8).

A second annual review, conducted 12 months later (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2010), reported that a small majority of residents thought that the Forum meetings had improved, but that others were frustrated by a perceived lack of effective action after issues had been raised. Despite efforts to improve publicity and make the meetings more effective the total average attendance was only marginally higher than in 2008/09. One factor that had boosted attendance, however, was the involvement of the Council Leader who had done a tour of the Community Forums during the year. A third of those responding to a survey undertaken for the review said that they attended a Forum specifically for that reason. The review also suggested that, while attempts to diversify and increase attendance at the Community Forums had not yet succeeded, the work of the forums was reaching far beyond those

directly attending. Partly this was due to the involvement of residents associations who were acting as a link to their members and partly this was because activity between meetings had increased, with more residents using the officer support for information or signposting, or to make comments about council services.

The principle of having Community Forums continued to be formally endorsed during this period. A 2009 scrutiny review of democratic engagement and electoral services (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2009b), for example, emphasised the value of the Forums albeit within a mixed economy of representative and participative structures with the councillor role at its heart. However, not all councillors were fully supportive:

> Well, I think they have them as part of their move to improve public participation. I don't know why they chose Community Forums as a structure. I'm not convinced that they, it's very difficult, I find, to work out whether the Council will do something like a Community Forum out of a genuine wish to have the public influence policy, or whether they do it to tick a box that the public are involved. *Councillor E*

While officers felt that progress was being made and the administration remained supportive, there were certainly dissenting voices and it was these that were able to influence the future of the Forums from 2010 onwards.

5.2.4 The Community Forums in Decline (2010-11)

The year 2010-11 saw two significant changes that combined to have a dramatic impact on the Forums. First, Labour was returned as the single largest party and was able to form a minority administration. There was less support for the Forums within the Labour Group than there had been from the Conservatives or from the previous Labour administration. The second change

was the severe tightening of public funding that followed from the economic downturn of 2008 and the deficit reduction plan of the coalition government elected in May 2010. The consequence for Merton was the need to find savings of over £70 million over four years including £23.7 million in the budget for 2011-12 (London Borough of Merton 2011).

As a consequence the Council agreed that support for the Forums would be reduced, that the dedicated support officer post would be withdrawn and that the Council would only provide support for one meeting a year for each of the Forums, probably to fit with the budget consultation process. Ward members were expected to fill any resulting gaps in community engagement activity either by supporting additional Forum meetings themselves or through their own ward meetings or networks.

The rationale for the change was summarised by the new Labour Cabinet Member for Finance who explained to one of the Forum meetings that:

> More than 20,000 residents could have been at this Forum meeting, and in fact there were four. It costs around £45,000 a year to run the Forums, which works out at around £100 per person who attends. Even the best attended forums only had 30-40 people at each meeting. So at a time when very substantial savings had to be made in the council's budget, the Forums had to be looked at in the financial context and in terms of the council's ambitions for community engagement. *Community Forum Chairs Report to Council, March 2010.*

At the same time, the third annual review of the community forums recorded a fall in the average attendance levels from 23 to 19 and this further supported arguments for a reduction in support (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2011).

The decision to scale back the Community Forums was not welcomed by all. The overview and scrutiny working group, set up to examine the budget proposals before they went to Council, opposed the proposed saving stating that; 'we cannot give up on community engagement just because Forums have failed to win support in the east of the borough' and that 'we await convincing proposals for alternative channels of engagement to replace Community Forums' (London Borough of Merton 2011). Similarly, one councillor, quoted in the local paper, said:

> The most annoying thing about this is the decision has been taken without any consultation with residents. It seems completely crazy to be losing engagement with residents, especially when we should be involving them in the process of difficult public spending decisions. *Councillor David Simpson (Conservative), [Wimbledon Guardian, 3rd February 2011]*

Following the decision to scale back support, some Forums continued to meet, albeit less regularly, on the initiative of local councillors with some support from residents. Two Forums in the more affluent and Conservative controlled north of the Borough have experienced the most regular pattern of meetings. These Forums were also the ones with the highest consistent levels of attendance and involvement from residents associations. Occasional reports, in the form of minutes, were still being presented to Council although up until July 2012 at least, these reports have been simply 'received' without further comment or action recorded in the minutes of the relevant Council meetings.

In conclusion it is possible to see the story of the Community Forums in Merton as characteristic of the relationship between UK local government and participatory initiatives more generally. While supported by all parties in public and provided with additional support resources they were nevertheless

unable to attract either the interest of the public or additional responsibilities from councillors. While a range of concerns surfaced throughout their history it was the lack of numbers attending that provided the ultimate justification for removing the bulk of their funding in 2011.

This section has described the 10 year history of the Community Forums in order to prepare the ground for the discussion of how and why councillors limited the value of the outcomes from the Forums in the local policy process. The first stage of this discussion, considered in the next section, is an assessment of the impact that the Forums actually had in this case.

5.3 Impact on the Local Policy Process

One of the central claims of the 'incompatibility conjecture' is that outcomes from participatory initiatives such as the Community Forums will have limited impact upon the local policy and decision making process and will be of little value to decision and policy makers. As noted in Chapter Four, the scheme used to describe the impact of outcomes draws on Burton's (2009) two strands of participation namely the level or scope of the decision and the relationship between those who participate and those who ultimately decide. Distinctions can then be made between local and strategic outcomes and between influential and decisive outcomes. These distinctions lead to a scale with high value outcomes that are strategic and decisive at one end and low value outcomes that are local and influential at the other (full details of this scheme can be found at ***APPENDIX C)***. The fieldwork suggested that outcomes in Merton were locally influential at best.

On the face of it, the intention was that the Forums should be at least strategically influential. The overarching purpose of the Forums was 'to

champion local concerns, influence the way in which local service provision responds to local needs, and guide the council and local partners when it comes to setting priorities' (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2009a, p. 1). It would have been reasonable to expect the Community Forums to have generated meaningful outcomes that could have influenced policy and decision making. They had the support of the ruling administration, were championed by a cabinet member, had dedicated officer support from a policy orientated team and they had direct involvement from local councillors including for the chairing of meetings. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, they had a reporting mechanism direct to council meetings with the facility to add formal motions.

In practice, however, outcomes from the Forums were not influential strategically. This was clearly illustrated by the lack of impact of the reports from the Forums to council meetings. From 2007 these reports were provided to council meetings from Forum chairs but these were 'for information' and hardly ever resulted in resolutions or decisions being made. In fact two motions were presented on the back of the Chairs' reports to Council although several of those interviewed thought that there were none. There was a strong perception that councillors had little interest in these items and that they caused a mass exodus from the council chamber when they were presented:

> A lot of Councillors stand up and walk out and go and get their cup of tea. *Councillor B*

> I mean, there is some visible exodus from the chamber because you know there's not going to be any critical vote for that part of the agenda. *Councillor C*

> Just read out at Council, you know. Two minutes, the Chairman stands up and reads out the wretched report, which always drives me round the bend because we can all read it and it's time wasting. *Councillor E*

Although, as one officer pointed out, the timing of these reports on lengthy council agendas might also have been unhelpful.

It was clear, therefore, that the Forums were not generating outcomes deemed worthy of council decision. Tellingly, the reports from the Forums were not discussed at party group meetings except to decide the practicalities of who would present what. Councillors were of the view that council meetings were not the best place for outcomes to be dealt with; senior officers or even scrutiny committees were seen as preferable methods for resolving any issues arising from the Forums. At the same time there was little support for the policy influencing role of the Forums among councillors generally. Three quarters of the councillors surveyed considered the Community Forums primarily as a listening tool with only three out of the 27 respondents agreeing that they should 'Make recommendations about area-wide policies and decisions' (Table 10). Survey respondents were also broadly split (14/11) on whether the Forums should be able to make recommendations to Cabinet or Council (Table 11).

Table 10 Councillor opinions about the purpose of Community Forums

In your opinion what should be the main role of the Community Forums? Select just one		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Deal directly with local complaints and service problems	11.1%	3
Make recommendations about area-wide policies and decisions	11.1%	3
Help the Council to listen to the opinions and concerns of residents	74.1%	20
Other? (Please specify)	3.7%	1

Table 11 Councillor opinions on how Community Forums might be improved

How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about how community forums might be improved?					
Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Response Count
Community forums would be improved if more members of the public attended	18	7	1	0	26
Community forums need to have better publicity	15	8	2	0	25
Community forums need to have more involvement from existing residents groups and community groups	7	12	6	0	25
Community forums would be improved if they had a greater role for ward members	5	9	10	0	24
Community forums should be able to make recommendations directly to cabinet and council	4	10	11	0	25
Community forums should be able to plan their own consultation exercises	2	15	7	0	24

If the issues coming out of the Forums were insubstantial in policy terms then they were certainly parochial in the sense that their outcomes reflected very local concerns. These outcomes, translated formally through minutes and action points and informally through local councillors taking up issues, tended to relate to environmental and 'street scene' issues. During 2008/09, for example, of the 124 issues discussed at the Forums, over two thirds of issues were concerned with; street scene (27); police, crime and crime prevention (25); planning and development (21); and the environment (15) (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2009a). While there was some recognition from both officers and councillors that there might be some value in pulling together threads from the different Forums this was never really acted on in any

meaningful way. Instead officers were happy to see the outcomes from the Forums used as one source of intelligence amongst many.

In conclusion, while the outcomes from the forums were to some degree locally influential, there was little evidence that they were decisive or that they had any impact at the strategic level. The outcomes and impacts from the Forums, captured through the reports from the Forum Chairs, dealt primarily with concerns relevant only to the Forum in question, and did not show how public concerns had translated into changes in services or policies. They were of low value within the local policy process. Given that there was both the intention and the potential for outcomes to have a high level of impact why did this not happen? The first step to understanding this is to specify the councillor behaviours that led to impact being limited. This will be the focus of the next section.

5.4 Councillor Behaviours

In Merton the cumulative effect of councillor behaviours in respect of the Community Forums over their 10 year history was to ensure that they remained outside of what councillors considered to be 'normal politics' with the consequence that they had limited impact upon the policy process. Broadly speaking councillor responses reflected a 'mobilization of bias' (Bachrach and Baratz 1962) in respect of the design of the Forums as well as at the agenda setting, meeting and post meeting stages of Forum activity. Three distinct behaviours can be identified as being particularly significant. These behaviours were; the delimitation of forum responsibilities, ensuring that contentious issues were not channelled through the forums and a focus on local service issues. The purpose of this short section is to describe each in turn.

The delimitation of Forum responsibilities was evident in the way that councillors influenced the design of the Forums and in debates over whether the Forums should be developed into area committees with formal powers. While there was an ambition that Forums should be developed in this way, this was not allowed to happen in practice. One scrutiny report, for example, stated that they were 'uncomfortable' with the idea of devolving powers down to area committees although this should be a long term goal (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2007). Similarly, with issues around delegating budget decisions, there was acceptance in principle that this was a good idea but, again, unwillingness to agree. Only around the issue of delegating some section 151 planning decisions was there any movement towards granting the Forums additional powers although this came towards the end of their history.

Ensuring that no contentious issues were to be channelled through the Forums was evident in the management of the Forums. This was apparent at the agenda setting stage, during the meetings and in the way in which the reports were presented to Council. Perhaps the biggest problem for the Forums in terms of generating outcomes was that they were not being fed with the issues that might allow them to influence policy. Such issues were being dealt with in other ways or had been effectively resolved before the Forum meetings. One example given in the interviews was the allocation of adventure playground equipment across the Borough. Although officers came to the Forums to consult on what to with a small unallocated portion of the fund, decisions concerning the bulk of the money had already been taken. Another example was the proposal to build a privately run five a side football facility within the boundaries of a park. This proposal was very unpopular with the local residents to the point that the Council had to withdraw its original plans. Two respondents felt that the Forums were the obvious consultation

mechanism to use and that difficulties for the administration could have been avoided if they had not been bypassed. The management of the Council reporting mechanism also worked to ensure that contentious issues were not formally considered by the Forums. Those attending the meetings seemed generally unaware that they could use the reports to Council as a means of presenting motions. Councillors also seemed reticent to suggest this option or to take it up on behalf of the Forums.

A focus on local service issues by councillors in Forum meetings at the expense of more strategic discussions also worked to limit any potential influence. This was evident from the scrutiny review that led to the establishment of the new Community Forums. The report from this review argued that 'the new style area forums should seize the opportunities to champion local concerns' and that they should 'be able to directly influence the way in which local service provision (whether by the council or other local agencies) responds to local needs' (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2007, p. 14). Support for the Forums was subsequently organised to help this to happen including the provision of a dedicated officer whose role was to follow up on these types of issues. This strategy of championing local service issues contributed to the agendas being taken up increasingly by non-strategic issues so that strategic issues were displaced. As one independent councillor observed; 'I think really the forums need to focus on area specific issues, otherwise they lose their Modus Vivendi, don't they?' (Councillor C).

Taken together, these different behaviours worked to ensure that the outcomes from the forums were limited to being locally influential and of low value within the policy process. Specifying these behaviours, however, only provides a partial explanation as to why the impact of the Forums was limited.

To gain a fuller explanation it is necessary to know what triggered these behaviours and the motivational logics that underpinned them. These two topics will be the focus for the next section which describes the institutional rules found to be in evidence.

5.5 Institutional Rules in Evidence

The theory of the incompatibility conjecture suggests that councillor responses will be shaped by institutional rules that are themselves shaped by the local governing codes adopted by local political élites. It is these rules that explain the limited impact that initiatives have within the local policy and decision making process. Specifically the theory suggests that three rules will be responsible for councillor behaviours toward participatory initiatives; the party unity, representative status and councillor utility rules. Evidence gathering during the case study sought to validate the existence of these rules, to specify their precise nature 'in-use' and, if possible, to identify any other rules that had not been predicted. Describing the rules as 'in evidence' serves to highlight both that the conclusions are based on a limited data set and the difficulties of establishing the existence of institutional mechanisms that actors themselves may not be aware of. The findings that follow, therefore, represent the results of observation, inference and reality checking as part of the fieldwork process.

Table 12 Institutional rules in evidence from the Merton case study

RULE	Behaviour	Trigger	Or Else Motivational Logic
Party Unity (M1)	The ruling group should limit the powers of Community Forums	When Forums give more power to backbench councillors	Or else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined
Party Unity (M2)	The ruling group should prevent the Community Forums from making contentious recommendations	When Forums have the potential to provoke a 'crisis of representation'	Or else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined
Representative Status (M3)	Party groups should limit the powers of Community Forums	When the Forums do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
Councillor Utility (M4)	Party groups should ensure that councillors focus on championing local service issues in Forum meetings	When the Forums are seen as 'talking shops'	Or else the ability to win elections will be undermined
Councillor Utility (M5)	Party groups should ensure that councillors focus on championing local service issues in Forum meetings	When the Forums are dominated by professionals at the expense of elected local councillors	Or else the ability to win elections will be undermined
Party Politics (M6)	Party groups should ensure that councillors focus on championing local service issues in Forum meetings	When the Forums have the potential to provide opponents with political opportunities	Or else the ability to win elections will be undermined
Party Politics (M7)	Party groups should prevent the Community Forums from making contentious recommendations	When the Forums have the potential to provide opponents with political opportunities	Or else the ability to win elections will be undermined

Through the fieldwork evidence for seven rules (M1-M7) was uncovered, five of which (M1-M5) related closely to three expected rules posited by the theory set out in Chapter Three; party unity, representative

status and councillor utility. All seven rules, presented as institutional statements consistent with the Grammar of Institutions proposed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995), can be found summarised in Table 12. These institutional statements are the constructions of the author intended to capture each rule more or less precisely. The rules reported are 'in-use' and predominantly informal (although there is no reason why rules, or elements of rules should not be found written as statements in formal documents). Each institutional statement representing a rule consists of three elements; the behaviour associated with the rule including who it applies to, the aspect of the Forums that triggers the behaviour and the Or Else motivational logic that shapes the behaviour. Each rule has been labelled with M to denote that it is from the Merton case study and numbered.

The rest of this section will describe the evidence for these rules and discuss to what degree the behaviours in question can be explained by rules underpinned by Or Else motivational logics or instead (or as well) by strategies with In Order To motivational logics, or by norms with As It Is Right That motivational logics. As alternative explanations for councillor behaviour these motivational logics provide an important test to the theory of incompatibility.

Party Unity (M1)

> The ruling group should limit the powers of Community Forums when Forums give more power to backbench councillors Or Else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined

This rule was one of two examples of party unity rules found. It was clear that party unity influenced the behaviour of councillors as was posited by the theory. Of those responding to the survey, for example, 60% agreed that, given a conflict councillors most would follow their party line (Table 13). All of

the interviewees recognised group loyalty as an issue with one independent councillor describing it as 'stifling' (Councillor E). Another reflected on how even the three independent Councillors needed to work together to 'group rules' if they did not want to be 'fairly swiftly discredited' (Councillor C).

Table 13 Voting behaviour of Merton councillors

If there should be a conflict between a member's own opinion, the opinion of the party group in the council or the opinion of the voters, how should, in your opinion, a member of the council vote? Choose one option		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Vote according to his/her own conviction	28.0%	7
Vote according to the opinion of the party group	60.0%	15
Vote according to the opinion of the voters	12.0%	3

This first variation of the party unity rule reflected a concern that the Forums should not threaten group unity by giving more power to back bench councillors. This issue came up in two of the interviews with officers. One reflecting that this was an ongoing practical concern for the leadership of the ruling group and shaped their responses to the Forums:

> I mean, for us, it's a third of the majority group, who are part of our Executive decision making structure and therefore are tied in with that and have that group loyalty rule and are sold into that. The further you get away from that, the more fringe members of the group are the ones who are inclined to walk off periodically, but I think that dynamic changes slightly and some of that will depend on where they stand in their constituency and if it's a fairly marginal one, there is a political expediency to not tow the group line. *Officer I*

> ...the hierarchy, in a sense, within the Council is that the Cabinet is the most important and makes the decisions, so whilst most councillors would like the Community Forums to do something, what they don't want is a challenging power base to the Cabinet. They absolutely don't want that, so it's benign in

> the sense that it's not going to be making any challenges to them and the Cabinet would definitely want anything that emerged from the community groups or Community Forums, if it's of any significance, to have to come to the Cabinet, because they wouldn't want to be establishing alternative power bases for different back benchers. *Officer F*

This institution can be clearly understood as a rule as opposed to a strategy or a norm. The councillor responses in question can be mapped back to anxieties about the exercise of power and specifically to the ability of the local political élite's leadership to manage the party group as a coherent unit. However, while the overriding logics appeared to be punitive, relating to a loss of governing competence for the group or discipline for individual councillors, in a closely balanced political environment, there was also some sense in which it might be said to be rational and pragmatic, relating to the effective management of the party. Much less in evidence was a sense that the behaviour was structured by a moral sense of loyalty or obligation to the party.

Party Unity (M2)

> The ruling group should prevent the Community Forums from making contentious recommendations when Forums have the potential to provoke a 'crisis of representation' Or Else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined

This second party unity rule (M2) reflected an anxiety in the ruling group about councillors experiencing a 'crisis of representation', in other words being torn between the wishes of the group and the wishes of their local electorate (Copus 2004). This was linked to the behaviour of ensuring that contentious issues were kept away from the Forums. As one senior officer explained:

> Now, that could be, people, you know, we're all odd as people, aren't we, we don't have a single motive, we have many motives and some of them are contradictory, so on different occasions, some of those members will be agreeing with the individual because they just think they're right, you know, that's my view as well, even though it's different to what the party thinks, some of them will be doing it thinking, well I know what our party line is about this, but actually in this ward, because it's normally their ward as well, people think differently and I've got to get re-elected, I'll break ranks and get myself re-elected, so we've got that kind of calculation. *Officer F*

It was also clear that this was the attitude of the ruling group as a whole not just the executive. As the same officer reflected:

> ...I had a number of conversations with back benchers and there was a consistent view that they weren't sure they wanted to take on responsibility for actually making decisions at a local level and they felt accountability should really rest with the cabinet and there was an anxiety that even if they only had a small budget of say £50,000, they'd end up with lots of competing bids against that £50,000 and if they approved one, they'd have upset nine others and that wasn't really where they wanted to be. They were more comfortable providing an area for discussion and then making recommendations themselves through to the Cabinet, but they'd prefer other members to actually be accountable for that decision making. I'm not sure how much that's something that's local to our members and you would find elsewhere, but it was real. *Officer F*

Linked to this rule and the previous party unity rule was a view shared by more than one respondent that there were two distinct mindsets amongst councillors within their groups. Some councillors were seen as party activists. These councillors, who see their loyalty first and foremost to the party group, were seen as being disinterested in the Forums and unlikely to have difficulties in terms of party unity. Community activist councillors, on the other hand, were seen as having a strong relationship with the people in their ward and

potentially, therefore, much more susceptible to breaking ranks from their group.

An additional question was included in the survey to explore this issue. Responses revealed a 50/50 split between councillors with a party activist or community activist mindset (Table 14). This 50/50 split applied regardless of party membership or any other factor. That there was a significant number of this latter type helps to explain why the leadership of the party groups were sensitive about the potential of the Forums to upset party management. Similarly, when asked about the best strategies to use to achieve their aims (Table 15), the most supported answer was to 'work with the public to get support'. It is interesting to contrast this with the responses to the question about councillor voting intentions noted above (Table 13). Here the majority (60%) would support the wishes of the party group when it came to a conflict as opposed to only 12% who would support the wishes of the community. The suggestion here is that while many councillors might prefer to work with and through the community, they nevertheless recognise their party groups as having the final say. In terms of the Community Forums it was clear that they had been made 'safe' as far as challenges to party unity were concerned. The ruling group ensured that neither issues that might be 'politicised' nor 'vociferous groups' would affect the business of the Forums (Overview and Scrutiny Commission 2009b).

Table 14 Merton councillor opinions about how they can make the biggest difference

Councillors can a make a difference in a number of different ways. In your opinion, how can a Councillor make the biggest difference? Please select one		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Through work in the community that the councillor represents	53.6%	15
Through work to change council wide policies	46.4%	13
Through work that benefits the political party that the councillor is a member of	0.0%	0

Table 15 Merton councillor opinions about the most effective ways to achieve their aims

Please indicate how effective you feel the following strategies are for councillors when working to achieve their aims:						
Answer Options	**Extremely effective**	**Very effective**	**Moderately effective**	**Slightly effective**	**Not effective at all**	**Response Count**
Work with the public to get support	3	17	5	1	1	27
Raise the issue with the relevant Cabinet member	2	11	8	6	0	27
Work with the relevant council officers	1	13	13	0	0	27
Present a motion to a council meeting	1	2	9	10	6	28
Raise the issue within the Councillor's own local party group	0	9	15	2	1	27
					answered question	**28**

As with the previous rule, this institution can be understood as a rule. It was underpinned by the assumption that the ability to hold the group together would be undermined if the Forums were able to make what was seen as contentious decisions. There was less evidence, however, that councillors believed that electoral chances would be harmed as might have been expected; the idea that councillors believe that divided parties lose votes was not strongly

supported. While the majority of the 26 councillors responding to the survey felt it was of great importance it ranked 6 out of the 7 issues tested (Table 16).

Table 16 Merton councillor perceptions of what the public consider when they vote

Please indicate how important you feel the following considerations are for the public when they vote in local elections:						
Answer Options	Of utmost importance	Of great importance	Of moderate importance	Of little importance	Not important at all	Response Count
The political party that a candidate belongs to	8	14	4	1	0	27
The experience of having a personal complaint dealt with successfully by the candidate	6	14	5	1	0	26
The extent to which the political party that the candidate represents has a good record of running the council	6	14	4	2	0	26
The ability of the candidate to solve problems in the community	6	13	5	1	1	26
The extent to which the candidate supports greater public participation in local politics	3	9	7	4	3	26
The extent to which the candidate's political party is united	1	14	6	4	0	25
The extent to which the candidate has an independent opinion regardless of the policy of any party they may belong to	1	9	13	1	2	26

From the evidence collected, therefore, the behaviours of delimiting Forum powers and of routing contentious decisions away from the Forums were underpinned by concerns about holding the group together and the consequences of this not being achieved. It might be argued that rational, In

Order To motivational logics, linked to the effective management of the party may also have been present. There was little evidence that these behaviours were underpinned by normative motivational logics although this may have been the case for some 'party orientated' councillors. Indeed, for a significant number of councillors working with the community was the appropriate way to proceed.

Representative Status (M3)

> Party groups should limit the powers of Community Forums when the Forums do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined

A shared concern among councillors was that the Forums had insufficient 'democratic weight' and it was for this reason that they should not have increased powers. In institutional terms it is possible to see this behaviour in question as being structured by a mix of strategy, norm and rule. The rational strategy at work reflected a concern for the effectiveness of the decision making process and a need to ensure it did not become factional:

> I don't think any of us actually want to go to an entirely populist participative democracy, whereby the 200 people who turn up at our newly energised forums all raise their hands and that decides that we, I mean, they could take terrible decisions, couldn't they, like closing the mosque or something, so you've got to guard against that. *Councillor C*

The norm responsible for this response reflected a belief held by some councillors that only elected councillors should be responsible for decision making:

> I think we also have some Councillors who kind of think that they were elected to make the decisions. What's the point in having a Councillor if you're going

> to have the public so involved in decision making outside of elections? *Councillor B*

> So some Councillors, I think, do completely disengage from these sort of forums, because they genuinely, you know, almost coming from a political theory point of view, don't agree that it's got anything to do with them, that's their job… *Officer I*

As mentioned previously, for councillors in Merton, the issue of democratic legitimacy was closely tied up with the numbers attending Forum meetings. As can be seen from Table 17, around two thirds of councillors who responded felt that there should be a minimum number with over a third suggesting that at least 30 people should be in attendance before a meeting could be taken seriously.

While these norms certainly existed they did not appear to be pervasive. When asked a series of attitude questions about various representative and participative variants of local democracy, the most supported statement was that 'residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives' (Table 18). Taken together the responses to the survey suggest a range of attitudes to local democracy. They suggest openness to public engagement albeit with the proviso that politicians have the final say.

Table 17 Merton councillor views about Community Forum public attendance levels

What should be the MINIMUM number of members of the public attending a Community Forum before it can be taken seriously? Please select one option below.		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
There should be no minimum number	34.6%	9
At least 10 people	11.5%	3
At least 20 people	15.4%	4
At least 30 people	15.4%	4
At least 40 people	19.2%	5
At least 50 people	3.8%	1
What should be the MAXIMUM number of members of the public attending a community forum? Please select one		
A maximum of 30	0.0%	0
A maximum of 50	0.0%	0
A maximum of 70	7.7%	2
A maximum of 100	11.5%	3
No maximum	80.8%	21
	answered question	**26**

Including this institution as a rule requires a degree of inference. The informal influence of councillors was dependent upon both their popular support and their claim to represent the interests of the whole community. If mechanisms such as the Forums, that did not fulfil these democratic criteria, were recognised as democratically legitimate, then this recognition would, by implication, devalue the status of councillors as representatives. Being elected becomes only one of many routes to democratic legitimacy and councillors will find themselves in competition with many other types of representative.

Table 18 Merton councillor attitudes to local democracy

People have different ideas about how local democracy should function. Please indicate how important for local democracy you feel the following requirements are:						
Answer Options	Of utmost importance	Of great importance	Of moderate importance	Of little importance	Not important at all	Response Count
Residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives.	18	8	2	0	0	28
Local politicians should try to generate consensus and shared values among local citizens/groups.	6	12	7	2	0	27
Residents should participate actively and directly in making important local decisions	4	16	6	0	1	27
The results of local elections should be the most important factor in determining council policies	4	13	7	2	1	27
Council decisions should reflect a majority opinion among the residents.	3	9	11	2	1	26
Political representatives should make what they think are the right decisions, independent of the current views of local people.	3	4	7	8	5	27
Apart from voting, citizens should not be given the opportunity to influence local government policies	1	3	3	7	13	27

Nevertheless, the general view was that there could be a place for the Forums in the democratic system of the Council if they were able to satisfy certain democratic criteria notwithstanding that those criteria were certainly challenging. Not that the Forums could ever have had primacy above elected councillors but they might be brought inside what was considered to be 'normal politics' with councillors remaining as the ultimate decision makers. Where

they were unable to fulfil these criteria, however, their responsibilities needed to be limited.

Councillor Utility (M4)

> Party groups should ensure that councillors focus on championing local service issues in Forum meetings when the Forums are seen as 'talking shops' or else the ability to win elections will be undermined

The councillor utility rule was supported by this case study but not in the way expected. The idea behind the posited rule is that councillors as 'elected managers' feel the need to demonstrate their practical value to the public in order to win votes. They will not allow participatory initiatives to be established that draw public attention away from councillor achievements, or worse, appear to be more effective than councillors in the public mind. The evidence from this case was that, while councillors did seek to demonstrate their utility, they did this within the Forums but not because they felt threatened. This behaviour was underpinned by two rules; the first reflected concerns that the public would see the Forums as ineffective and blame local councillors; and the second reflected a need to intervene on the side of the public when officers were perceived as making unpopular service decisions. A seemingly unintended consequence of councillors championing service issues was that strategic and policy issues were less prominent than they might have been. These issues were displaced.

Councillors were certainly concerned about the effectiveness of the Forums. The infrequency of meetings and the poor level of feedback for issues raised by individuals were raised in many of the interviews. Councillors felt a need to rescue the Forums from being seen as talking shops by the public which, in the eyes of councillors, might affect their election prospects if they

were held responsible. Responses to the survey suggest that the subsequent focus on service issues was not necessarily the councillors' first choice. This is reflected by the fact that very few of the councillors surveyed felt that the main role of the forums should be to solve local complaints and service problems. Only three out of 27 responders agreed with this option (Table 19). This suggests that this focus on complaints and service issues was unintended and reflected concerns and pressures outside of what had been envisaged.

Table 19 Merton councillor opinions about the role of the Community Forums

In your opinion what should be the main role of the Community Forums? Select just one		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Deal directly with local complaints and service problems	11.1%	3
Make recommendations about area-wide policies and decisions	11.1%	3
Help the Council to listen to the opinions and concerns of residents	74.1%	20
Other? (Please specify)	3.7%	1

This institution can be presented as a rule as a there was a clearly perceived link between the Forums being seen a talking shops and councillors losing support in their communities. Responses could also said to be shaped by a parallel rational strategy reflecting councillor concerns simply to get things done for the public. There was, however, little evidence of the behaviours in question being shaped by any norms associated with the idea of the elected councillor. Indeed, councillors in Merton were relaxed about working with officers who they regarded as helpful and supportive. In general councillors were happy for officers to take the burden of resolving service problems although they were also happy to take credit if appropriate.

Table 20 Merton councillor attitudes toward Community Forums

How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Community Forums?					
Answer Options	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**Response Count**
Community Forums are a useful way for local politicians to engage with the public	7	14	5	0	26
Community Forums are a democratic mechanism with as much value as any other	3	13	8	1	25
Community Forums often provide a platform for political troublemakers	3	13	8	1	25
Community Forums have relatively little democratic value	3	8	12	2	25
Community Forums are able to solve local problems that councillors cannot	0	7	14	4	25
Community Forums unnecessarily duplicate the role of councillors	0	5	19	1	25
				answered question	**26**

Responses to the survey suggested that councillors were little concerned either about their role being duplicated or that the Forums could solve problems that they could not (Table 20). One officer reported that, although councillors felt that they were better placed than residents to solve problems, this was a practical rather than a principled view, that 'they're a councillor so this means that they're the best person to do the job' (Officer H). Furthermore:

> I haven't seen much of, you know, Councillors parading round as if they own the world, just because they're a Councillor and you know, you see it quite often in other Councils and certainly in Councils I've worked before, but it's not so prominent here. Officer H

Councillor Utility (M5)

> Party groups should ensure that councillors focus on championing local service issues in Forum meetings when the decisions of professionals are unpopular with the public or else the ability to win elections will be undermined

Championing local service issues in the Forums also reflected a need to side with the public against the unpopular actions or decisions of officers. Partly this was about rescuing the forums from corporate consultation exercises. One officer talked about powerpoint presentations that bored people into a coma and, as one Forum chair put it:

> ...my predecessor....suddenly found Community Forum agendas were being taken over by Council departments doing their public consultation, which meant they were given a 20 minute slot, they gave a 25 minute presentation, there was no time for questions, but they were able to add it to their consultation that they had been to the four community forums and so [named councillor] got to the point where at one forum, there was no time for any public participation, because she'd been given three or four of these in one agenda and so the Council officers were all happy because they'd done their public consultation, but the public was pretty fed up because they'd come along and not had a chance to raise or discuss the issues that they wished to raise. *Councillor E*

Championing service issues also reflected a need to intervene on behalf of the public when they were seen to be in dispute with officers. This was not an issue of principle so much as one of pragmatism:

> I don't think Councillors actually consider themselves service experts... where it's expedient, they'll work against the Council officers and in favour of the residents association, say if they feel that that would give them more political support locally in a particular neighbourhood. *Councillor A*

> I suppose in an area forum ... an individual councillor or the three ward councillors are probably more likely to react to a residents association seeking action or indeed, you know, a persistent resident or half a dozen residents ... I think it's some of those pressures that inform how much weight to give to what comes out of an area forum. *Councillor D*

In one sense there is a parallel with the crisis of representation noted earlier. However, instead of a conflict between the wishes of the public and the wishes of the party group here there is a conflict between the wishes of the public and the actions of paid officials. This appeared much less of a crisis for councillors who found it easy to side with the public rather than follow their corporate responsibility. There was also evidence of a related, but more general concern that councillors should not allow officers to be seen as the people who got things done, stifling the role of councillors:

> ....since the war, we've had a dominance of the officers, I think, over the local councillors ... in most cases, they've not been able to make a contribution to the neighbourhood they represent that is creative, that is one of initiative, one where they can exercise a discretion, to add value. *Councillor A*

While solving service problems was seen as being appropriately done by officers, in the context of a public participation initiative, councillors did not want officers to be seen to be running things. This was particularly the case where officers were seen to be annoying the public by being overly bureaucratic or reducing opportunities for people to raise the issues that they brought with them. As with Councillor Utility Rule (M4), councillors perceived that public frustrations at these types of meeting could affect their electoral chances. Again, like the Councillor Utility rule (M4) there was little evidence that this behaviour was shaped by norms linked to the notion of the 'elected manager'. There was perhaps a rational strategy of ensuring greater public involvement

by ensuring more time for councillors to discuss service issues with the public and less time for officers to give their consultation presentations.

As well as the five rules that were found by looking for the rules hypothesised by the theory stated in Chapter Three, two additional rules, relating to party politics, that did not fit so well, were identified. These are discussed next.

Party Politics (M6)

> Party groups should ensure that councillors focus on championing local service issues in Forum meetings when the Forums have the potential to provide opponents with political opportunities or else the ability to win elections will be undermined

One consistent aspect of councillor attitudes toward the Community Forums was that adversarial politics should not feature. This desire for the Forums to be 'non party political' was clearly stated in the 2007 review and was widely supported in other evidence. This institution, along with the Councillor Utility rule (M4), underpinned the focus by councillors in meetings upon service rather that policy or strategy issues.

This institution can be stated as a rule as councillors perceived that, if wider political debates were permitted in Forum meetings, then this could damage their election chances. There was little evidence that this behaviour reflected a rational strategy supporting more efficient management of meetings, for example, although there was some suggestion that, in common with the Representative Status rule (M3), the desire to keep party politics away from the Forums reflected a normative feeling that they were not legitimately part of 'normal politics'. Or. As one respondent put it; 'I think they almost see them as disconnected from politics' (Officer F).

Party Politics (M7)

> Party groups should prevent the Community Forums from making contentious recommendations when the Forums have the potential to provide opponents with political opportunities or else the ability to win elections will be undermined

Similar to the Party Unity rule (M2) this institution relates to the management of agenda setting for the Forums. Instead of an anxiety about coming into conflict with public wishes, however, it is triggered by an anxiety that political opponents will take advantage of contentious recommendations being made and debated in public settings. Again, similar to the Party Politics rule (M5), this is linked to worries that opponents will gain electoral benefits by exploiting such situations and a sense that the Forums should not be legitimately considered as part of 'normal politics'.

Taken together, the seven rules outlined above capture how and why councillors responded to the Community Forums in the way that they did. As a consequence of these responses the outcomes from the Forums were of low value and local influencing at best. Overall, for both of the main parties, party management and organisation were overriding factors as was the primacy of 'democratic weight', in other words measurable popular support. The idea of the elected manager was less important in shaping responses to the Forums and politicians were broadly happy to leave service issues to officers. However, where necessary, it was important for councillors to be seen as championing local service issues even if this meant siding with the public against officers.

5.6 Conclusion

In Merton, the Community Forums, borne out of the modernisation agenda pushed by central government, were never fully accepted by councillors and never had any real impact upon the decision making of the council. Despite having the potential to influence borough wide policy and, in the council reporting mechanism, a formal means for doing so, their impact was extremely limited. As one of the Forum chairs concluded:

> So, do I think they will influence policy? No, I don't think they ever will actually, thinking about it, because the processes are too cumbersome. *Councillor E*

Councillors struggled to find a place for them in the local democratic order and regarded them as being outside of what they considered to be normal politics. As one officer put it:

> I think they almost see them as disconnected from politics. Politics is the shouting that they do to each other in the Council chamber. Community Forums are much more just us as a group of people trying to do the right thing in the Community Forum. *Officer F*

Some of the Forums, particularly in the north of the borough had some success in attracting residents but overall the initiative failed to gain sufficient support from either the public or from councillors to make them viable in the long term.

It would be unfair, however, to suggest that the Forums had no value or impact at all. For many councillors they represented an important and genuinely held principle of engaging the public even if they did not play out so well in practice. Many councillors dedicated time to the Forums and used them to address and solve a whole range of issues which were evidenced in the

annual reports produced by officers. Similarly many officers, particularly those employed to directly support the Forums, were fully committed to making them work. It was around local service issues in particular that the Forums were able to make a difference. When it came to giving the Forums a meaningful role within the policy process, however, councillors were constrained.

In broad terms the findings from this case study are consistent with the conjecture that participatory initiatives are incompatible with local politics. The seven proposed institutional rules provide a credible explanation as to why the Community Forums had such little impact upon local policy and decision making. The Or Else motivational logics of holding the élite together, winning elections and maintaining governing competence were uncontested in the interviews as explanations for councillor responses toward the Community Forums. These Or Else logics could be easily connected to triggers associated with the Community Forums and the influence of the local governing code was also clear. The power model employed by the main parties emphasised the authority of the group leadership and resulted in an emphasis on party management. It was this aspect of the local governing code in particular that ensured that the group unity and party politics rules were so prominent.

For this case study, the behaviours in question appeared more likely to be the result of institutional rules rather than strategies or norms. The behaviours connected with group unity and councillor utility in particular could be closely associated with Or Else motivational logics. The behaviours connected with representative status, however, had a much weaker association with Or Else logics and might equally well be explained by strategies or norms although the most obvious possibility is that all three were present reinforcing

each other. It is worth noting the absence of ideological preferences shaping norms in this case; there were no clear patterns in terms of broad notions of democracy nor were party ideologies at all evident in this context.

While this case clearly did not represent an exception to the incompatibility conjecture there is one finding that points towards such a possibility; the effect of public pressure. Although not directed through the Forums, a number of examples of community campaigns highlighted by the interviewees suggested that this type of pressure could provide a significant counter to both the party unity and representative status rules. These campaigns demonstrated the ability to recruit the support of councillors with the implication that the Forums could potentially do the same. At the same time, the high levels of attendance for the Forums in the north of the Borough, together with strong involvement from established residents groups, led to them continuing after the budget cuts of 2010/11 with the ward councillors stepping in to provide the support. Public pressure channelled through pressure groups and particularly residents associations was seen as democratically legitimate by councillors. The implication is that if the Forums could be meaningfully connected to these types of groups then they themselves would be seen as more democratically legitimate. Furthermore it suggests that the Forums might also be more legitimate in the eyes of the councillors if they were in some respects independent of the Council

The Merton case was selected as a typical example. The use of area forums outside of 'normal politics' was a common approach for many local councils in the wake of the local government modernisation of the late 1990s and early 2000s. A bigger challenge to the theory of the incompatibility conjecture should be found where participatory initiatives have been

incorporated into the formal governance structures of the council and formally associated with the day to day roles of councillors. This is exactly the case for the Neighbourhood Partnerships in Bristol and the Ward Forums in Hull. These will be the subjects of the two case studies that follow.

6. Local Politics and Bristol's Neighbourhood Partnerships

> Responding to calls by local people to have more of a say in local decision making, Bristol City Council is introducing new forms of Neighbourhood Governance across the city where local people can have more say in influencing decisions. The new local governance structure will be called Neighbourhood Partnerships.
>
> A Quick Guide to Bristol's New Neighbourhood Partnerships, Voscur, 2007 [Leaflet]

Bristol City Council's Neighbourhood Partnerships represented an experiment in local governance that was bold, innovative and perhaps unique. This participatory initiative contained elements of both area forums and area committees; the informal engagement associated with the former and the formal decision making responsibilities of the latter. Unlike many other councils which had introduced co-governance mechanisms in direct response to a national policy agenda, in Bristol the Neighbourhood Partnerships emerged from a much more complex set of local processes and from the self conscious aspirations of the local political élite. They were regarded as an important policy for the Labour administration that introduced them in 2007 and then as a flagship policy for the Liberal Democrats who enhanced them in 2009. During the 2011/12 budget round, when many other councils felt obliged to reduce funding for participatory initiatives, the budgets for the Neighbourhood Partnerships were not only protected but increased.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the Neighbourhood Partnership story in Bristol in order to test and refine the theory that

participatory initiatives such as these are incompatible with local politics. This theory suggests that councillors will work to ensure that the outcomes from participatory initiatives will always have limited value within the local policy process. These behaviours are not necessarily the result of conscious choices; indeed, many councillors have acted as enthusiastic champions, but rather a consequence of the structure of élite local politics and the formal and informal institutions associated with it. Three institutional rules in particular have been suggested as explanations for the limited impact of participatory initiatives; namely the party unity, representative status and councillor utility rules (see Chapter Three).

This chapter will proceed in five stages. First a short overview of local politics in Bristol will be provided in order to highlight important characteristics including the key features of the governing code of the local political élite. It will characterise Bristol's local politics as being highly contested with regular changes in council leadership contributing to a sense of instability in city wide politics. Second the history of the Neighbourhood Partnerships will be discussed in order to identify their defining characteristics and how they have changed over time. This section will consider their emergence, their establishment in 2007 and their enhancement in 2009. The third section will assess their impact upon the local policy and decision making process and conclude that impact, while significant at the local level has been limited city wide.

The fourth section will present evidence of the councillor responses to the Neighbourhood Partnerships and the ways in which outcomes have been limited both in terms of their management and their design. This will be followed by a fifth section that specifies as clear written statements the

institutional rules-in-use evidenced from the case study. In total six rules were identified and each is discussed in terms of what triggered it and the extent to which it can be credibly described as an institutional rule. Before all this, however, it is important to understand the main characteristics of local politics in the City of Bristol.

6.1 Local Politics in and Governing Codes in Bristol

Bristol City came into a being as a unitary authority in 1996. As of 2013 it had a growing population of about 432,500 expected to reach 473,000 by 2021. It has a relatively young population, with more children under sixteen than people of pensionable age, and 16% belonging to a black or minority ethnic group. Bristol City is the 10th largest Local Authority in England and Wales (Bristol City Council 2013).

Bristol City as a unitary Council was run by a majority Labour administration until 2003. Since this time a series of Labour and Liberal Democrat minority administrations have formed the Cabinet with one all party administration operating from 2003 to 2004. During the period 2009-13, which includes the time during which the fieldwork was conducted (October 2010 – March 2011), Liberal Democrats retained control of the Cabinet.

The city's 35 wards each return two councillors. Elections were conducted by thirds (spread across three years) at the time of the fieldwork but as only one councillor from any ward stood at any one time, two-thirds of wards were contested at each election. The Council has decided, however, that from 2016 whole council elections will be held every four years. Significantly, in May 2012, a referendum determined that the city would operate under an elected mayor instead of a leader and cabinet system. In November 2012

George Ferguson was elected as the first modern Mayor of Bristol. At the time of the fieldwork in 2010/11, however, the leader and cabinet model was still operating.

From 2003 to 2011 there was a high degree of instability in the political leadership of the City. During this period there were no less than eight changes of council leader. This was a consequence of close competition between the parties, internal changes within the parties and the system of election by thirds. Unsurprisingly elections have been keenly contested. In an article about the aftermath of the 2011 elections, the Bristol News noted that a coalition was unlikely 'not least because of the bitterness between the parties' (Bristol News 7/5/11). This political instability, together with a more general dissatisfaction with the political élites in the city, appears to have contributed to the establishment of the elected mayor. A recent review of governance in the city ahead of the first mayoral elections concluded that: 'The outgoing system of leader and cabinet is widely regarded as flawed in terms of visibility of the leader and effectiveness in decision-making' (Hambleton *et al.* 2013). The report found that the only group who did not consider the old system to be flawed were the political élites.

As described in Chapter Three, the electoral strategies and power models adopted by local political élites as part of their local governing codes can be captured using a limited set of variables (see Table 4, p. 68). Drawing on these variables it is possible to say that in Bristol, as with many other UK Councils, electoral strategies were partisan rather than apolitical and, following national politics, tended to be catch-all, rather than seeking to appeal solely to a single constituency of voters. A more distinctive aspect of electoral strategies in the city was the strong focus on the sub local electoral arena as opposed to a focus

on either national or city wide politics. This feature of the local governing code, which will be covered in more detail later in the chapter, may have been a consequence of the instability of political leadership and of the election by thirds system.

A further important aspect of the local governing codes operating within the city, certainly in the period before 2008, was a reliance on central government for direction and resources. Hence this aspect of the power model might be characterised more as one of acquiescence rather than autonomy or collaboration. As Davies and Pill (2012a, p. 2206) suggest: 'Despite devolutionary talk of a 'new localism' and council-led 'place-shaping', the relationship between centre and locality was still characterised by more or less overt top–down pressure to conform with the latest national policy shifts' with the result that 'UK Government priorities were 'imprinted on the strategies pursued throughout Bristol's congested governance landscape' (Skelcher cited in Davies and Pill 2012a). The successful drawing down of funds from a number of regeneration schemes meant that the city 'enjoyed relatively high levels of neighbourhood funding until near the end of the Labour administration' and that this led to 'an explosion of collaborative governance institutions' (Davies and Pill 2012a, p. 2205). Hence the policy and practice of regeneration schemes, often operating at a neighbourhood level and with a strong emphasis on community empowerment came to be a key characteristic of political and managerial life in the city.

A second important aspect of the power models operating within the city was the development of a devolved approach to service delivery. This model, which was an important factor in the development of the Neighbourhood Partnerships, was reflected in the delegation of much decision making and

influence from the centre to ward councillors. In Bulpittian terms this reflected an autonomy power model whereby matters of low politics were delegated from the centre to the periphery. Party groups in Bristol were more relaxed about community level issues than would have been the case in many other councils and happy for councillors to be relatively autonomous from the group leadership. This model may in part have been a result of the difficulties that the parties had in retaining overall control of the council; community power bases were perhaps more significant as a result.

In terms of governance the power model operating in Bristol could be said to be strategic rather than one of autonomy or alliance. Local politicians worked to coordinate policy across a range of organisations; an approach that has developed out of the City's experience of regeneration schemes. Not that this was necessarily a choice for the local political élites. An important feature of politics in the city was the prominence of the voluntary sector. A series of confrontations between the council and community groups over regeneration schemes in the 80s resulted both in an active community sector and in a respect for that sector within the political élite. Voscur is the city's umbrella body for the voluntary sector and this organisation plays an active role in the political life of the City. As noted by Purdue *et al.* (2004, p. 278): 'Bristol has a reputation for new social movement activity and a strong community and voluntary sector'.

Having defined the local political context and having specified the local governing codes in operation it is now time to tell the story of the Neighbourhood Partnerships themselves. While the emergence of the Neighbourhood Partnerships has been considered from an urban studies perspective (Davies and Pill 2012b; 2012a) here the story is told from a local

political point of view which suggests a number of alternative conclusions and new insights. In addition the material presented here is original in as far as it continues the story of the Neighbourhood Partnerships beyond 2008.

6.2 The History of the Neighbourhood Partnerships 2003-13

The Neighbourhood Partnerships were formally established in 2007 by the new Labour administration before being given additional responsibilities and increased support by the Liberal Democrat administration in 2009. They were designed as a co-governance mechanism intended to engage the public in decision making. Significantly, and unusually, the Neighbourhood Partnerships were established entirely within what was considered to be 'normal politics'. The Partnerships were connected to the decision making structure of the Council through the use of Neighbourhood Committees; a type of mini area committee that sat in the centre of each Neighbourhood Partnership and allowed formal decision making to be delegated to local councillors. The Neighbourhood Partnerships were, in effect, area forums wrapped around area committees. In total 14 Neighbourhood Partnerships were set up to cover the whole city with each incorporating two or three council wards whose boundaries they followed.

The story of the Partnerships can be broken up into three distinct phases each of which will be described in more detail in the section that follows. First there was the emergence of the Partnerships including a 'pre history' of the bodies that preceded them. The second phase was the introduction of the Partnerships as a formal neighbourhood governance structure from 2007-09. The third phase was the period of enhancement and investment from 2009-2012. During 2013 the Mayor of Bristol conducted a major review of the

Neighbourhood Partnerships although the results of this have not been published. At the time of writing, therefore, their future is unclear.

6.2.1 The Emergence of the Neighbourhood Partnerships

Davies and Pill (2012b; 2012a) have argued that the emergence of the Neighbourhood Partnerships had an economic rationale linked to the withdrawal of funding from the small number of area regeneration projects that had existed in the city:

> In 2008, in response, Bristol replaced smaller resource-intensive area-based initiatives and associated neighbourhood governance structures with 14 super-size cross neighbourhood partnerships, each covering two to three council wards of up to 30,000 people and with much lower levels of funding than before. These 'supra neighbourhood' entities were expected to be far more proactive than their predecessors, influencing public service provision rather than drawing down resources.
>
> This institutional reconfiguration was significant for two reasons. First, it is suggestive of a policy turn towards geopolitical upscaling and self-help. Secondly, it highlights that the commitment to neighbourhood was waning under New Labour even before the economic crisis and subsequent spending cuts. (Davies and Pill 2012a, p. 2209)

The evidence collected for this case study suggests a different interpretation that explains the emergence of the Neighbourhood Partnerships as a more or less pragmatic response to a series of political challenges and opportunities. The fact that Neighbourhood Partnerships were a child of the political élite rather than a product of officer recommendations was confirmed by all of those interviewed. Three drivers for the establishment of the Neighbourhood Partnerships can be identified.

First, as noted above, a small number of areas within Bristol had benefited from a significant amount of regeneration funding from central government. This funding was to be delivered through partnership structures with a strong emphasis on community involvement. This meant that by 2007 there were some areas for which devolved governance and community representation were normal. Having these areas treated differently in the eyes of local councillors, certainly in terms of funding, but also in terms of the involvement that local councillors were able to have, caused tensions as some felt that the arrangements were unfair. The introduction of the Neighbourhood Partnerships as a consistent pattern across the city was in part a response to these tensions.

A second issue was the existence of community led organisations that were seeking to represent two areas of the City. As noted previously, the community and voluntary sector in Bristol was confident and organised and, in these two areas; Bedminster and Lockleaze, the organisations that were established as informal community trusts were entirely credible. In setting up the Neighbourhood Partnerships there was an element of bringing these organisations into the fold.

The third driver that informed the establishment of the Neighbourhood Partnerships was the political intentions of the local political élites themselves. Both the Labour and Liberal Democrat groups had been seriously thinking about a more formalised structure for neighbourhood governance for a long time. As one officer interviewed put it: 'Bristol's been sort of fiddling around with neighbourhood partnerships for a number of years' (Officer P). Certainly 'Neighbourhood Planning' meetings were taking place as far back as 2003 with councillors from different parties, officers and council partners involved.

Although both of the main parties in Bristol were keen to see some system of Neighbourhood Partnerships established, there were different ideas about the purpose. For the Labour group it was more about consultation and engaging residents in debates about their area. For the Liberal Democrats the aim of devolving power down to ward councillors was much more important. A couple of interview respondents suggested that, prior to 2009 at least, the Liberal Democrats would have preferred a pure area committee model rather than a structure that privileged community involvement.

One outcome from the various discussions held was the piloting of three Local Leadership Groups in December 2005. They were described in a report to a scrutiny committee like this:

> LLGs [Local Leadership Groups] preceded NPs [Neighbourhood Partnerships]. As with NPs, the LLGs were an attempt to provide a structure that would enable local people to voice issues of local concern with their councillors and service providers. The intention was to hold service providers to account and to improve the quality of local service delivery. The LLG structure had a strong focus on the role of the councillors. (Bristol City Council 2007, p. 2)

These pilots were another ingredient thrown into the Neighbourhood Partnership pot. The significance of their rebranding was that they were given a new emphasis on community and partnership engagement.

While in many local authority areas participatory co-governance initiatives had been introduced directly on the back of central government advocacy, in Bristol the process was much more complex. The Neighbourhood Partnerships certainly represented to a large degree New Labour policy intentions and this was publicly stated at the time. However, they also represented a pragmatic desire to draw the regeneration partnership areas and

the community led partnerships into one city wide structure. Crucially this also meant 'filling in the gaps' so that those areas, and those councillors, that had not previously experienced neighbourhood governance could also join in. The Neighbourhood Partnerships were therefore a solution to a set of political problems at least as much as they were a solution to urban economic challenges.

6.2.2 The Establishment of the Neighbourhood Partnerships

By 2008 the Neighbourhood Partnerships had been firmly cemented into the governance of the Council. The Corporate Plan 2008-11 (Bristol City Council 2008, p. 4) identified 'Better Neighbourhoods' as one of its four main themes explaining:

> To achieve this, all communities must be empowered to influence their neighbourhoods and how services are delivered. We are committed to listening and responding to residents, through the development of Neighbourhood Partnerships across the city, creating a real opportunity to improve the quality of life in all neighbourhoods.

This introductory phase was marked by a willingness to allow different partnerships to develop at different speeds. As a Cabinet report in 2009 notes: 'a strength of the arrangements to date has been an evolutionary approach which has allowed each neighbourhood to develop in a way which best suited the history and characteristics of that locality' (Bristol City Council 2007, p. 4). This report also recorded the success in drawing in partner agencies and in particular the Police. Neighbourhood policing boundaries were redefined to fit with the boundaries of the partnerships for example.

The introduction of a consistent and comprehensive structure was not without its problems. The groups that had been incorporated felt that, while

they had the opportunity for greater influence, this was going to be on the Council's terms. Their own agendas were being pushed to one side.

6.2.3 Enhancement and Investment 2009-13

In 2009 the Neighbourhood Partnerships received an upgrade from the Liberal Democrat administration. Indeed this enhancement of the Neighbourhood Partnerships was described publicly by the Leader of the Liberal Democrat group as one of their flagship policies. This upgrade, set out in a Cabinet Report (Bristol City Council 2009), placed 'Neighbourhood Committees', a formal decision making body for local councillors, in the centre of the Neighbourhood Partnership structure. The arrangement, which was in effect an area committee in the centre of an area forum, provided a mechanism for delegating budget decisions. These decisions were linked to environment, highways and community centres in the first instance.

The stated intention was for this to be the beginning of a process of further delegation. In parallel with this delegation of responsibilities, the Neighbourhood Partnerships were also given what was termed an *influencing* role in terms of a range of services. In practice this meant that relevant officers were expected to come to the Partnerships to receive direction on community level service delivery. In the first instance these services included; community safety; street cleaning; parks and green spaces; and community engagement. Although partnerships were expected to lead community engagement locally, this was to be done within a city wide framework of Neighbourhood Forums attached to each Neighbourhood Partnership. These Forums, which were designed to be informal mechanisms for public engagement that could feed into the Partnerships, were expected to meet at least twice a year in each area.

Community engagement was, therefore, seen as another important function for the Partnerships to adopt.

Public involvement in the partnerships was intended to happen in three ways. First community representatives could be invited to be members of the Partnership itself although they could not vote on issues that were legally excluded such as budget decisions. While the process of indentifying these representatives varied there was certainly the option of elections. Second, the public were able to attend and observe Partnership meetings and participate at certain points in the agenda through public questions. Certainly some of the meetings attracted 50 people or more. Finally, as noted above, a structure of Neighbourhood Forums was put in place. These meetings were much more informal than the Partnership meetings and were designed for public engagement. The results from the forums were reported to the Partnership meetings.

Significantly a new officer structure was put in place to support the Neighbourhood Partnerships. This structure, costing £500,000, included a new Service Director responsible for Neighbourhoods, seven Area Co-ordinators responsible for overseeing the work of the Partnerships and two additional staff for Democratic Services to support the formal Neighbourhood Committees as part of the formal council decision making structure. Existing community development officers were also drawn into the structure as part of area teams.

Those interviewed regarded the design of the Partnerships as representing both the aspirations of the political leadership at the time and the political compromises that were needed to get them up and running. One officer explained how the model drew very much upon Liberal Democrat philosophy:

> The decisions about a local park, about local street cleaning, around local crime and drug issues, whatever you want to wrap into that sort of model, local people should have a say in that and that strengthens democracy and it's about local people having an influence in there and maybe even having part of their decision process. So I think it was very much about that for them. *Officer Q*

However, the final design had to ensure the commitment both of the other parties and of the backbenchers in the ruling group's own party:

> The model they have now is partly, I think, about them trying to keep on board the rest of the politicians from other parties who had already committed to wider neighbourhood partnerships and so all they were doing was kind of enhancing or adding to the model, as opposed to saying, we want it our way and stripping everything out. I think obviously these things absolutely stand and fall on the buy in of local members. *Officer P*

Only the Conservatives displayed any scepticism although this related to the cost of the Partnerships rather than the principle.

Ownership of the Neighbourhood Partnership programme rested with the leaderships of the party groups rather than with the rank and file. This was suggested by observers outside of the Council and is also supported by the fact that many councillors felt confused about the concept when the Partnerships first started. That no one outside of the Council appears to have been involved in formulating the design of the Partnerships further contributed to a sense they were being implemented top down.

Regardless of their origins the first round of the revamped meetings drew high councillor and officer attendance. Inevitably there were some teething troubles for example around the timing of meetings and the volume and accessibility of the paperwork. This had been anticipated by the leading

politicians who had in any case sought to implement quickly and to 'learn by doing'. This approach was in large part a consequence of the uncertainty that came from election by thirds; the Liberal Democrat leadership did not feel they had the luxury of a year or even six months to develop proposals more carefully.

The field work for this case study took place 12 months after these changes had been introduced. While the new arrangements had been introduced as planned, it was evident from observation of Partnership meetings that operating the Partnerships in practice would still need some refinement. Uncertainty about roles remained an issue as was the perception that the reports being provided by some departments reflected a corporate 'one size fits all' approach rather than the needs of individual areas. It was evident that while the delegation of powers to the Neighbourhood Committees was proving relatively straightforward, the influencing agenda was proving to be more difficult to implement. Overall, however, and with recognition of some of the teething troubles, there was a general satisfaction with progress from an officer perspective:

> Where we've got to now is, I think it's fair to say, after a year, just under a year of the new model, we've got 14 pretty reasonably functioning little governance structures in neighbourhoods. *Officer P*

The story of the Neighbourhood Partnerships was one of compromise, pragmatism and emerging consensus. Despite the perhaps inevitable practical difficulties in delivering such a structure city-wide the introduction of the Partnerships nevertheless represented an experiment in local governance that was bold, innovative and perhaps unique. Significantly the Partnerships were a politically driven project supported by a political consensus albeit on the back

of some compromise. This cross party political commitment was underlined during the very difficult budget process of 2012. Despite the need to find almost £24 million in savings the budget for the Neighbourhood Partnerships was protected and in fact enhanced. This contrasts starkly with the experience of other councils such as Merton where similar budgets have been drastically reduced.

While the Neighbourhood Partnerships were successful in a number of different ways the interest here is on the impact that this initiative had upon the Council's policy and decision making. This will be the subject of the next section.

6.3 Impact on the Local Policy Process

One of the central assumptions of the incompatibility conjecture is that the outcomes form participatory initiatives such as the Neighbourhood Partnerships will always have a limited impact within the local policy process. Being precise about the extent of this impact is therefore an important concern for this research. In describing the impact of outcomes the discussion draws on Burton's (2009) two strands of participation namely the level or scope of the decision and the participatory relationship between those who participate and those who ultimately decide. From these strands two distinctions can be made; between local and strategic outcomes; and between influential and decisive outcomes (see ***APPENDIX C***). The fieldwork suggested that the outcomes from the Neighbourhood Partnerships were locally decisive at best.

Before proceeding it is important to establish what the Neighbourhood Partnerships were actually intended to achieve in terms of impact on the local policy process. The Partnerships can be characterised as being first and

foremost a vehicle for public involvement in sub local, i.e. community level decision making but with the capacity to influence city wide policy through the involvement of councillors. The Neighbourhood Partnerships were advertised to the residents of Bristol as follows:

> Neighbourhood Partnerships bring public sector decision making to a local level where local residents can influence how they would like to see their neighbourhood improve. [http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/council-and-democracy/neighbourhood-partnerships accessed 11th November 2013]

While the emphasis was very much at the community level, the Partnerships were intended to have some strategic influence even if this was not promoted as clearly. The idea was that the Partnerships could inform city wide policy and decisions informally through councillors. This was stated within the Corporate Plan:

> As elected community leaders, our councillors are in a unique position to provide a link between neighbourhood and strategic agendas and between residents and services. (Bristol City Council 2008, p. 4)

It was also clear from the interviews that the Partnerships did have the potential for this wider role even if no formal mechanisms had been set up to achieve this. Amongst the officers in particular there was a sense that city wide influence was an aspiration. This was certainly the case for the officers close to the Partnerships:

> It is the intention ... I think that's where it's key that we have a medium or a means to bring all 14 Partnerships together, to ensure that we are still looking at the bigger picture as well and that's done through the Bristol Partnership, through the Thriving Neighbourhoods Board and you know, in that respect. *Officer O*

Another officer said:

> Well, I have a hope, an aspiration and for the purpose of the tape, I've got my fingers crossed now, that that would happen. One of the things that we put into the training with staff and the councillors was we have a very top down approach to developing policy strategy, what about the other way round? *Officer Q*

For some councillors this wider role was also desirable. A small but significant number (21.6%) of the councillors surveyed indicated that 'making recommendations about area-wide policies and decisions' should be the main role of the Neighbourhood Partnerships (Table 21).

Table 21 Bristol councillor opinions about the role of Neighbourhood Partnerships

In your opinion what should be the main role of the Neighbourhood Partnerships? Select just one		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Deal directly with local complaints and service problems	7.8%	4
Make recommendations about area-wide policies and decisions	21.6%	11
Help the Council to listen to the opinions and concerns of residents	37.3%	19
Other	33.3%	17
	answered question	**51**

One interviewee recalled that, at their launch in 2007, the Partnerships had been described as 'a prism through which all our decisions will be made' by a councillor leading the policy at that time (Partner R). This external observer also suggested that there might be an aspiration to work more strategically but that this had not been thought through or was poorly communicated.

Despite the potential of the Partnerships to have a more strategic impact the evidence from this case study suggests that the outcomes from the Partnerships were of low to medium value. There was no formal process in place for transmitting outcomes to city wide decision making bodies such as Cabinet, Council or the Bristol Partnership. There was a Thriving Neighbourhoods sub group of the Bristol Partnership that might have fulfilled this function although the fact that this was only referred to by one interviewee, and even then they were unclear about its role, suggests that this was not an effective mechanism. One of the councillors, commenting on the fact that there was no formal connection between the Partnerships and city wide policy formulation, said:

> I think that is lacking. Is that a role of the councillors though? If I had a concern, if in my Neighbourhood Partnership, there were issues that were really that concerning, as a councillor, I could take it to full council, put a motion on the agenda or I could go towards the executive member and get it raised at the Cabinet or whatever, so I suppose the question is, do you need some kind of formal mechanism or does it work better informally? I don't know. *Councillor M*

However, while the intention was for councillors to mediate between the Partnerships and strategic policy and decision making this did not appear to be happening. None of those interviewed, for example, were able to give any examples of city wide policy being decisively influenced by the Partnerships through this route.

While they had little formal impact upon city wide decision making the Partnerships certainly had a high degree of influence at the local level. Some outcomes from the Partnerships, through the mechanism of devolved decision making, were clearly decisive. As noted above, Partnerships were making

budget decisions, albeit minor ones, on environment and highways issues and in respect of community centres. Officers were also coming to the meetings so that they could influence the local delivery of community safety schemes; street cleaning; the management of parks and green spaces and community engagement.

One issue that arose from the field work, however, was the extent to which such outcomes could always be described as participatory. The issue here was that while councillors were in full public view while making decisions there was variation between the Partnerships with some councillors making decisions *with the public* but others only making decisions *in public*. As one external interviewee observed:

> I think some perceive it as they're the boss, they're in charge and they don't like really engaging some of the other members of the community and there's quite a lot of tension in some neighbourhood partnerships. I think others are much more open and leave their kind of party political role or their kind of leadership, as in I make all the decisions. *Partner R*

The councillors interviewed seemed to be relaxed about following public wishes in the majority of cases. This suggests that public involvement was often decisive rather than simply informing. However this was straightforward as long as the issues themselves remained uncontroversial. As one councillor reflected:

> I think if we were to be in the same situation with the Neighbourhood Partnerships as we are, say, with the planning application when you've got a very controversial planning application and you've got to very clearly and very publicly put your controversial vote on record and you know, there are 100 people in the public gallery and you get booed, as you do... I think if that sort of situation was to be transplanted into the Neighbourhood Partnerships, the

> councillors might be a bit more uneasy about going along... I think I'd be much more uneasy about Neighbourhood Partnerships, just purely from not wanting to be in the situation of making myself unpopular. *Councillor M*

The 'influencing agenda' decisions brought by officers about, for example, the timing of street cleaning, or the location of cycle paths could be made by the full Partnership and did not require a separate decision to be made by the councillors operating in Neighbourhood Committee mode. Again, the councillors interviewed appeared relaxed about these influencing decisions even if officers were taking time to adjust to this new way of doing things. Like the delegated issues, the influencing agenda was certainly locally decisive in many cases.

In conclusion, while the Neighbourhood Partnerships were far from being strategically decisive, there was an element of them being strategically informing through the councillors although this was not clearly visible. If this is considered alongside the evidence that the Partnerships were at least locally informing and arguably locally decisive then it is possible to describe the outcomes from the Neighbourhood Partnerships as being of low to medium value within the local policy process (see ***APPENDIX C***). But what were the councillor behaviours that limited the value of these outcomes and prevented the Partnerships from producing high value outcomes? That will be the focus of the next section.

6.4 Councillor Behaviours

Overall councillors were happy to embrace the Partnerships and to work to consolidate them within the governance systems of the council. Despite some complaints about the associated bureaucracy councillors were, broadly

speaking, supportive. It was this support that ensured that low to medium value outcomes were achieved in terms of the policy and decision making process. The focus of this research, however, is upon those behaviours, evident at both the design stage and during the day to day management of the Partnerships, which served to limit their impact and to prevent them from having a more strategic influence.

Placing local councillors formally at the heart of the Neighbourhood Partnerships certainly enhanced their potential to influence city wide policy and decision making by giving them a clear status and legitimacy within the local governance system. However, the mediation of outcomes through councillors was also the reason why their impact was limited. Four limiting behaviours were identified through the fieldwork. First, placing councillors in the heart of the Partnership structures precluded the need to establish formal mechanisms for city wide influence. Second a non participatory style of decision making adopted by some councillors within the Partnerships worked to ensure that public influence was limited. Third a focus by councillors upon devolved matters meant that the capacity to deal with strategic concerns was restricted. Finally, the championing of local service issues also served to sideline and displace more strategic concerns. Each of these behaviours will be considered in more detail below.

Placing councillors in the heart of the Partnership structures followed the assumption that councillors would mediate between the Partnerships and strategic policy and decision making. As a consequence additional mechanisms for informing city wide policy were seen as unnecessary. However, as reported by more than one interviewee, councillors were likely to see the job of undertaking city wide consultation on strategic issues as something that officers

should do. This design decision therefore had the effect of limiting the impact of the Partnerships.

In terms of the second behaviour, as noted above, some councillors were choosing to make their decisions *in public* rather than *with the public*. The consequence of this is that the Partnerships operating in this way could not be described as participatory initiatives but rather as part of the Council's normal governance structures. This behaviour might also be described as *biased facilitation*.

The third limiting behaviour was that of focusing on devolved matters at the expense of strategic concerns. The devolution agenda was clearly wider than the Neighbourhood Partnerships and looked likely to affect a broad range of services. A number of responses to the survey suggested that the budgetary aspect of devolution in particular lay at the heart of what the Partnerships should be about as far as councillors were concerned. When asked in the survey; 'what should be the main purpose of the Neighbourhood Partnerships?' a number of respondents referred explicitly to devolution as illustrated by the replies below:

> Make budgetary decisions that affect the local neighbourhood
>
> Allow councillors to make decisions about their own wards
>
> Main purpose should be to actually make local delegated decisions with delegated budgets
>
> To make decisions about local service delivery from options put forward by officers according to council policy.
>
> The primary role of the NP is to make Decisions on devolved budget items, including the "wellbeing fund" to support local initiatives.

> Provide a community based steer for councillors who decide on the spending of devolved budgets etc.
>
> Primarily NPs are about devolution of power and decision making
>
> [Survey responses]

One councillor interviewed put it this way:

> For me, the whole purpose of neighbourhood partnerships is really just to put money at the local level, so you can make a local decision on it and respond to your local needs and the local people can have a say on it. I know there's a lot of local people, but you know, that's the whole purpose, money talks. *Councillor N*

The dominance of agendas by devolved decision making was seen as both a practical necessity and a consequence of the natural purpose of the Partnerships. Either way there was less space for city wide issues.

The fourth behaviour that limited the potential for the Partnerships to impact upon city wide policy and decision making was the need that councillors felt to champion local service issues. Councillors wanted to be seen working on issues brought to them by the community. This also created a particular relationship with council officers. Councillors felt that it was their job to keep officers focused on issues relevant to residents.

> I think it's quite right that on the group that looks at this, that we have a Councillor, because otherwise Councillors are going to become redundant and I think Councillors do make officers focus attention at times for the community, rather than possibly for carrying out some bit of policy that was determined a long time ago and has no relevance today. *Councillor J*

It was evident both from the interviews and from the observation of Partnership meetings that councillors saw their role as one of siding with the public against the officers and against the 'central bureaucracy' of the Council. This meant that at times the Partnerships were effectively operating as a form of officer scrutiny. The effect of this was that the Partnerships spent their time on technocratic service issues rather than strategic concerns. The antipathy towards officers might also have made city wide influence more difficult simply because councillors were, as a result, less willing to publicly engage with the consultation agendas brought by the officers.

Having outlined the limiting behaviours that were present, it is also worth noting those behaviours that were not evident. Although councillors were clearly not keen on being seen to decide on contentious issues in public, the management of such issues did not seem to be a concern. This is evidenced by the fact that chairing of the Partnerships, and thereby control of the agendas, was not automatically seen as a councillor job. Indeed at least two of the Partnerships were not chaired by councillors.

Having established the behaviours that limited the outcomes from the Partnerships the next stage is to specify the institutional rules that shaped these behaviours.

6.5 Institutional Rules in Evidence

The incompatibility theory suggests that councillor responses will be shaped by institutional rules that reflect the prevailing local governing codes. Specifically it suggests that three rules in particular will be responsible for councillor behaviours toward participatory initiatives; the party unity, representative status and councillor utility rules. Evidence gathering during the

case study sought to validate the existence of these rules, to specify their precise nature 'in-use' and, if possible, to identify any other rules that had not been predicted. Describing the rules as 'in evidence' serves to highlight both that the conclusions are based on a limited data set and the difficulties of establishing the existence of institutional mechanisms that actors themselves may not be aware of.

Through the fieldwork evidence for six rules (B1-B6) was uncovered. Of these rules five related closely to the Representative Status and Councillor Utility rules hypothesised in Chapter Three (the Party Unity rule was not found to be in evidence). All six rules, presented as institutional statements, consistent with the Grammar of Institutions proposed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995), with the behaviour, trigger and logic components clearly distinguished, can be found summarised in Table 22. These institutional statements are the constructions of the author intended to capture each rule more or less precisely. The rules reported are 'in-use' and predominantly informal. Each institutional statement representing a rule consists of three elements; the behaviour associated with the rule including who it applies to, the aspect of the Forums that triggers the behaviour and the logic that shapes it. Each rule has been labelled B to denote that it is from the Bristol case study and numbered. The rest of this section will describe the evidence for these rules and discuss the degree to which the behaviours in question can be explained by rules, in other words institutions underpinned by Or Else motivational logics, or instead by two alternative types of institution namely strategies with rational logics, or by norms with obligatory logics.

Table 22 Institutional rules evidenced from the Bristol case study

RULE	Behaviour	Trigger	Logic
Representative Status (B1)	Councillors should ensure that Neighbourhood Partnerships have a central decision making role for councillors	When Partnerships are operating outside of representative structures	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
Representative Status (B2)	Councillors should make decisions independently of the views of the public	When the public attending meetings do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
Devolved Politics (B3)	Councillors should focus primarily on devolved issues in Neighbourhood Partnerships	When backbench councillors do not have a meaningful role	Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined.
Councillor Utility (B4)	Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in Partnership meetings	When Partnerships are seen as talking shops	Or else the ability to win elections will be undermined
Councillor Utility (B5)	Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in Partnership meetings	When the Partnerships are dominated by professionals at the expense of elected local councillors	Or else the ability to win elections will be undermined
Councillor Utility (B6)	Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in Partnership meetings	When the Partnerships are dominated by professionals at the expense of elected local councillors	Or else the ability to govern competently will be undermined

Representative Status (B1)

> Councillors should ensure that Neighbourhood Partnerships have a central decision making role for councillors when Partnerships are operating outside of representative structures Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined

The first two institutional rules reflected councillors' desire to have a central and consistent role within the Partnerships. In the first instance this was reflected in the process of designing the new Partnerships; a process that culminated in 2007 and included the incorporation of existing community led partnerships and regeneration structures. In the second this was reflected in the way in which some councillors operated within the Partnerships once they were up and running. While the two rules at work here had two distinct triggers they overlapped in a number of ways.

The trigger for the Representative Status rule (B1) had as much to do with the role (or lack of a role) for backbench councillors at the time as with the proposed arrangements for neighbourhood co-governance. There was a perception amongst many councillors that the cabinet style of decision making, introduced by the Local Government Act 2000, had left those councillors outside of the cabinet without any meaningful role. Backbench councillors were clearly frustrated in particular with their inability to get things done and there was the strong view expressed by more than one that scrutiny - the holding to account role intended for back bench councillors - was a waste of time. For example:

> I could probably write reams of paper on my views on how ineffective and useless Scrutiny is, I'm sorry to say, but for these purposes, I think as a party, when we did take the majority of control of the Council, we had very acute in our minds this problem that backbench Councillors, especially opposition

> Councillors, don't really have any power and we wanted to say, how can we give more power to individual ward members and therefore, as a consequence of that, to their local communities? *Councillor M*

The underpinning logic for this institution was undoubtedly to do with governing competence. If the community led partnerships were able to continue without a central role for ward members then this would undermine their leadership role within a given community. At the same time many councillors in areas with no regeneration arrangements perceived that colleagues active in such arrangements were able to achieve a great deal more than they could.

While this institution can be clearly stated as a rule, the need to ensure that councillors were placed at the centre of Partnership structures also reflected parallel norms and strategies. Councillors felt that it was their presence that made the Partnerships democratic. As one councillor survey respondent put it: 'Partnerships in themselves have little democratic accountability - it is the Councillors that sit at the heart of it that give it legitimacy'. However, attitudes to democracy covered a wide spectrum and it was difficult to point to a dominant ideological position in this respect. Responses to the survey suggest that councillors broadly adhered to the belief that the public should be involved in decision making but that councillors should have the final say. As illustrated in Table 23, the three most supported statements are that 'residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives', that 'local politicians should try to generate consensus and shared values among local citizens/groups' and that 'residents should participate actively and directly in making important local decisions'.

Table 23 Bristol councillor opinions about local democracy

People have different ideas about how local democracy should function. Please indicate how important for local democracy you feel the following requirements are:						
Answer Options	**Of utmost importance**	**Of great importance**	**Of moderate importance**	**Of little importance**	**Not important at all**	**Response Count**
Residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives.	15	33	1	0	0	49
Local politicians should try to generate consensus and shared values among local citizens/groups.	13	23	12	0	0	48
Residents should participate actively and directly in making important local decisions	6	31	8	2	0	47
Council decisions should reflect a majority opinion among the residents.	5	14	22	4	1	46
Political representatives should make what they think are the right decisions, independent of the current views of local people.	3	13	17	9	4	46
The results of local elections should be the most important factor in determining council policies	2	20	16	5	3	46
Apart from voting, citizens should not be given the opportunity to influence local government policies	0	11	4	6	22	43
		answered question				**49**

There was also evidence of a rational strategy in this context. The idea here was that placing councillors in a central role would improve the effectiveness of the

Partnerships owing to councillors' knowledge and experience of the Council machine and their ability to engage with the public.

Representative Status (B2)

> Councillors should make decisions independently of the views of the public when the public attending meetings do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined.

As noted earlier, while many of the ward councillors were happy to make decisions *with the public* others were more inclined to see their role as making decisions *in public* and saw the Partnerships as an accountability mechanism rather than a participatory mechanism. This behaviour was triggered by a concern that those attending did not have sufficient democratic legitimacy primarily in terms of their representativeness.

> However, it's the same faces coming to the Forum and the Partnership all the time, and I would love to see more come and have influence so that there is a balanced debate... I love my ward, care about what happens in it but at the end of the day there are divisions between groups, and some are more vocal and get things through while others who may need services or representation more lose out. *survey response*

One councillor mused that the only satisfactory way to overcome this might be to have formally elected community representatives:

> I think, in the partnership and I know it's very sort of middle class, retired architect heavy and very Council block of flat light, the partnership itself and I think that the actual legitimacy of the partnership as a democratic body is questionable at the moment. I think that the only way you ultimately get around that... is to have some kind of formal system of selection or election for members of the partnership. *Councillor M*

As one officer observed:

> That's where the tensions continue to be because, you know, on the one hand really, a lot of politicians want to just be in control of it all and they kind of keep looking around the table saying, well, who are these people, you know and of course, these people are potentially self selected residents... but of course, you know, a lot of members, when things get choppy, will just turn round and say, well, we're the elected members, who are these people? *Officer P*

The numbers attending was also an issue but it was not as prominent as the representativeness of attendees. As can be seen from Table 24, nearly half of the councillors responding to the survey were unconcerned about there being a minimum number attending. This may have reflected the view of some councillors that it was the Neighbourhood Forums rather than the Neighbourhood Partnerships that should have been the main focus for public involvement.

Table 24 Bristol councillor views on Neighbourhood Partnership public attendance levels

What should be the MINIMUM number of members of the public attending a Neighbourhood Partnership before it can be taken seriously? Please select one option.		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
There should be no minimum number	46.0%	23
At least 10 people	6.0%	3
At least 20 people	20.0%	10
At least 30 people	16.0%	8
At least 40 people	2.0%	1
At least 50 people	10.0%	5
What should be the MAXIMUM number of members of the public attending a Neighbourhood Partnership? Please select one		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
A maximum of 30	6.0%	3
A maximum of 50	2.0%	1
A maximum of 70	2.0%	1
A maximum of 100	0.0%	0
No maximum	90.0%	45
	answered question	**50**

In inferring that this institution is a rule the suggestion is that councillors fear a loss of influence if residents, who are seen to lack democratic legitimacy, are allowed to participate meaningfully in decision making. Like the previous rule, however, this behaviour might also be explained by parallel norms and strategies.

Devolved Politics (B3)

> Councillors should focus primarily on devolved issues in Neighbourhood Partnerships when backbench councillors do not have a meaningful role Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined.

The focus upon devolved matters in Neighbourhood Partnership meetings, whether related to decision making or the influencing agenda, had the consequence of limiting time for city wide policy or strategy issues to be considered. Like the Representative Status rule (B1) this reflected many councillors' sense that backbenchers were relatively powerless under the cabinet system. There was little doubt that the devolution agenda was a central rationale for the Neighbourhood Partnerships as far as councillors were concerned.

The institution associated with this behaviour can clearly be stated as a rule. The underpinning motivational logic ties to a distinct power model, led primarily by the Liberal Democrat Leadership but also supported by the other political groups. This model was what might be described in Bulpittian terms as an autonomy model whereby the centre is content to delegate matters of low politics to the periphery leaving it to concentrate on what it sees as matters of greater importance. As one officer described it:

> The Liberal Democrats, in particular, are very keen on the devolution side of this. The Leader, in particular, feels very strongly that as you move into the

> future, that Bristol Council, the City Council, will become a slimmer and slicker and smaller central function, which would potentially then be supported by this raft of neighbourhood partnerships, making all the local decisions, so any decision that could be devolved to a neighbourhood level goes to the neighbourhood partnerships. *Officer P*

The survey also supported this. The vast majority of those asked how they could best make a difference responded 'through the community' (Table 25).

Table 25 Bristol councillor opinions about how councillors can make the biggest difference

Councillors can a make a difference in a number of different ways. In your opinion, how can a Councillor make the biggest difference? Please select one		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Through work in the community that the councillor represents	81.3%	39
Through work to change council wide policies	18.8%	9
Through work that benefits the political party that the councillor is a member of	0.0%	0
answered question		**48**

One councillor summed up the frustration of having little influence like this:

> I was first elected in 2007... I suddenly found that as a backbench Councillor in an opposition group on a hung Council, I had absolutely no say whatsoever and all I could do was plead with the Executive member for whichever area it was or talk to the officers, but on the whole, the sort of tangible outcomes of my work were lacking. I felt like I spent a lot of time banging my head against a brick wall. *Councillor M*

In Bristol this power model also reflected the volatile nature of politics at the centre. It represented an embedding of power in the local strongholds where councillors could be more certain of retaining it. One consequence was a reduced risk that councillors would experience a crisis of representation. Party

group discipline was therefore less of an issue and had much less bearing on the functioning of the Partnerships than might otherwise have been the case. Councillors were also more relaxed about the influence of party politics and political troublemakers compared to Merton for example. As Table 26 illustrates, as many survey respondents agreed with the statement 'neighbourhood Partnerships often provide a platform for political troublemakers' as disagreed; a ratio of 26/25. This compares with a ratio of 16/9 supporting the same statement in the Merton survey (see Table 20).

Table 26 Bristol councillor attitudes to the Neighbourhood Partnerships

How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Neighbourhood Partnerships?					
Answer Options	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**Response Count**
Neighbourhood Partnerships are a useful way for local politicians to engage with the public	21	28	0	2	51
Neighbourhood Partnerships are a democratic mechanism with as much value as any other	8	27	12	2	49
Neighbourhood Partnerships often provide a platform for political troublemakers	4	22	20	5	51
Neighbourhood Partnerships have relatively little democratic value	3	12	21	14	50
Neighbourhood Partnerships unnecessarily duplicate the role of councillors	2	7	29	12	50
Neighbourhood Partnerships are able to solve local problems that councillors cannot	0	14	27	10	51
				answered question	**51**

Devolution of decisions and influence to the Partnerships to a certain extent, therefore, also meant the devolution of politics. As one councillor put it:

> I think on the whole, most members of the group... if they thought that the residents really wanted something different and it was quite clear that there was that conflict between the outcome of a participation initiative and what the group's policy is, they'd probably have no problem in saying, well obviously, the residents have got to win on this. There's no point in being dogmatic or ideological about it, you know, we're here to serve the people of Bristol. *Councillor M*

Furthermore, the relatively low influence of the party group over the behaviour of councillors in this case, certainly compared with the other two cases, was borne out by the survey. As Table 27 illustrates, only 14% indicated they would vote with the party in the event of a conflict.

Table 27 Bristol councillor opinions about voting in the event of a conflict

If there should be a conflict between a member's own opinion, the opinion of the party group in the council or the opinion of the voters, how should, in your opinion, a member of the council vote? Choose one option		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Vote according to his/her own conviction	60.5%	26
Vote according to the opinion of the party group	14.0%	6
Vote according to the opinion of the voters	25.6%	11
	answered question	**43**

There was also evidence that the focus on devolved matters was being shaped by parallel norms and strategies. Interview respondents associated the devolution agenda with a particular 'philosophy' of the Liberal Democrats, for example, and others saw it simply as the most effective way to get things done. Focusing upon devolved issues was seen as an effective strategy for attracting the public into meetings.

Councillor Utility (B4)

> Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in Partnership meetings when Partnerships are seen as talking shops Or Else the ability to win elections will be undermined

Closely linked to the Devolved Politics rule (B3) two institutional rules were evident that resulted in councillors focusing on local service issues at the expense of more strategic or city wide concerns. The first of these rules was triggered by concern that the Partnerships would be seen as 'talking shops' by the public who might subsequently punish councillors at election time if they held them responsible for this.

> The expectations of residents have I believe, been encouraged by Council statements. The levels of funding, however, and the responses of officers have not enabled the partnerships to live up to these expectations and are in danger of being labelled as mere 'talking shops'. (survey response)

It was evident that the Partnerships were regarded by the councillors as 'theatres of representation' (Copus 2004). Being in the electorate's gaze clearly influenced behaviour. One councillor described making decisions in public in the Partnerships like this:

> You've got to back it up somehow from the neighbourhood, 'cause it's all public and they're your residents in the audience, they're your residents on the side with you, they're gonna watch actually how you do it, you've got to be responsible, you know... it's sort of like almost being with your parents, you have to behave. *Councillor N*

The link to electoral performance that frames this institution as a rule was clear. As the same councillor put it, the focus on local issues was appropriate as it was 'what people got worked up about'. One survey

respondent stated that the Partnerships had 'made elections meaningful again'. Another interviewee talked more specifically about how resolving service issues in Partnership meetings could be of help at election time:

> I'm up for re-election next year and the political side of me is already thinking, brilliant, I can put all these things in my leaflets that I've achieved during my term of office that wouldn't probably have happened otherwise, so I think that super local campaigning for political purposes, but also super local issues and things that affect communities, they're much more easily addressed at a local Neighbourhood Partnership level, rather than on a city wide basis by the Council as a whole. *Councillor M*

Evidence from the survey further strengthens the idea that solving community problems and winning elections were connected in the minds of councillors. As Table 28 shows, when asked about what they felt were the most important considerations for the public when voting, the ability to solve problems in the community came out as the most popular choice (21/47 respondents agreeing that this was of utmost importance) and the experience of having a personal complaint dealt with successfully was ranked second highest (18/48 respondents agreeing it was of utmost importance).

Table 28 Bristol councillor perceptions of what the public consider when they vote

Please indicate how important you feel the following considerations are for the public when they vote in local elections:						
Answer Options	**Of utmost importance**	**Of great importance**	**Of moderate importance**	**Of little importance**	**Not important at all**	**Response Count**
The ability of the candidate to solve problems in the community	21	16	10	0	0	47
The experience of having a personal complaint dealt with successfully by the candidate	18	22	5	1	2	48
The extent to which the candidate supports greater public participation in local politics	6	20	17	4	1	48
The extent to which the political party that the candidate represents has a good record of running the council	6	22	16	4	0	48
The extent to which the candidate has an independent opinion regardless of the policy of any party they may belong to	5	13	25	4	1	48
The extent to which the candidate's political party is united	1	19	16	11	1	48
The political party that a candidate belongs to	0	34	11	3	0	48
					answered question	**48**

Not that all councillors were the same in this respect. One observer suggested that there were three approaches by councillors. Some were happy to reap electoral benefits as a by product of work that was done out of a genuine wish to help the community. A second group were seen as more cynically manipulating the Partnerships for electoral gain. A third group did

not engage meaningfully at all and saw the Partnerships as an unwelcome distraction outside of their political practice.

The focus on championing service issues in the Partnerships was further reinforced by the perception amongst councillors that this was the best way to get things done as illustrated by the survey. When asked about the most effective strategies for achieving aims the most supported answers were 'work with the public to get things done' and 'work with the relevant council officers' (Table 29).

Table 29 Bristol councillor opinions about the most effect ways to achieve their aims

Please indicate how effective you feel the following strategies are for councillors when working to achieve their aims:						
Answer Options	**Extremely effective**	**Very effective**	**Moderately effective**	**Slightly effective**	**Not effective at all**	**Response Count**
Work with the public to get support	9	23	13	5	0	50
Work with the relevant council officers	8	26	13	2	0	49
Raise the issue within the councillor's own local party group	6	11	22	9	1	49
Raise the issue with the relevant cabinet member	4	15	22	3	4	48
Present a motion to a council meeting	1	8	21	13	6	49
					answered question	**50**

There was little evidence in this case study that the elected manager as a normative model was underpinning this behaviour although, to a degree, there was evidence that a rational strategy was in play. Councillors felt that while service delivery should be managed by the officers, they were in the best position to make the Partnerships more effective by representing the interests of their constituents to those officers, both from the Council and from other local

public service providers. As one interviewee suggested: 'I think Councillors do make officers focus attention at times for the community, rather than possibly for carrying out some bit of policy that was determined a long time ago and has no relevance today' (Councillor J).

Councillor Utility (B5)

> Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in Partnership meetings when the Partnerships are dominated by professionals at the expense of elected local councillors or else the ability to win elections will be undermined

Another significant aspect of the way in which the Partnerships operated was the relationship between councillors and officers. Councillors often saw their role as championing local service issues in behalf of the public, almost in opposition to the officers. When the decisions of officers were seen as unpopular, either locally or city wide, councillors often challenged this on behalf of the community; at least in the public setting of the Partnerships. In practice Partnerships meetings became a form of officer scrutiny led by councillors. So, while officers were seen as the appropriate people to be managing services and were generally trusted to get things done, councillors saw their own role as representing community interests within those services. Consultation and engagement within the Partnerships was potentially, therefore, a cause of tension between officers and councillors who might align themselves with the public and against the 'central bureaucracy' of the Council. As one observer put it:

> They know that the Council is a bit of a toxic brand, so actually, to be seen as not accepting what the Council says gives them a bit of credit, whereas if they were just kind of trying to champion the Council, you know, it's not a brand that people want to be associated with particularly, fairly or not. *Partner R*

Hence, as with Councillor Utility rule (B4), there was clear electoral logic underpinning this institution.

Councillor Utility (B6)

> Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in Partnership meetings when the Partnerships are dominated by professionals at the expense of elected local councillors Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined.

Evidence from the case study suggested that the previous rule could be understood as one underpinned by governing as well as electoral concerns. Behind this there was a broad anxiety about officers running things locally at the expense of councillors. As one officer suggested:

> Actually, I think the members we have in Bristol feel, in part, that over years, they've felt a bit disenfranchised by officers sometimes would be my view and that they want to rest some of that control into the neighbourhoods, rather than it being part of the big centralised block of officer led work, really. *Officer P*

In the councillor interviews as well there was a strong sense that the focus on service issues in the Neighbourhood Partnerships strengthened the hand of councillors when it came to getting officers to act on their behalf:

> Because they are employed to actually carry out the decisions of the neighbourhood partnership and in the past, it's been, you know, sometimes the ability to be able to say yes and no in the right places, put it in an in-tray, let it gather dust and then you have to keep on and on and on and on to get something done and you know, that's frustrating, whichever party you're in. *Councillor L*

Hence one of the logics at work in this case was the local political élite feeling a need to rebalance the power relationship between officers and councillors in their favour.

The six rules articulated in this section together provide an explanation as to why the Neighbour Partnerships did not fulfil their potential to contribute to city wide policy and decision making. Separating them out as institutional statements is, of course, an exercise in abstraction. In practice they overlap, merge and operate in parallel with a range of related strategies and norms. The behaviours of councillors in this case have been underpinned by a clear power model for the local political élite and a clear sense of how the Neighbourhood Partnerships can generate electoral benefits. This is not to say that councillors have consciously sought to undermine the possibility of the Partnerships influencing city wide agendas. It is better to say, perhaps, that these institutional rules have worked to ensure that more strategic discussions have been displaced.

6.6 Conclusion

Bristol's Neighbourhood Partnerships represent an innovative approach to community co-governance with the potential to foster meaningful public participation in the local policy and decision making process. Cross party support and a significant investment in infrastructure meant that they provided a platform from which much was achieved. However, much of the impact of the Partnerships was at the community level and wider influence was more difficult to evidence. This apparent absence of city wide impact was not a reflection of a conscious strategy but rather the unintended consequence of a number of decisions about how the Partnerships would operate. The

devolution agenda that made the Partnerships possible also served to limit their wider influence. Partly this was because community level issues were considered by councillors as a more legitimate use of Neighbourhood Partnership time and partly because local service issues were prioritised at the expense of wider policy debates. City wide policy and decision making appears to have been squeezed out.

In broad terms, then, this case study supports the credibility of the incompatibility theory stated in Chapter Three. The six institutional rules identified as being in evidence together provide a satisfying explanation of the councillor behaviours that limited the impact of the Neighbourhood Partnerships. The importance of winning elections and governing competence were all recognised by interviewees as significant influences for councillor behaviours in respect of the Neighbourhood Partnerships. However, in both cases, these Or Else motivational logics reflected a concern with the sub local whether this related to winning the next ward election (the electoral system meant that one was always around the corner), or to enhancing the influence of the backbench councillor.

This case also shows how important the power model adopted by the local political élite is for the functioning of participatory initiatives. The institutional rules observed in this case study were borne out of a particular power model which was itself a consequence of particular local conditions. A strong community and voluntary sector along with some highly active regeneration partnerships created a governance environment at the local level that local politicians were keen to engage with. A very close electoral balance between the main parties created an expectation that political control of the council could not be maintained for any period of time. It seems likely,

therefore, that this made a strategy based on holding power at the community level more attractive. Whereas in the Merton case study, the party group maintained a central authority over the majority of decisions, in Bristol an 'autonomy model' operated whereby the political leadership was content to devolve responsibility over 'low political' matters to ward councillors.

While the Or Else logics of winning elections and maintaining governing competence provide the most prominent explanations for the behaviour of councillors in respect of the Neighbourhood partnerships, strategies and norms underpinned by different motivational logics were also evident. The central role for councillors was justified both on practical and normative grounds as their experience and knowledge made the Partnerships more effective and their presence made them more legitimate. Placing councillors formally in the middle of participatory co-governance initiatives, however, was something of a double edged sword. While their presence provided status, legitimacy and a potential link to strategic policy and decision making, the evidence from this case suggests that their involvement may have limited as well as enhanced the value of the outcomes from these initiatives.

There was some support for the idea that behaviours were shaped by ideological concerns such as notions of participatory democracy or the community politics orientation of the Liberal Democrats. However these were minor influences. Overall the evidence from this case study that pragmatic rather than ideological concerns had the bigger influence.

In terms of finding circumstances where the incompatibility theory might not apply, this case points in two directions. First, the influence of central government might be significant. The climate created by the Labour Government's modernisation agenda was important for the development of the

Neighbourhood Partnerships but so were the community engagement requirements attached to regeneration funding as they provided important stimuli for the developments that preceded the Partnerships. There was recognition from interviewees that if public involvement was a legal requirement, such as with the statutory requirement to deal with public petitions happening at the time, then central government could have a big influence. Hence budgetary incentives or legal requirements might provide counter incentives or sanctions able to interfere with the operation of the Or Else logics.

A second source of disruption for the institutional rules observed in this case is that of public pressure. There was a general perception amongst councillors that Bristol was a place with a relatively active citizenry and community sector. One councillor suggested that the reason public engagement initiatives were working well in Bristol was partly to do with political will but also because of 'a reasonably switched on electorate, who expect to be able to have some involvement in the decision making' (Councillor M). In those Partnerships that incorporated existing community organisations the effect of public pressure was most obvious; councillors participated as partners and were less able to impose themselves as 'the boss'. There was also a degree of tension between what the council wanted from the arrangements and what the community groups wanted; particularly in terms of agenda setting and the increase in paperwork. This tension was absent from the Neighbourhood Partnerships newly created by the Council although these new structures also struggled to generate as much public interest. This suggests that public pressure within initiatives may be one way to encourage a more participatory style of behaviour by councillors.

While the Merton case study, explored in the previous chapter was selected as a typical example of a participatory initiative established in the wake of the local government modernisation agenda, the Bristol case was intended to provide a greater test to the theory given the greater embeddedness of the Neighbourhood Partnerships within the council's formal decision making structures than was the case with Merton's Community Forums. The next chapter will analyse a third case study which, like Bristol, examines a co-governance initiative that was very much part of normal politics; this time under the stewardship of a Labour administration. Hull's Ward Forums will be the subject of the third and final case study in the chapter that follows.

7. Local Politics and Hull's Ward Forums

> Ward forums are your opportunity to have a say in what happens in your area and influence decisions. To ask questions of your elected members, councillor officers and other representatives, and to hear their answers.
>
> Hull City Council, 2012 [via www.hullcc.gov.uk accessed 15/1/12]

Hull introduced a system of Area Committees and Ward Forums in 1999 as an enthusiastic response to the local government modernisation reforms of the Labour Government of the time. The overall aim was 'to make council meetings more accessible enabling local people to become more involved in decisions which affect their lives' (Local Government Chronicle 11/8/1999). The Ward Forums were designed to foster public participation by enhancing the role of the ward councillor. With a clear link to the Area Committees they were also an integral part of the Council's governance arrangements. Hull is a particularly interesting case study, not just because of the enthusiasm with which these arrangements were adopted, but because of the longevity of the initiative. In 2013 the Area Committees and Ward Forums were still operating and strongly supported despite the extreme financial pressures that existed at the time.

As with the initiatives discussed in the Merton and Bristol case studies the Ward Forums ultimately had a very limited impact on city wide policy and decision making. The primary purpose of the Area arrangements, of which the Forums formed part, was devolution of responsibility for services to councillors and, while considered an important strand, public involvement was not the central concern. While the Forums certainly had the potential to influence city

wide policy and decision making, albeit informally through the mediation of councillors, it was for service issues at the local level that their influence was felt. Seeking to explain why outcomes from the Forums did not reach further is a central concern of this case study.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to examine the case of Hull's Ward Forums in order to test and refine the theory that participatory initiatives such as these are incompatible with local politics. This theory suggests that councillors will work to ensure that the outcomes from participatory initiatives will always have limited value within the local policy process. These behaviours are not necessarily the result of conscious choices. Indeed, many councillors have acted as enthusiastic champions. Behaviours are instead a consequence of the structure of élite local politics and the formal and informal institutions associated with it. Three institutional rules in particular have been suggested as explanations for the limited impact of participatory initiatives; namely the party unity, representative status and councillor utility rules. Institutional rules are a particular type of institution that provides a causal link between political behaviour and social structure. Uncovering evidence for these rules, and for the Or Else motivational logics that underpin them, is therefore an important aspect of theory testing.

The chapter will proceed in five stages. First a short overview of local politics in Hull will be provided in order to highlight the distinctive characteristics of the local governing codes associated with the political élites. This overview will characterise Hull's local politics as being highly contested with electoral competition between Labour and the Liberal Democrats being a particular feature. Two aspects of the local governing code will also be explored; the fragmented nature of politics and the willingness of councillors to

get involved in day to day service issues to a degree more notable in many other councils. Second the history of the Ward Forums will be discussed in order to identify their defining characteristics and how they have changed over time. This section will consider their pre history, their establishment in 1999, their rise and their subsequent decline. The third section will assess their impact upon the local policy and decision making process and conclude that outcomes, while significant at the local level have had little value city wide.

The fourth section will present evidence of the councillor responses to the Ward Forums and the ways in which outcomes have been limited both in terms of their management and their design. This will be followed by a fifth section that specifies as clear written statements the institutional rules-in-use evidenced from the case study. In total four rules were identified and each is discussed in terms of what triggered it and the extent to which it can be credibly described as an institutional rule with an Or Else motivational logic. Before all this, however, it is important to understand the main characteristics of local politics in Hull.

7.1 Local Politics and Local Governing Codes in Hull

Hull City Council (full title Kingston upon Hull City Council) was established as a unitary authority in 1996. It is a primarily urban authority with a population of approximately 256,000. Since World War II, when the city experienced severe bomb damage, Hull has experienced a decline in traditional industries and in particular the maritime economy upon which the city historically relied. While chemical and health care industries are significant the public sector is particularly important for the economy. Hull experiences high levels of social deprivation and unemployment and this has led to the city

attracting substantial levels of European and UK regeneration funding. Hull has a population that is predominantly white compared with similar urban areas. Hull is also notable for having the lowest levels of church attendance in the UK (accessed from www.hull.gov.uk 23/3/2014).

Local elections in Hull are conducted 'by thirds' on a four year cycle with no elections held every fourth year. Since boundary changes in 2002, a total of 59 councillors are elected from 23 wards. The Council has a Leader and Cabinet model of decision making which was introduced enthusiastically at the time of the Labour Government's local government modernisation programme of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Significantly the Area Committee structure was also introduced at this time. Primarily intended to ensure a meaningful role for back bench councillors it was also a reflection of the area based nature of local politics in the city. The Area Committees and the associated area approach to service delivery were still in place at the time of the fieldwork and remained popular amongst councillors across parties.

At the time of the fieldwork local politics in Hull were highly factional. This was partly the result of a preference for sub local and ward based politics, partly because of inter party competition and partly due to a tension between modernisers and traditionalists in the city. Up until 2002 local politics in Hull was dominated by a traditional local Labour party with strong links to local trade unions. The electoral domination of Labour was reflected in the fact that there were even years when there was no opposition with Labour winning every single Council seat. According to one officer 'they used to say if you put a chair out with red ribbon it would get elected' (Officer Y). When Labour lost control of the Council in 2002 following Liberal Democrat gains, this not only came as a shock to the Labour Group but ushered in a period of instability.

From 2002 to 2007 Liberal Democrat gains meant that no party was in overall control of the Council. By 2007 the Liberal Democrats were able to form a majority administration which they maintained until 2012 when Labour was able to regain control.

Another significant feature of local politics in Hull during this period was the imperative to modernise. Political modernisation had been an important struggle for the Labour group in the years before 2002 with core traditional values still in evidence throughout the period. However, it was the need to modernise the Council as a whole that came to the fore. Hull found itself in the national spotlight in 2002 when a highly critical Audit Report into corporate governance (Audit Commission 2002) coupled with extremely poor corporate performance ratings served to set the agenda for much of this period. Despite the fact that significant improvements were subsequently made, the reputational damage that came with being considered one of the worst Councils in the country inevitably had an impact on political debate and practice.

As described in Chapter Three, the electoral strategies and power models adopted by local political élites as part of their local governing codes can be captured using a limited set of variables (see Table 4, p.68). Drawing on these variables it is possible to say that local political élites in Hull were perhaps more strongly partisan when fighting elections than in other areas and, while following national politics in seeking a catch-all appeal to voters, nevertheless retained strong links between the party and its constituency of voters. This was particularly the case for the Labour Party. Electoral competition has tended to play out most prominently in the city-wide arena. This is no doubt a consequence of the fierce rivalry between the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. One councillor interviewed for the fieldwork described Council

meetings as a 'real slug fest' adding that 'sometimes visitors are quite shocked by them' (Councillor U).

While city wide politics may have been the most visible aspect of electoral competition the sub local nevertheless retains its importance for many councillors. For Labour there has been a tradition of maintaining seats by ensuring that the individual needs of council housing tenants were effectively dealt with. As earlier research reported: 'A tenant participation officer at the council described the influence of what she described as the "housing baron culture", in which if "you control your housing estate then you control your seat"' (Lowndes *et al.* 2006a, p. 554). For the Liberal Democrats the 'community politics' approach is, in any case, a central tenet of their local election strategies.

Overall, local politicians in Hull are less inclined to look towards national issues when campaigning in local elections in comparison with other areas. Indeed, a mistrust of national politics is one of the few things that local politicians in Hull seem to have in common.

In terms of the power models adopted by the City's local political élites there were several defining features. First, there was a strong sense of independence from national politics; an autonomy model rather than one of collaboration or acquiescence was certainly the preference for local politicians. This can in part be traced back the intervention of the National Audit Office in 2002. For some local politicians in Hull, and certainly for two of those interviewed for the fieldwork, the unwelcome spotlight that followed from the 2002 Audit report was as much to do with national Labour Party politics, and in particular disputes between Peter Mandelson, minister responsible for Local Government at the time, and John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister and local MP, as it was to do with Hull's actual performance. While opposition to

unpopular national policies were one of the things that the otherwise warring Labour and Liberal Democrat groups could agree on, the overall impression was that national politics were seen as unhelpful at best.

A second defining feature of the power models adopted in Hull was the approach to services that was a distinct combination of devolution and direct management. The strong commitment to devolved decision making and area based politics was demonstrated though the extent, longevity and political support associated with area working. As will be discussed later on, politicians were very supportive of area working even in the face of challenges from officers about whether these arrangements were efficient. Linked to this was a managerialist and service orientation that was much stronger in Hull than in other areas. Indeed, the Audit report of 2002 noted that: 'Members have a history of being involved in work that should be done by officers' (2002, p. 33). At the time of the fieldwork this was still very much the case perhaps influenced by the fact that a significant minority of councillors were either officers in other councils or had previously been council officers in Hull.

Finally, councillors preferred an autonomous approach to local governance. While relationships with public service agencies varied there was little sense of building alliances with the voluntary sector although this may not have been much of an option. With the exception of one or two larger organisations, the voluntary sector in Hull was not strong compared with similar areas. While tenants and residents groups did play a part, at the community level formal representative politics remained relatively unchallenged.

Having given a brief overview of local politics in Hull and established the main features of the local governing codes it is now time to tell the story of

the Ward Forums themselves. To the knowledge of the author this is the first time that this history has been fully mapped out. The only previous research, conducted by Wilkinson and Craig (2004), that looked at the Ward Forums in any meaningful way, reflected fieldwork that had been conducted in 2002, at the very beginning of the period of greater political uncertainty.

7.2 The Ward Forums 1999-2013

The Ward Forums[4] were introduced as a part of a package of modernisation measures adopted in the late 1990s. As well as the new style leader, cabinet and scrutiny decision making arrangements, the Council introduced seven Area Committees across the city. These committees, intended to provide a meaningful role for ward councillors, reflecting the traditional strength of area based politics in the city. It was as an enhancement of the Area Committees that the Ward Forums were introduced. While intended to be consistent and coherent vehicles for public participation when first created, and seemingly having initial success, by the time of the field work the pattern of Ward Forums across the city had evolved into a disjointed patchwork of different approaches. Some interviewees reported that they had lapsed altogether in some places.

The purpose of this section is to detail the history of the Ward Forums and to explain the trajectory of their development. This will be done in three stages. First the origins of the Ward Forums will be discussed, following which

[4] Sometimes also known as Neighbourhood Forums; the term Ward Forums is used here to refer to both

the early years of the Forums from 1999 to 2002 will be explored and finally the decline in Forum activity from 2002 to the present day will be considered.

7.2.1 The Origins of the Ward Forums prior to 1999

The Ward Forums were introduced as part of a series of radical reforms designed during 1998 as part of what was labelled the Agenda for Change programme. This programme, which also encompassed councillor development, senior management structures and staff engagement, was developed with the help of external management consultants. Decentralisation and a move to area working was a significant part of this agenda. While government policy was the main catalyst, and in particular the need to give back bench councillors a meaningful role, there was already a history of decentralised arrangements in Hull. The Area Committees were in part a development of the decentralised Housing Management service that had existed prior to 1996. There was also the view, expressed by interviewees, that the Committees reflected the factional and community based nature of politics in the city. These reforms were clearly politically led and pushed by councillors rather than officers. One officer recalled a councillor working group at the time acting like a star chamber for the area approach, requiring officers to justify, in person, any arguments against decentralisation for specific services (Officer X).

Public involvement was seen as an important aspect of the Agenda for Change programme and to this end a public engagement strategy was incorporated as a key strand. Significantly, it was agreed to appoint community participation officers for the newly established area committees and to give a central policy team oversight of a community involvement strategy. The report setting out the new model of decision making stated that:

> Each Area Committee... will exist to provide a link between the people for a defined locality and the activities of the Council allowing for the direct feedback from the community and the participation of councillors as community leaders. (Wilkinson and Craig 2004, p. 1)

The Ward Forums were considered to be the main vehicle for public engagement and were the centrepiece of the public engagement strategy.

During 1999 new Area Coordinators were consulting the public about participation strategies for the area committees and setting these up. A willingness to embrace new ways of doing things certainly was in evidence. In a discussion in one of the Area Committees, for example, councillors debated whether the public taking part in the ward forums should be elected. In the end they decided that this would be unnecessary but that those attending should at least be on the electoral register for that particular area [Northern Area Committee 3/2/1999].

From many of those interviewed the Ward Forums could be understood as a rationalisation of ad hoc public engagement that was already happening. As one councillor involved in setting up the Ward Forums described it:

> We'd always had public consultation, but it had been very ad hoc, it had been issue based, you know, if there was a housing issue or something, you'd arrange a public meeting to consult on it and whoever turned up, turned up. What I wanted to see really was something that was more stable and regular, if you like, so that rather than calling a meeting because an issue had come up, there'd be a structure of meetings that you could feed issues into. *Councillor U*

As well as the desire to improve decision making and to implement government policy it is possible that other political motives may have been behind the introduction of the Ward Forums. One view from the interviews

was that the Ward Forums were there to provide additional legitimacy for the Area Committees:

> Well, my perception at the time was, as we moved into having the Cabinet structure, the role of backbenchers was very much diminished... The area committees were then a power base and to some extent, I think the ward forums were almost kind of like, almost like a knee jerk reaction to, if that's my power base, I've got to have something that sits below it. *Officer Y*

Another interpretation was that the Forums were introduced by the Labour Leadership at the time in order to 'modernise' their own backbenchers. While the changes are now regarded as uncontroversial at the time there was resistance. As one councillor recalled:

> Well, I think, as I say, when the plan was first proposed, back in the 90s, there was a huge debate, a lot of anger from important Councillors about why are we changing, you know, if it's not broke, don't fix it. Well, it was broke, to some extent, they just wouldn't admit it, so there was a lot of antagonism. *Councillor U*

One further perspective was that the Ward Forums were introduced to placate a national Labour Party leadership by a local party that was otherwise regarded as rebellious; showing that they could 'tow the party line' when they were being defiant on other issues (Councillor S).

The climate of thinking differently associated with local government modernisation set the context for the introduction of the Ward Forums. However, their introduction also reflected existing practices and the form that they took was as much a consequence of the local political climate as it was a consequence of national agendas. Hull's local politics continued to be important as the Ward Forums developed.

7.2.2 The Early Years of the Forums 1999-2002

Whatever the motives for their introduction, the Ward Forums, initially at least, were popular. Indeed, the whole move to area committees and area working was considered to be a success. As the Leader of the Council reported as part of evidence offered to a Parliamentary Select Committee in 1999: 'Although the political structure is still in its early stages public attendance levels and participation in the discussion sessions have been encouraging. The variety of questions and concerns raised at these meetings has also been significant' (Public Administration Select Committee 2000). Similarly, in the same year, the Local Government Chronicle reported that a team from the Improvement and Development Agency, undertaking a one week in depth study, had praised the way in which Hull was embracing modernisation and particularly the 'level of input from local people at the newly established ward forums' (Local Government Chronicle 20/7/1999). The new approach was something that the Council was clearly happy to share nationally. Later that year the Local Government Chronicle further reported on the changes revealing that 'citizens are being spurred on to voice their views on vital issues affecting their everyday lives' and that:

> The aim of the changes was to make council meetings more accessible enabling local people to become more involved in decisions which affect their lives. At the new ward forums and area committees citizens have, for the first time, the opportunity to question committee members directly. *Local Government Chronicle 11/8/99*

The success of the Forums is corroborated by contemporary research. Reflecting on fieldwork that took place in 2002, Wilkinson and Craig concluded that:

> In terms of increasing participative democracy Local Area Committees and Ward/Neighbourhood Forums have proved hugely successful. Large numbers of people have attended them and many of those have connected with local democracy for the first time.... The overwhelming view of local stakeholders was that, albeit with the occasional slow starter, ward and neighbourhood fora had made a positive and welcome contribution to local democracy, bringing elected members and council officers out to the people. (Wilkinson and Craig 2004, p. 1)

One conscious feature of the Ward Forums, and all of the community engagement activities surrounding the Area Committees, was the ability to determine arrangements locally. So, for example, while in some areas venues and times were fixed, in other areas meetings were moved around with the hope that this would attract greater public involvement (Wilkinson and Craig 2004). Similarly marketing arrangements could be very different depending on the area of the city.

One particular strength of the community engagement arrangements observed by Wilkinson and Craig was the willingness of the Council to follow up on consultation and engagement with report backs to residents through newsletters some of which were 'exceptional in quality' (2004, p. 7). Officers felt that these newsletters were having a positive effect on turnout and both residents and community groups praised this aspect of community engagement.

However, even at the time of their introduction it appears that the way in which the Forums operated in practice was uneven to say the least. As one officer, around at the time, suggested:

> Some areas didn't have them very much even at the beginning, so in some parts of the East of the city, there were other mechanisms, so they're like the residents

> associations, so there are some strong residents associations or there's at least one strong residents association now left in the East of the city, which picks up a lot of issues, but there hasn't for some time been a ward forum in that area. I think it is quite different in different parts of the city and it's the local dynamics. *Officer Y*

Nevertheless, the high levels of public engagement in these early years were certainly having an influence on local decision making in some areas. As one councillor recalled:

> Before the ward forum, a leaflet would go out, giving the contact details of the Councillors, the issues that were going to be discussed and inviting them to the meeting and sometimes we had, you know, quite big meetings and decisions were made because of that, decisions were made in that meeting. *Councillor W*

One important aspect of the area working arrangements was the ability for councillors to pay for local improvements through a community initiatives budget and this in turn helped to underpin the credibility of the Forums. One councillor who was actively involved in the establishment of these arrangements, highlighted how delegation of funding, and in particular the amount that was delegated, was important in terms of the success of area working more generally:

> I've talked in the past to Councillors in the Yorkshire area, Leeds springs to mind, I remember having a conversation once and a Councillor said, oh yeah, we do that, we have area committees. I said, oh, how much do you get to spend? Oh, well, we've got about £2,000 a year for the area. I said, oh, that's interesting, we've got about half a million. *Councillor U*

One aspect of the Forums that was not so successful, at least in the early years, was that of linking up with the agendas of other public bodies in particular the police. Around the same time as the Forums were being

introduced the police had become interested in involving the public in setting local priorities for community safety through a set of meetings, separate to the Forums, called Community Safety Action Partnerships. These meetings, less well attended than the Forums, were shunned by many of the local councillors. At the same time, while the Forums were intended to consider a wide range of issues, the input from police and other officers was perceived to be more of an opportunity for scrutiny than a means for the public to influence priorities. As one interviewee recalled, the community safety part of the agenda felt like a 'bolt on' where public officials could be summoned to answer to the councillors:

> My perception is that back then, the Police and I dare say other sort of Government Council officers were just whipping boys for elected members basically and I had the experience of just sort of going there and being ambushed and kind of beaten up over issues really, that's my experience. *Partner Z*

Over time, the relationships between local councillors and other public services such as the police have become more constructive. At the same time the way that the Forums have operated has become more varied. Indeed, diversification, along with a decline in public interest, was to define the story of the Forums over the following 10 years.

7.2.3 Declining interest and diversification 2002-13

Despite the enthusiasm surrounding their introduction, over time the Ward Forums have become a less significant aspect of the Council's governance arrangements. By the time of the fieldwork in 2012 there was a significant decline in public and councillor interest across many areas of the city. While pockets of successful practice still existed, overall the story is one of decline. Central to this was a diversification in how the Forums were designed and

managed across different parts of the City. The effect of this variation, which had been consciously embraced at their inception, was to create an uncoordinated patchwork quilt of practice.

Levels of public attendance at Forum meetings had been an issue throughout this later period with the variable level of public involvement across the city being identified as an issue by scrutiny councillors (Hull City Council 2005, p. 16). This is not to say that declining numbers affected all parts of the city or that poorly attended Forums did not see the occasional influx of higher numbers. All of the councillors interviewed were able to provide examples of issues such as wheelie bins or housing stock transfer that generated significant public interest for particular meetings. Overall, however, the trend was one of declining interest.

The picture of decline and diversification presented here is based largely upon the evidence gathered through the interviews and the survey. It should be noted that, while this represents a consensus view, there was no central set of statistics to provide more comprehensive evidence. Significantly, perhaps, none of those interviewed were able to provide an overview of how the Forums were operating across the city. As one senior officer reflected, for example; 'I think some areas have maintained them more than others, but I don't know the exact pattern across the city... I think it is quite different in different parts of the city and it's the local dynamics' (Officer Y).

Significantly, the decision to allow councillors to determine the arrangements for Forums in their wards led over time to variety of approaches. Evidence from the interviews and the survey highlighted at least four approaches that councillors had taken; discontinuation, 'going through the

motions', super councillor surgeries and ward conferences. Each will be briefly described.

Two of the councillors interviewed reported that Ward Forum meetings had lapsed altogether in their areas although this did not appear to be widespread. Indeed, some of those interviewed were unaware that this was happening at all. As one councillor put it: 'Well, I think perhaps the official ward forums have certainly, I don't know about the other wards, but in my ward, they've stopped' (Councillor W). Another said: 'It is widely known we haven't done one in my ward for more years than we can shake a stick at and nobody is particularly fussed about it, which I think tells you an awful lot' (Councillor S). The discontinuation of the Forums in these areas had a lot to do with the councillors seeing them as unnecessary, either because residents meetings fulfilled a similar function or because holding ad hoc meetings as sensitive issues came up seemed a better approach. As an interviewee working for a partner agency observed:

> Ward forums, again, it depends, it varies from ward to ward and it varies in terms of Councillors, some are really wedded to them and have them quite frequently and you know, a number of them around the same ward and some just have more or less stopped doing them, you know. *Partner Z*

For those councillors who did not choose to discontinue Forums in their area a number of different approaches could be taken. One route was to 'go through the motions'. Meetings were organised, councillors attended but mainly from a sense of duty, a feeling that they were expected to happen but without any sense that there would be benefits beyond listening to the 'usual suspects'. In these circumstances meetings became less regular and something of an annoyance. As one councillor put it: 'When they first kicked off, they

were very popular to start with, but of course, as the years have gone on, they're now becoming sort of an irrelevance really, to be quite honest' (Councillor T).

A third approach to the Forums was to focus on their potential to solve individual complaints, to use them as 'super councillor surgeries' rather than co-governance initiatives. In some areas the Ward Forums have been replaced by a bus which, on a given day, takes the local councillors, along with local service providers around the ward, stopping off to deal with any issues that residents want to raise. This 'ward bus' is of course a long way removed from the Ward Forums as originally conceived. Similarly, there has been a change in some areas in the way in which officer support has been used. At first each had community participation officers who were tasked with improving community involvement. Over time this role has evolved into one of area coordinator whose purpose is much more to do with working on behalf of the local councillors to resolve local service issues and to 'get things done' in the wards.

While some areas have drifted away from the original purpose of Ward Forums, others have sought to develop and invigorate them. The idea of 'ward conferences' involving a wide range of partners was being enthusiastically advocated by one of the councillors interviewed during the fieldwork. The idea was to replace both the Ward Forums and the separate community safety meetings with two, less frequent but better attended events a year:

> So the conference is, it's aimed at people working together, to say these are the problems, what are your priorities, that sort of thing, giving them some information that says, this is the crime stats in the area, or whatever and also trying to say, this isn't just about your case work, this is about what you want for the area in general. *Councillor V*

This is an approach that has public participation at its heart and a focus much wider than solving complaints and narrow service problems. From the interviews, however, this appeared to be the exception rather than the rule. The general pattern was a mix of discontinuation and weariness along with a focus on individual complaints and service issues.

Apart from diversification what might account for the decline in both public and councillor interest? Certainly fatigue and possibly a diminishing pool of problems to deal with might be factors:

> So, we've got four neighbourhood fora and when we first started, we met in each of them every three months, so it was quite a hectic schedule and we kept that up for a good 10 years, so you can imagine, four meetings every three months, that's 16 meetings a year, which, I mean, apart from the fact it was quite an administrative burden for the area team... I think, to be frank, issues have gone away. A lot of the very local micro issues that we've managed to address, partly because we've got money to address them, have been dealt with. *Councillor U*

Another problem faced by the Forums that had a wearing effect was the attitude of corporate management and departmental hierarchies. An unwillingness to feed the Forums with substantial or strategic issues and an unwillingness to get involved in meetings made the task of the Forums harder. As one officer put it:

> I think my view of areas and it's the area management as well as the area committees, is that they have never been entirely accepted by more centralised departments and more centralising tendencies, so that we do feel that we're having a constant battle between, well, to justify the area's interest and validity in its interest about particular issues. *Officer AB*

One further explanation for the decline of the Forums might simply be that their original raison d'être may have no longer applied. If the main reason for the introduction of the Forums was to provide added legitimacy for the Area Committees then, by the time of the fieldwork, this added legitimacy was no longer required. The Area Committees were a firmly established aspect of the Council's governance structures and strongly supported by the majority of councillors.

Throughout the 13 year history presented here the experience of the Ward Forums suggests a series of contrasts. First, there was a contrast between the enthusiasm and high activity levels of the early days and the weariness and diminishing engagement of the later years. Second, there was a contrast between the support forthcoming from local councillors and the apparent ambivalence of the centre. Finally, there was a contrast between the development of ward conferences in some areas and the complete discontinuation of the Forums in others. While this has been a story of decline no single cause seems to suggest itself. Rather, it seems, like the air leaking from a tyre with a slow puncture, the Ward Forums have faded quietly without anyone noticing.

Having set out the story of the Ward Forums it is now time to consider the extent to which their outcomes had value within the local policy process. It will not come as a major surprise to find that outcomes had a low value. Exactly how low will be the subject of the next section.

7.3 Impact on the Local Policy Process

One of the central claims of the 'incompatibility conjecture' is that outcomes from participatory initiatives such as the Ward Forums have little or

no value within the local policy and decision making process. This description of value reflects a scale developed for the research that can be found at ***APPENDIX C***. In essence distinctions are made between local and strategic outcomes and between influential and decisive outcomes. High value outcomes will be both strategic and decisive whereas outcomes that are local and influential will be found at the lower end of the scale. Strategically influential and locally decisive outcomes will be found somewhere in between. The outcomes from the Ward Forums were, at best of low to medium value.

If judgements about impact on the policy process are to be meaningful then it is important to establish that the Forums were intended to influence city wide policy making and were capable of doing so. Certainly, from the fieldwork it was clear that the original intention was for the Forums to have a wider strategic influence. The Agenda for Change report, which set the foundations for area working, placed particular emphasis on the linkage between the Area Committees and the Ward Forums and pointed to a number of potential benefits flowing from this including discussion of policy proposals and 'direct feedback from the community' (Wilkinson and Craig 2004, p. 1). One officer recalled that in the early days minutes or notes from the Forums were reported to the Area Committees although that practice had since fallen by the wayside: 'I don't think there was ever a decision that they shouldn't come, but they just stopped coming' (Officer AB). While unused this reporting route nevertheless remained available. A second practice intended to link the Area Committees formally with central policy and decision making was that of giving individual Cabinet Members the responsibility of sitting on a particular Area Committee. Again, although this stopped happening after a couple of years this route remained more or less available as many Cabinet Members were naturally members of the Area Committees. Taking into account also the

powers of Area Committees to refer matters to council, cabinet or scrutiny meetings there were, in theory at least, formal mechanisms available that could link the Forums to city wide policy and decision making.

In reality, however, the more likely route of influence for the Ward Forums was informally through the mediation of the councillors. Whether or not a formal reporting structure existed, the central role for councillors in the Forums meant that they were well placed to link the outcomes from Forum meetings into city wide policy and decision making should they choose to. Even the formal mechanisms available, such as the referrals from Area Committees to council and cabinet meetings, were not, it seems, encouraged, and required some experience and softer skills on the part of councillors to use. One councillor described this system thus:

> You'd have to know how to use it. I mean, to be fair, the brighter, more experienced Councillors know how to use it better than some of the newer, not so bright ones, but you know, that's life, isn't it? *Councillor U*

Councillors could bridge between the Forums and wider policy and decision making but only if their skills and the prevailing local culture was right. As an officer noted:

> So, whilst we have the fundamental structures the same, what they do, how influential they are and how busy they are depends very much on the members of the committee and how they want to operate. *Officer AB*

Given the right circumstances, then, councillors could provide effective advocacy for the outcomes from the Forums.

The evidence gathered for this case study, however, suggests that, at the time of the fieldwork, the outcomes from the Forums were of low to medium

value at best. There was no coordinated input from the Forums into city wide policy and decision making. Nor was there any consistent link between the issues discussed at Ward Forums and those considered at Area Committees. As one officer explained:

> What they haven't used the ward forums for, which they could do if they wanted, but they tend not to theme them, they don't use the ward forums as a mechanism to obtain public views on a policy initiative... they wouldn't go along with the Council's budget to those forums and say, you know, come and talk to us about this, they wouldn't use it for that mechanism at all, it's for very much ward based issues. *Officer AB*

There were some exceptions. When individual issues of public concern raised interest and involvement in Forum meetings, councillors could then use the Area Committees as a means of addressing these issues. For example, as one officer described:

> From my way of thinking, ward forums and area committees, the only time for me that they're linked is if there is a big issue. One, for example, is we've just had a traffic regulation order on a huge area on Bridlington Avenue, Fountain Road area and up near Endeavour School, off Beverley Road. ...So, this was discussed at a ward forum and because of the actual kind of public outcry and the demand for this, this was ultimately linked to the area committee. *Officer AA*

If formal mechanisms were being used infrequently then it seems that informal channels were not being utilised much either. Of the councillors interviewed none suggested that outcomes were being transmitted informally into city wide policy and decision making. Given that only four of the 32 councillors responding to the survey (Table 30) agreed that the Forums should be able to make recommendations about area-wide policies and decisions it is

clear that, by the time of the field work at least, that they were regarded by councillors as an mechanism of limited influence at best.

Table 30 Hull councillor opinions about the main role of the Ward Forums

In your opinion what should be the main role of the Ward and Neighbourhood Forums? Select just one		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Deal directly with local complaints and service problems	28.1%	9
Make recommendations about area-wide policies and decisions	12.5%	4
Help the Council to listen to the opinions and concerns of residents	46.9%	15
Other? (Please specify)	12.5%	4
	answered question	**32**

While the outcomes from the Forums were certainly not strategically decisive they were undoubtedly locally informing. The delegated powers that councillors had, particularly in terms of spending decisions, gave them an ability to deal with local issues that they could take with them into Forum meetings. The councillors interviewed were able to give many examples of low level issues being dealt with. In addition the role of the community coordinators, operating in some wards, to help the councillors respond to issues raised in the Forums shows that concrete mechanisms were in place to respond to outcomes.

From an officer perspective there was also a strong sense that the Forums had made a difference at the local level even if it was difficult to pin this down in any structured way. As one suggested:

> I think it's very difficult to track through and say exactly how all of those local initiatives influence decision making, but in terms of the officer core and kind

> of drawing things out of community, what the community is saying, I think they do have an influence in terms of developing local strategies, local interventions and I think they have, that understanding is much better than it was... I think responsiveness to those local issues has definitely improved. *Officer Y*

Nevertheless, outcomes were informing rather than decisive. Courses of action were determined by the councillors in the meetings rather than by the meetings themselves. There was no sense that the councillors were obliged to do anything with these outcomes other than 'take them on board'. Even the aspiration to use the Forums as a listening mechanism at the area level had only limited success. In 2005 a scrutiny inquiry into the area arrangements heard evidence that approximately half of the Council's service areas 'do not use area forums as a means to consult with communities, instead they develop and use their own one-off system' (Hull City Council 2005, p. 11).

Finally, one councillor interviewed explained how the Forums could be difficult meetings precisely because they only dealt with the consequences of city wide decision making and did not contribute to the decision making itself:

> They're difficult meetings if you're closing junior schools or closing a library... and it's not actually your decision, 'cause the decision has already been made in group or Cabinet or Council. Then, you know what it's like, there's always this time lag, the decision is made, then it's implemented, then you get the complaints from the residents, but actually, the decision was made months ago... then you get the complaints, but it's too late then, 'cause you can't go back, the decision's done, so the people are not involved at the decision making. *Councillor W*

In conclusion, while the Forums had the potential for more strategic influence, particularly through the mediation of councillors, they could be most

accurately characterised as a community focused participation initiative. The outcomes from the Forums were locally informing and, given the right issues and the sufficient amount of public pressure they could be locally decisive. But what were the councillor behaviours that limited the value of these outcomes and prevented the Forums from having a wider strategic impact? That will be the focus of the next section.

7.4 Councillor Behaviours

Overall councillors were supportive of the Ward Forums and all of those interviewed thought them to be a good idea. While the operation of Forums varied the general principle was not in doubt; even those councillors who did not have them were happy to defend the right of other councillors to run them. However, despite this support, outcomes from the Forums had only low to medium value within the local policy and decision making process. The question that follows is what was it that the councillors did to limit the value of these outcomes? The purpose of this section, therefore, is to identify those behaviours, evident at both the design stage and during the day to day management of the Forums, which served to limit their impact.

Four limiting behaviours were in evidence. First, a non participatory style of decision making adopted by some councillors in respect of the Forums worked to ensure that public influence was limited. Second, a focus by councillors upon 'area' matters, reinforced by local agenda setting, meant that the capacity to deal with strategic concerns was limited. Third, the perceived need to solve local service issues and complaints served to sideline and displace more strategic concerns. Finally, allowing councillors to determine the format of individual Ward Forums according to local circumstances made it difficult to

establish coherent city wide participation structures. Each of these behaviours will be considered in more detail below.

For the majority of councillors, certainly for the bigger issues, it was their responsibility to make decisions rather than the Forum meetings that they were attending. As one councillor explained:

> We can take your views, we can listen to them, but all you're doing is telling us... so there's decisions that you can make with three Councillors sat there, with the officers, where somebody says, I want yellow lines, well, we can discuss that, but bigger issues, you're basically just telling the Councillors what your point of view is and they go off and do what they want with them. *Councillor W*

This biased mediation has been observed in research elsewhere (for example Karlsson 2012) and refers to the practice of only acting on those outcomes that are consistent with the councillor's own view or that of the councillor's party. There was little sense from the fieldwork that councillors were championing outcomes from the Ward Forums in Area Committee meetings or elsewhere. This went a long way to ensure that the impact of the Forums was limited.

The second limiting behaviour was a focus upon area matters so that city wide issues were excluded or displaced. In Hull there was a very clear demarcation between issues that were the responsibility of the Areas and issues that were the responsibility of the centre. Issues considered to be the property of the Centre were not generally discussed in Ward Forums. Chairs setting agendas for the Forums saw their responsibility as being to the Area rather than to the Centre. At the same time the centre had very little ability to influence the agendas of Ward Forums.

Third, as noted previously, in Hull there was a particularly strong culture of councillors getting involved in day to day service issues. Unsurprisingly this permeated the operation of the Forums to the exclusion of more general policy and decision making issues. One officer described the way that Ward Forum's operated in this way; 'It's basically a glorified surgery really, so residents will come along with issues that they want the members to respond to' (Officer AB). In other words the Forums were simply being used to deal with individual complaints albeit in a public setting. This focus on service problems was another cause of displacement for city wide policy issues.

The final limiting behaviour was the policy of allowing each Area Committee to locally determine arrangements for Ward Forums. Without corporate oversight the system of formally linking Ward Forums to Area Committees through minutes quickly fell by the wayside and the roles of the Forums and Committees were kept distinct. While in some areas Forum meetings were supported and promoted vigourously by local councillors in others they became a tick box exercise or fell out of use all together. Without a consistent approach or structure the possibility of conducting meaningful city wide consultation was limited.

For a leading councillor at the time, however, the approach was justified:

> I was hoping to let a hundred flowers bloom – diversity. One of the criticisms from the CGI report was that the Area Committees were developing at different rates and they were doing different things and I thought, well, that was exactly what we wanted them to do! Leader of opposition, 2002 (cited by Wilkinson and Craig 2004, p. 4)

Indeed Wilkinson and Craig's study found overwhelming support for this approach and, by the time of the fieldwork, there was no suggestion that this

had changed; the consensus was that different areas needed different approaches to public participation.

The decision to delegate responsibility for participatory arrangements was nevertheless treated with some concern by the Audit Commission who noted in 2002 that 'there is too great a variation in the type of activity. Committees have taken different approaches to engaging directly with the public with different degrees of success' (Audit Commission 2002, p. 25).

Having established the four behaviours that limited the outcomes from the Forums the next stage is to specify the institutional rules that shaped these behaviours.

7.5 Institutional Rules in Evidence

The theory of incompatibility suggests that councillor responses will be shaped by institutional rules that form part of the councillors' local governing code. It is these rules that explain the limited impact that initiatives have within the local policy and decision making process. Specifically the theory suggests that three rules will be responsible for councillor behaviours toward participatory initiatives; the party unity, representative status and councillor utility rules. Evidence gathering during the case study sought to validate the existence of these rules, to specify their precise nature 'in-use' and, if possible, to identify any other rules that had not been predicted. Describing the rules as 'in evidence' serves to highlight both that the conclusions are based on a limited data set and the difficulties of establishing the existence of institutional mechanisms that actors themselves may not be aware of. The findings that follow, therefore, represent the results of observation, inference and reality checking as part of the fieldwork process.

Through the fieldwork evidence of four rules (H1-H4) was uncovered. Of these rules two related closely to the Representative Status and Councillor Utility rules hypothesised in Chapter Three (the Party Unity rule was not found to be in evidence). The four rules, presented as institutional statements consistent with the Grammar of Institutions proposed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995), can be found summarised in Table 31. These institutional statements are the constructions of the author intended to capture each rule more or less precisely. The rules reported are 'in-use' and predominantly informal. Each institutional statement representing a rule consists of three elements; the behaviour associated with the rule including who it applies to, the aspect of the Forums that triggers the behaviour and the logic that shapes it. Each rule has been labelled with H to denote that it is from the Hull case study and numbered.

The rest of this section will describe the evidence for these rules and discuss to what degree the behaviours in question can indeed be explained by rules underpinned by Or Else motivational logics or instead (or as well as) by strategies with rational logics or by norms with obligatory logics. As alternative explanations for councillor behaviour that are neither punitive nor necessarily associated with the local political élite, strategies and norms provide an important test to the theory of incompatibility.

Table 31 Institutional rules in evidence in the Hull case study

RULE	Behaviour	Trigger	Logic
Representative Status (H1)	Councillors should make decisions independently of the views of the public.	When the public attending meetings do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy	Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
Devolved Politics (H2)	Councillors should focus primarily on neighbourhood issues in Ward Forums	When the Forums threaten to give more power to the centre	Or Else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined
Devolved Participation (H3)	Councillors should determine the format of Ward Forums according to local circumstances	When the Forums threaten to give more power to the centre	Or Else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined
Councillor Utility (H4)	Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in Ward Forums	When Forums are seen as talking shops	Or Else the ability to win elections will be undermined

Representative Status (H1)

> Councillors should make decisions independently of the views of the public when the public attending meetings do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined

This first proposed institutional rule relates to the mediation role that councillors had in respect of the outcomes from the Ward Forums. For outcomes from the Forums to be translated into city wide policy and decision making they had to be passed on by councillors to the Area Committees who could then refer specific issues onto council, cabinet or scrutiny. From the interviews it was clear that, on the whole, councillors did not see this as part of their role and treated the Forums as a general sounding board rather than a mechanism for informing policy and decision making. The largest group of the

councillors responding to the survey considered the main role of the Forums to be to 'help the Council to listen to the opinions and concerns of residents' rather than to 'make recommendations about area-wide policies and decisions' (Table 30). Perhaps more significantly, when asked about how they would vote when faced with a conflict between party, public and personal opinion (Table 32) only two out of those responding indicated that they would vote with the public.

Table 32 Hull councillor opinions about voting in the event of a conflict

If there should be a conflict between a member's own opinion, the opinion of the party group in the council or the opinion of the voters, how should, in your opinion, a member of the council vote? Choose one option		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Vote according to his/her own conviction	48.3%	11
Vote according to the opinion of the party group	43.5%	10
Vote according to the opinion of the voters	8.7%	2
	answered question	**23**

The trigger for this behaviour was the perceived lack of democratic legitimacy of the Forums. This was linked to the low numbers attending and their perceived domination by the same people. Several of those interviewed referred in particular to the meetings being the preserve of the 'usual suspects'; small groups of usually male, white and middle aged residents. As one councillor put it:

> In principle, there was a very good idea on the conception of them, but unfortunately... but it is the usual suspects and you will hear most of the Councillors tell you that. We all have our little clique of people that will come and attack you on a regular basis or come and agree with you on a regular basis, it's those usual suspects, you know. *Councillor T*

In inferring that this institution is a rule the suggestion is that some councillors fear a loss of influence if residents who are seen to lack democratic legitimacy are allowed to participate meaningfully in decision making. It is a concern over loss of power that motivates this behaviour. Certainly this was credible for those interviewed albeit that all councillors were not affected in the same way. As one officer put it:

> I think some would have the view that they are the elected representative of that community and therefore, they are in power to make a wide range of decisions on that basis of the election, they've been elected by the community, therefore they can have a lot of latitude in making decisions. Others, I think, would perhaps be more comfortable with having more regular dialogue with the locals in terms of making a decision. I think there's a mixture of that across the Council and that's important because it frames the way people view different groups. *Officer X*

While 'the latitude to make decisions' was undoubtedly a motive underpinning this behaviour, equally prominent were institutions reflecting both rational, practical issues and the strong normative concerns of councillors. Making decisions independently could be understood as a consequence of a rational strategy; that behaving in this way would ensure more effective participation in policy and decision making. Central to this is the idea that any council wide arrangement of Ward Forums would favour the articulate and those with time on their hands. For engagement to be effective councillors needed to be at the heart of the system speaking for the silent majority or for the unconfident. As one councillor reflected:

> ...it can be the person who shouts loudest gets what they want rather than, so the role of the Councillor, if you like, is mitigating the, you know, making sure everything's even, so even if somebody can't shout loudly, they still get what they want. *Councillor V*

There did not appear, however, any great desire to increase the representativeness of the Forums or the numbers attending. Indeed, as can be seen from the survey (Table 33), over half agreed that there should not be a minimum number attending.

Table 33 Hull councillor views on Ward Forum public attendance levels

What should be the MINIMUM number of members of the public attending a Ward or Neighbourhood Forum before it can be taken seriously? Please select one option below.		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
There should be no minimum number	54.8%	17
At least 10 people	12.9%	4
At least 20 people	16.1%	5
At least 30 people	9.7%	3
At least 40 people	0%	0
At least 50 people	6.5%	2
What should be the MAXIMUM number of members of the public attending a Ward or Neighbourhood Forum? Please select one		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
A maximum of 30	3.2%	1
A maximum of 50	0%	0
A maximum of 70	0%	0
A maximum of 100	6.5%	2
No maximum	90.3%	28
	answered question	**31**

The suggestion here is that numbers mattered less because councillors were not thinking about the Forums primarily as mechanisms for public participation.

Perhaps the most prominent institutions in this context were the strong norms about how councillors ought to act; specifically in relation to the Burkean concept of the representative as a trustee. This came through from the interviews in particular:

> [The councillors] see themselves as the expert in drawing on what people tell them in terms of casework, etc, they don't actually see a valid role for that day

> in day out participation. I think there is a sense for a lot of the members where they would not see a challenge that came to them in that way as being at all legitimate. *Officer Y*

> The reality is I decide what I think is the best thing as much as I can, having listened to what people have to say. If I don't agree with them, I'll tell them I don't agree with them and point out that there's 10 of them in the meeting and I represent 13,000 people. That's the bottom line for me. *Councillor S*

The responses to the survey question about 'the most important requirements for local democracy' (Table 34) broadly support the prevalence of this view with 'residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives' being the most popular statement out of the seven provided. However, the fact that the third most popular statement was 'residents should participate actively and directly in making important local decisions' suggests that the trustee role was far from all encompassing.

Table 34 Hull councillor opinions about local democracy

People have different ideas about how local democracy should function. Please indicate how important for local democracy you feel the following requirements are:						
Answer Options	**Of utmost importance**	**Of great importance**	**Of moderate importance**	**Of little importance**	**Not important at all**	**Response Count**
Residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives.	7	15	4	0	0	26
Local politicians should try to generate consensus and shared values among local citizens/groups.	7	11	7	0	0	25
Residents should participate actively and directly in making important local decisions	3	12	8	2	1	26
Political representatives should make what they think are the right decisions, independent of the current views of local people.	3	7	7	5	2	24
The results of local elections should be the most important factor in determining council policies	3	9	5	4	2	23
Council decisions should reflect a majority opinion among the residents.	2	11	8	3	1	25
Apart from voting, citizens should not be given the opportunity to influence local government policies	1	1	5	4	10	21
answered question						**26**

When it came to the democratic legitimacy of the Forums the survey suggests that councillors were broadly split when it came to whether or not they had democratic value (Table 35) although the statement that ' the forums

are a useful way for local politicians to engage with the public' was supported by most.

Table 35 Hull councillor attitudes toward the Ward Forums

How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Ward and Neighbourhood Forums?					
Answer Options	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**Response Count**
The Forums have relatively little democratic value	6	10	14	1	31
The Forums are a useful way for local politicians to engage with the public	5	12	6	1	24
The Forums often provide a platform for political troublemakers	5	11	14	1	31
The Forums are a democratic mechanism with as much value as any other	4	14	11	1	30
The Forums are able to solve local problems better than councillors acting alone	2	5	21	2	30
The Forums unnecessarily duplicate the role of councillors	1	7	18	4	30
				answered question	**31**

Overall, therefore, the evidence suggests that the biased mediation of the outcomes from the Forums by councillors is driven in part by practical concerns and in part by the norms associated with acting as a trustee and with party loyalty. Underneath both of these sets of institutions, however, rules indicating a loss of governing competence can be credibly inferred. The qualification, however, is that there are diversity of institutions at work; there are no individual strategies, norms or rules that influence all councillors.

Devolved Politics (H2)

> Councillors should focus primarily on neighbourhood issues in Ward Forums when the Forums threaten to give more power to the centre Or Else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined

One reason that city wide issues were not being considered in the Ward Forums was that councillors were focussing on neighbourhood issues at the expense of more strategic concerns. The logic of this behaviour was clearly linked to the devolved model of service delivery associated with the area approach. For councillors, maintaining this power model involved respecting a clear distinction between the 'high politics' of the centre and 'low politics' of the wards. As a councillor who had been involved with setting up the structures described the arrangement like this:

> ...what we wanted to set up originally was a fairly strong coherent centre, where it was easy to track who was making decisions, but to devolve down as much local power as possible to the area committees and the local ward Councillors, so that the Cabinet members could concentrate on, if you like, more strategic city-wide issues. *Councillor U*

This was a settlement that suited most councillors. The survey, for example, revealed that over two thirds of councillors responding regarded working through the community as the way in which a councillor could make the biggest difference (Table 36). The suggestion here, therefore, is that holding the group together meant respecting this distinction between the Areas and the centre. Ward Forums were seen as Ward business and while the centre did not want to upset councillors my intruding on their patch neither did councillors want to give the centre an opportunity to extend their influence by inviting them in.

Table 36 Hull councillor views about how they can make the biggest difference

Councillors can a make a difference in a number of different ways. In your opinion, how can a Councillor make the biggest difference? Please select one		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Through work in the community that the councillor represents	69.2%	18
Through work to change council wide policies	26.9%	7
Through work that benefits the political party that the councillor is a member of	3.9%	1
	answered question	**26**

The Areas were, to a degree, independent of the rest of the Council's governance structure. As one officer suggested that 'they seem to create their own workloads and their own view of the world' (Officer Y). Similarly, councillors responding to the survey felt that raising issues at area committee meetings was a more effective way of getting things done than either raising the issue with a cabinet member or presenting a motion to council (Table 37). This was a reflection of the degree to which the devolved power model that operated in the City had influenced day to day working arrangements. The delegation of substantial budgets to councillors was further evidence that the power and influence of ward councillors was a guiding concern.

Table 37 Hull councillor views about their most effective strategies

Please indicate how effective you feel the following strategies are for councillors when working to achieve their aims:						
Answer Options	**Extremely effective**	**Very effective**	**Moderately effective**	**Slightly effective**	**Not effective at all**	**Response Count**
Work with the relevant council officers	7	15	3	3	0	28
Raise the issue at an area committee meeting	5	10	11	2	0	28
Raise the issue with the relevant cabinet member	4	10	9	3	2	28
Present a motion to a council meeting	1	6	11	7	3	28
Raise the issue within the councillor's own local party group	1	9	11	6	2	29
					answered question	**29**

The preference for neighbourhood, as opposed to city wide issues in the Forums, while strongly linked to concerns about governing competence, was also linked to some degree, to strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of participation. So, for example, councillors considered that it was the focus on local issues that was more likely to bring the public to meetings. At the same time, this behaviour might be associated with a normative role; the councillor as the community champion. This role parallels the 'parochial' role described by Newton where 'the political world of the parochial consists primarily of his own world and of the individuals who bring their problems to him', they see themselves as a 'special sort of unpaid social worker or ombudsman' (Newton 1976, p. 137). While both strategies and norms may have been in play to an extent, it was the concerns over power and influence that came out most strongly.

Devolved Participation (H3)

> Councillors should determine the format of Ward Forums according to local circumstances when the Forums threaten to give more power to the centre Or Else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined

One further important consequence of the devolved power model adopted by councillors in Hull was the decision taken early on to devolve responsibility for public participation to the Areas. This meant that they had the ability to vary the format of the Forums as they saw fit in order to let 'a hundred flowers bloom'. The consequence was that, by the time of the fieldwork, many of the flowers had wilted and some had died.

Like the Devolved Politics rule, the need to devolve responsibility for public engagement was underpinned by the devolved power models operated in the party groups and the settlement between the Centre and the Areas. The tentative suggestion here is that responsibility for public participation was held by the Areas in order to keep it out of the control of the centre. In the Craig and Wilkinson study, for example, they describe the overwhelming majority of interviewees having 'defended the right of each LAC and ward / neighbourhood fora to develop their own democratic instruments' (2004, p. 5). The language here suggests, perhaps, that the 'rights' in question were under threat from the centre. However, given that these events took place a decade before the fieldwork it is difficult to be sure. Nevertheless, the Or Else logic relating to this behaviour can be tied to the need to keep the group together with responsibility for public participation forming part of the deal. Public participation was something that councillors did not want controlled at the Centre.

It is, however, possible to attribute this behaviour to a rational motivational logic. As the 'hundred flowers' quote suggests, a diversity of approaches may be the best way to foster sub local public participation. Innovation can be encouraged and approaches fostered that reflect circumstances at the ward level. While this can be taken at face value, the experience of what followed does not suggest a strong and shared commitment to innovation. Again, like the Devolved Politics rule, this behaviour might be associated with the idea of the councillor as the community champion. The notion that this councillor role should include the facilitation of public participation was, however, very much a minority position.

Councillor Utility (H4)

> Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in Ward Forums when Forums are seen as talking shops or else the ability to win elections will be undermined

As noted previously, the 'elected manager' orientation had a powerful influence over councillors in Hull. Triggered by a concern that the public would see the Forums as pointless if they were unable to solve service issues and complaints, councillors ensured that these issues could be dealt with, indeed this service orientation grew stronger over time with the effect that city wide policy and decision making issues were increasingly displaced. By the time of the fieldwork, the 'super surgery' model for the Forums, typified by the Ward Bus, had become the approach for the majority.

This behaviour can be clearly linked to the Or Else motivational logic of winning elections. Responses to the survey suggest that, in the view of councillors, the experience of having a personal complaint dealt with successfully, and the ability of the candidate to solve problems in the

community, were most likely influence voters (Table 38). These were felt to be more important than issues such as the party that the candidate belongs to or the candidate's record of running the council.

Table 38 Hull councillor views of public voting considerations

Please indicate how important you feel the following considerations are for the public when they vote in local elections:						
Answer Options	**Of utmost importance**	**Of great importance**	**Of moderate importance**	**Of little importance**	**Not important at all**	**Response Count**
The experience of having a personal complaint dealt with successfully by the candidate	12	12	3	1	0	28
The ability of the candidate to solve problems in the community	11	14	1	0	0	26
The political party that a candidate belongs to	8	14	6	1	0	29
The extent to which the political party that the candidate represents has a good record of running the council	6	13	5	1	2	27
The extent to which the candidate supports greater public participation in local politics	3	14	3	5	2	27
The extent to which the candidate's political party is united	2	7	11	7	1	28
The extent to which the candidate has an independent opinion regardless of the policy of any party they may belong to	2	5	14	3	3	27
					answered question	**29**

Conversely, when the Forums were not seen to be solving problems, councillors worried that they might lose public support. One councillor reflected that this might have been the only reason for public involvement:

> Well, if I was brutally honest about it, I think that's where my disappointment has been with the whole system. The public tend to get engaged when there's something they want to complain about, I'm afraid. *Councillor U*

The need to win elections manifested itself in two ways in the Forums. In some the traditions of 'knock about' politics were still evident and, as one officer reported, some councillors were using the Forums as their 'political stage'. A more common approach, however, was to put political differences to one side and to work more pragmatically that might have been possible in the Guild Hall; to 'join together for a common good' as one officer put it (Officer X). Certainly, these behaviours could be understood as simply councillors wanting to make a difference, and this came through from the interviews. One interviewee from a partner agency was very clear on this point:

> The overriding impression I do have is that they really do want to make things better for the constituents. That's their overriding, you know, aim and I've never really sort of come away with the impression that they're just power hungry or that, you know, it would be wrong of me to characterise it in that way, 'cause I've never really got that. *Partner Z*

A cynical view would be that these behaviours are also consistent with a particular type of election strategy, whether explicitly expressed or otherwise, that associates electoral gain with solving problems and recognises that the public react badly to squabbling politicians.

Nevertheless this behaviour could be associated with a normative logic and the appropriateness of the councillor acting as an 'elected manager'. There was some suggestion that there was a rational motivational logic present; namely that a focus on solving service issues was the best way to draw people in. If this had been the case, however, it would be reasonable to expect that

wider policy issues would have been introduced into meetings once the public had been enticed in. This was not the case.

Having elaborated the four institutional rules that were in evidence, it is worth noting that the party unity rule, posited by the theory of the incompatibility conjecture, was absent. This was clearly a consequence of the devolved power model adopted in Hull and a settled distinction between high low politics. The group leaderships were either unwilling or unable to manage the Ward Forums; crises of councillor representation were therefore not a significant issue. Similarly there were no rules associated with keeping party politics out of the Forums as had been the case in Merton, for example. As well as the devolution of politics, the fact that the Forums were at ward level reduced the potential for them to be political battle ground; for one thing many wards had councillors from only one party.

7.6 Conclusion

Hull's Ward Forums were introduced in 1999 as the participatory element of a substantial package of devolution measures. Despite early success, however, their ability to provide public participation in city wide policy and decision making has declined. Perhaps most significantly, the decision to devolve control over the design of these mechanisms has ensured that their impact has been at the sub local level at best. The diversity of approaches that have developed could only have had a wider influence if councillors had taken responsibility for championing outcomes from the Ward Forums within city wide policy and decision making. This did not happen on account of the widely accepted distinction between the high politics of the centre and the low politics of the Areas.

In broad terms, then, this case study supports the credibility of the theory of the incompatibility conjecture. The four institutional rules in evidence provide a satisfying explanation of how councillor behaviours, over time, limited the impact of the Ward Forums city wide. Anxieties about a loss of governing competence meant that councillors continued to make decisions independently of the public when faced with the 'usual suspects' in Ward Forums. Concerns about holding the group together resulted in a devolved power model that in turn led to neighbourhood, rather than strategic issues, dominating discussions in the Forums. It is also possible that the same concerns resulted in a devolved approach to the way that the Ward Forums operated with the consequence that participation through the Forums was variable and uncoordinated. Finally, anxieties about loss of votes, if the Forums were seen as talking shops, meant that local service issues came to dominate at the expense of policy or strategic concerns. All of these Or Else motivational logics were recognised by interviewees as credible explanations for these behaviours.

The effects of the local governing code on the way in which councillors responded to the Ward Forums was also clearly evident in this case. The devolved power model was a decisive factor in ensuring that the influence of the Forums remained sub local. At the same time the 'elected manager' orientation of councillors worked to ensure the dominance of service issues over policy matters or other city wide concerns. However, the most significant aspect of politics in the City was its fragmented nature resulting in real difficulties for the group leaderships as they sought to bring coherence. As well as party competition, which appeared more pronounced in Hull than elsewhere, there were tensions between the Centre and the Areas, between traditionalists and modernisers and between new and established councillors.

All of which worked against the development of meaningful city wide public participation arrangements.

While Or Else logics were clearly present as credible explanations for councillor behaviours, alternative explanations were also evident in this case. Technical motivations were present, the most significant of which was the need to provide 'biased mediation' of outcomes when confronted with the 'usual suspects'. In this context behaviour could be explained as councillors improving effectiveness by adding the views of the 'silent majority' to outcomes from the Forums. At the same time norms associated with the trustee role and party loyalty were also present. Finally, the community focused councillor as a role type was also evident and provides a normative explanation for the neighbourhood and service orientation of some councillors in the context of Forum meetings.

In looking for exceptions, in other words conditions in which the theory of the incompatibility conjecture might not apply, this case suggests two areas that might be explored. The first is public pressure. While this seems to have been less of an issue at the time of the fieldwork, the numbers attending the Forums in the early years seemed to provide a genuine impetus for politicians to respond in more significant ways. At the same time, councillors were clearly sensitive to large numbers coming through the door for a particular issue given the electoral implications that this might have. The second point worth noting is that there were councillors who took advantage of the devolution of responsibility for the Forums to facilitate mechanisms that were geared towards more general public engagement and priority setting. These examples suggest two possibilities; that participatory norms are at work or that a more

community orientated election strategy is being pursued. Either way there seems to be a challenge to the notion of incompatibility.

So concludes the third case study. The purpose of the studies has been to test and refine the theory of the incompatibility conjecture in empirical settings. The next task is to see what has been learned from the cases and how the theory might be adjusted accordingly. That will be the purpose of the next chapter.

8. Findings from the Case Studies

You can borrow ideas but you can't borrow situations.

Billy Bragg, North Sea Bubble

Regardless of their potential to do so, the participatory initiatives in Merton, Bristol and Hull have had only very limited impact upon council wide policy and decision making. The proposition at the heart of this thesis is that this should be expected. While local politicians may genuinely wish to practice more participative approaches, the élite structure of local political life prevents them from doing so; participatory initiatives are incompatible with formal local democracy as it currently operates. The reason for undertaking the case studies in Merton, Bristol and Hull was to explore the mechanics of this incompatibility; to explore what shapes councillor responses to the participatory initiatives that they themselves have sponsored. Specifically this meant testing and refining the claims of the 'incompatibility theory' developed prior to the cases studies in Chapter Three.

The purpose of this chapter is to draw together the findings from the case studies and consider their implications for the theory. Such testing and refining of theories in empirical settings is a fundamental aspect of the realist research process (Pawson and Tilley 1997). In this respect four processes have been at work. These are; a process of *credibility checking*; comparing the claims of the theory with case study observations and the views of local actors; a process of *actuality checking;* examining what eventuates in different contexts and specifically the institutional rules shaping councillor responses in each case; a process of *alternative checking*; asking whether shared strategies and norms

might be credible explanations for councillor behaviour alongside or instead of the institutional rules; and a process of *exception checking*; identifying situations where the theory does not apply. Having three case studies to draw from allows both for cumulative findings to be identified and for differences to be observed.

In order to elaborate the key findings from the case studies this chapter will proceed in five stages dealing with each the claims of the theory in turn. The key findings will be noted along the way. These have been labelled *a* through to *n* and are listed together at the end of this chapter. The five stages that follow will build from the concrete towards the abstract. The first will take as its focus the problem setting in which the institutional action takes place; that of the participatory initiatives. It will provide an overview of the institutional rules in evidence, in other words the combinations of behaviours, triggers and Or Else motivational logics that limited the impact of the initiatives in the three cases. Section two will then consider the strategies and norms in evidence. The question here is whether different types of motivational logics to the Or Else logic, namely the In Order To and As It Is Right That logics, provide credible alternative explanations for the observed behaviours.

A third section will then consider the extent to which local governing codes have had an effect on the behaviours in question. Specifically this means looking for the influence of electoral strategies and power models. The fourth section will consider what has been learned about the social structure under consideration, in other words the local political élite. Specifically it will explore the extent to which the cases supported the existence of Or Else Logics as emergent properties of the local political élite and the extent to which local political élites can be said to demonstrate behavioural cohesion. A fifth and

final section will then consider any exceptions to the proposed incompatibility theory thrown up by the case studies; specifically the degree to which contextual aspects such as public pressure, civic infrastructure or interventions by national government or local parties might block the institutional rules that shape councillors responses to participatory initiatives and thereby limit the applicability of the theory. First, however, an overview of the institutional rules found to be in evidence will be set out.

8.1 Institutional Rules in Evidence

The 'incompatibility theory' set out in Chapter Three claimed that three institutional rules can be inferred as best explanations for councillors' responses to participatory initiatives; the Party Unity, Representative Status and Councillor Utility rules. It further suggested that these councillor behaviours are triggered by the characteristics of participatory initiatives. In order to explore this claim, the case study fieldwork sought to identify the relevant behaviours and triggers in evidence so that the institutional rules for each case could be constructed and the relevant Or Else motivational logics inferred. At the same time evidence was sought for other rules not suggested by the theory.

The purpose of this section is to elaborate what was found and implications for the 'incompatibility theory'. The focus is upon the problem setting; what critical realists would identify as the domain of the *actual*; the place where the action happens. First an overview of the rules found to be in evidence will be presented. Second, the behaviours associated with those rules will be discussed and classified. Third the triggers associated with these behaviours will also be discussed and classified.

Overall 13 institutional rules were inferred from the case studies by the researcher and have been summarised in Table 39. Where variations of the same rule have been identified these have been labelled A, B or C. The references in brackets refer back to each case study so that M = Merton, B = Bristol and H = Hull. The generic term 'initiative' is used instead of the participatory initiative in each case. Five key findings (a to e) provide the focus for the remainder of the section.

Table 39 Summary of institutional rules in evidence across the three cases

RULE	Behaviour	Trigger	Motivational Logic
Party Unity A (M1)	The ruling group should limit the powers of the initiative	When the initiative gives more power to backbench councillors	Or Else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined
Party Unity B (M2)	The ruling group should prevent the initiative from making contentious recommendations	When the initiative has the potential to provoke a 'crisis of representation'	Or Else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined
Representative Status A (M3)	Party groups should limit the powers of the initiative	When the initiative does not have sufficient democratic legitimacy	Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
Representative Status B (B1)	Councillors should ensure that the initiative has a central decision making role for councillors	When the initiative is operating outside of representative structures	Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
Representative Status C (B2 /H1)	Councillors should make decisions independently of the views of the public.	When the public attending meetings do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy	Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
Councillor Utility A (M4/ B4 / H4)	Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in initiative meetings	When meetings are seen as 'talking shops'	Or Else the ability to win elections will be undermined
Councillor Utility B (M5/ B5)	Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in initiative meetings	When meetings are dominated by professionals at the expense of councillors	Or Else the ability to win elections will be undermined

RULE	Behaviour	Trigger	Motivational Logic
Councillor Utility C (B6)	Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in initiative meetings	When meetings are dominated by professionals at the expense of councillors	Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined
Party Politics A (M6)	Party groups should ensure that councillors focus on championing local service issues in initiative meetings	When meetings have the potential to provide opponents with political opportunities	Or Else the ability to win elections will be undermined
Party Politics B (M7)	Party groups should prevent the initiative from making contentious recommendations	When the initiative has the potential to provide opponents with political opportunities	Or Else the ability to win elections will be undermined
Devolved Politics A (B3)	Councillors should focus primarily on devolved issues in initiative meetings	When backbench councillors do not have a meaningful role in neighbourhood governance	Or Else the ability to govern competently will be undermined.
Devolved Politics B (H2)	Councillors should focus primarily on devolved issues in initiative meetings	When initiatives threaten to give more power to the centre	Or Else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined
Devolved Participation (H3)	Councillors should determine the format of the initiative according to local circumstances	When initiatives threaten to give more power to the centre	Or Else the ability to hold the group together will be undermined

a. The case studies reveal a diversity of institutional rules, which explain councillor behaviour, across and between the cases

The case studies revealed a diversity of rules between the cases. Overall 13 separate rules were inferred with some overlap between the cases. There were seven rules identified in Merton, six in Bristol and four in Hull. Only one of the rules, Councillor Utility A, was found in all three cases. In addition only two further rules were found present in two cases. These were Representative Status C (Bristol and Hull) and Councillor Utility B (Merton and Bristol).

The implication of this is that the institutional rules shaping councillor responses to participatory initiatives do need to be studied in context. This reinforces Searing's message that studies of politicians need to be situated (1994). The responses of councillors cannot be taken for granted.

b. The Party Unity, Representative Status and Councillor Utility rules were all in evidence although not in all of the cases and not in the same form

The three rules suggested by the theory were all found in evidence. There were two variations of the Party Unity rule (both found in the Merton case study), three variations of the Representative Status rule, found across the three cases and three variations of the Councillor Utility Rule, again, found across the three cases. The Party Unity rule was notable by its absence from the Bristol and Hull cases.

This finding, while broadly supporting what was suggested by the 'incompatibility theory', implies that not all rules will be present in all settings and that, where rules are present, they will be subject to variations on the ground. This further reinforces the need for situated approaches and sensitivity to local conditions. Diversity should be expected and, if there are rules that are more likely to be found than others, these will be the Representative Status and Councillor Utility rules.

c. Three rules not suggested by the theory were in evidence; Party Politics, Devolved Politics and Devolved Participation

While the three rules posited by the theory represented eight of the thirteen rules found to be in evidence, three other rules were also found; Party Politics, Devolved Politics and Devolved Participation. The first of these, the Party Politics rule, found only in Merton, reflects an anxiety that initiatives will

provide a platform for political opponents and a desire to shut down the potential for additional political 'battlefields'. Initiatives are regarded as 'theatres of representation' (Copus 2004) albeit theatres in need of censorship. The result is that contentious topics are avoided. The second rule not suggested by the theory is that of Devolved Politics. In both Bristol and Hull, where greater autonomy for backbenchers over sub local issues was a significant aspect of local political life, meetings focused on devolved matters, squeezing the time for city wide policy and decision making. A third rule, that of Devolved Participation, evident only in Hull, represented an extension of the autonomy of backbenchers to cover decisions about the design of the participatory initiatives themselves. This resulted in a patchwork of practice and made drawing together city wide conclusions difficult.

The presence of these rules suggests that the 'incompatibility theory' needs to provide for a greater variety of rules than the three initially suggested. Given that these findings come from only three case studies it seems unlikely that the list of possible rules has been exhausted. Once again, the case for understanding each case in terms of the local conditions that apply is underlined.

d. Seven different limiting councillor behaviours, both intended and unintended, were observed

From the fieldwork seven different types of councillor behaviour that reduced the impact for participatory initiatives were identified and these are listed in Table 40. In providing this classification a distinction has been made between those behaviours that related to the design of the initiative and those that relate to the management of the initiative. In addition a distinction has been made between those that were consciously *intended* to limit the impact of

the initiative in question and those behaviours for which this consequence was *unintended*. The letters in brackets denote the cases in which the behaviours were observed. Each will be considered briefly.

Table 40 Limiting behaviours of councillors observed from the case studies

	Design	**Management**
Intended	Biased Facilitation 1. Limit the powers of the initiative (M)	Biased Mediation 2. Prevent the initiative from making contentious recommendations (M) 3. Make decisions independently of the views of the public attending (B,H)
Unintended	Digressive Facilitation 4. Ensure that the initiative has a central decision making role for councillors (B) 5. Determine the format of the initiative according to local circumstances (H)	Digressive Mediation 6. Focus primarily on championing local service issues in initiative meetings (M,B,H) 7. Focus primarily on devolved issues in initiative meetings (B,H)

The first observed behaviour was that of formally limiting the power of the initiative in question. In Merton, the option of constituting the Community Forums as area committees and investing them with greater power and responsibilities had been debated but rejected. The Forums were treated as being outside of 'normal politics' and hence not suitable for dealing with substantial policy issues. Such behaviours, that relate to the design of initiatives and for which the consequence of limiting the impact of the initiative is consciously intended, are labelled here as *biased facilitation* behaviours.

Two limiting behaviours were observed during the management of the initiatives that were also consciously intended to limit the impact of the initiatives. The first, associated with Merton was simply the practice of routing contentious issues away from the Community Forums. The second was councillors making decisions independently of the public views expressed at meetings. This behaviour was observed in both Bristol and Hull, where the initiatives did have greater powers and responsibilities than was the case in Merton. It was down to the councillors to transmit outcomes to the Council's wider policy processes and to ensure that outcomes reflected public wishes rather than simply their own. However, a significant number of councillors, but not all by any means, chose to practice a non participatory style of decision making within meetings and were not transmitting outcomes into wider processes. For these councillors the purpose of the initiatives was not necessarily to inform wider policy and decision making but rather to enhance accountability; making decisions *in public* rather than *with the public* (Bristol) or as a general sounding board (Hull). These behaviours are labelled here as *biased mediation* behaviours.

The remaining four observed behaviours, while having a limiting effect, were not consciously intended to do so. The first two of these were related to the design of initiatives. In Bristol the central role for councillors was an important principle of the Neighbourhood Partnerships. However, where councillors chose to adopt a non participatory style of decision making this had the consequence of limiting the impact of the partnerships as participatory mechanisms. A second behaviour, observed in Hull, gave councillors control over the design of the Ward Forums. The unintended consequence of this had three aspects. First it resulted in a patchwork of practice, making city wide coordination difficult, second, where councillors did not view the participatory

function as important this aspect was designed out and third, some councillors were able to end the Ward Forums altogether. These behaviours have been labelled as *digressive facilitation* behaviours.

The final two behaviours related to the management of initiatives. These were also behaviours for which the consequence of limiting the impact of initiatives could not be described as intentional. The first of these was the practice of focusing on service issues and complaints at the expense of wider policy and decision making topics. This behaviour, which was the only one observed in all three cases, was also related to four separate rules; more than any other observed behaviour. Similarly, a focus on devolved, sub local issues observed in Bristol and Hull had the effect of squeezing city wide concerns from the agendas of meetings. These behaviours have been labelled as *digressive mediation*.

What is notable about these findings is the diversity of behaviours across the cases. Four of the seven observed behaviours occurred in only one case and only one, the practice of focussing on service issues, was common across all three. The implication for theory is not just a further reinforcement of the need for a situated understanding, but also the importance of recognising that there are a number of different ways in which the impact of participatory initiatives can be limited. Most significant, perhaps, is the finding that many of the behaviours are not consciously intended to have a limiting effect.

It is also worth noting that a single behaviour may be associated with different and/or multiple Or Else logics and triggers. Take, for example, the Councillor Utility A, B and C rules (Table 39). Here, the championing of local service issues in initiative meetings was associated with two different Or Else logics (winning elections and governing competence) and two different triggers

(when meetings are seen as 'talking shops' and when meetings are dominated by professionals at the expense of councillors).

Having highlighted the findings from the case studies relating the limiting behaviours of councillors, the next question to consider is what were the characteristics of the initiatives that triggered these behaviours? That will be the focus of the next sub section.

e. Five different types of trigger were associated with the limiting behaviours of councillors although different combinations of triggers were found in each case

The 'incompatibility theory' suggests that the limiting behaviours of councillors will be triggered by characteristics of the participatory initiatives in question and this was indeed the case in all three councils. From the fieldwork five types of trigger were observed and these are listed below (the letters in brackets denote the cases where the triggers were observed):

1. Threat to group cohesion (M,B,H)
2. Insufficient democratic legitimacy (M,B,H)
3. Perceived as 'talking shops' (M,B,H)
4. Potential to provide political opportunities for opponents (M)
5. Domination by professionals (M,B)

Each will be considered in turn.

The potential threat to group cohesion posed by the initiatives was a common concern across the case studies although this manifested itself in different ways. In Merton, where party groups were organised on a centralised basis, the Community Forums were perceived both as a potential source of

tension between public demands and group policy and as a potential power base for backbench councillors. It was these concerns that led to the responsibilities being limited and contentious issues being kept away from meetings. In Bristol and Hull, however, where a devolved model was in operation, it was the perception that the Neighbourhood Partnerships and Ward Forums might lead to more central power that triggered limiting behaviours; respectively the focus on devolved matters at the expense of city wide concerns in both Bristol and Hull and the devolution of the design of the Ward Forums in Hull.

The second common concern was the perceived lack of democratic legitimacy associated with the different initiatives. This issue played out differently in each case with some aspects being more or less important for politicians in the different councils. The numbers attending, the representativeness of those that did attend and the fact that those attending were unelected were all causes of concern; however, in each case the emphasis was different. For Merton councillors it was popular support and the ability to represent a cross section of the community that mattered most; it was the idea of *small* numbers of unelected and unrepresentative members of the public participating in decision making that caused concern. For Bristol councillors the numbers mattered less but the fact that those attending were self selected rather than elected was the prominent issue. In Hull it was the unrepresentativeness of the 'usual suspects' that came to the fore; the fact that it was the same people turning up each time. In each case, however, a lack of democratic legitimacy was the trigger for limiting behaviours.

The third trigger that was common across all the cases was the perception that meetings of the initiative in question were seen as 'talking

shops' by the public. Councillors were concerned that the people that did attend could see direct practical benefits and something being done as a result of discussions. While individual complaints were generally not seen as appropriate for meetings; service issues affecting the community certainly were. This concern to ensure that meetings were about action rather than talk, however, resulted in policy items being squeezed from agendas.

The fourth trigger related to the initiatives providing political opponents with a platform although this was only observed in Merton. While 'party politicking' was a concern in both Bristol and Hull the councillors in those cases were much more relaxed about it happening within the context of meetings. In this sense the Neighbourhood Partnerships and the Ward Forums were seen as a legitimate arena for 'normal' politics. In Merton, however, the concern about party politics led to contentious issues being kept away from the Community Forums.

The fifth and final trigger observed in the case studies was the perception that initiatives were being dominated by professionals, whether from the council or from partner agencies. In both Merton and Bristol councillors identified themselves with the public rather than with officers in meetings. As well as a form of scrutiny taking place, this resulted in a championing of the service issues brought to meetings by the public and unwillingness to be associated with 'corporate' policy agendas and consultations. In Hull this was not so much of an issue due to the prominent role already being played by councillors in terms of service delivery and the lack of corporate involvement in the Ward Forums.

This section has examined the institutional rules found to be in evidence and highlighted and classified the behaviours and triggers associated with these

rules. Each of these rules has been associated with a particular type of motivational logic. In order to test the theory, however, it is important to explore whether alternative causal mechanisms are at work. This will be the focus of the next section.

8.2 Strategies and Norms in Evidence

While the rules evidenced from the case studies include Or Else motivational logics it may be possible that the observed combinations of behaviours and triggers are underpinned by different motivational logics (see Section 3.1.3). As Sayer suggests: 'Typically, social scientists are dealing not only with systems that are open but ones in which there are many interacting structures and mechanisms. This creates the risk of attributing to one mechanism (and its structure) effects that are actually due to another' (Sayer 2000, p. 16). Hence the fieldwork sought out the most likely alternative mechanisms.

Such alterative explanatory mechanisms fall into two categories. *In Order To logics* reflect rational motivations and a concern with the effectiveness of the participatory initiative in question. In this sense they represent a technical critique of participatory initiatives of the type suggested by Sweeting and Copus (2013). *As It Is Right That* logics reflect a sense of obligation and a concern with the appropriateness of the behaviour in question. Such logics reflect personal beliefs and ideological preferences that actors bring into problem settings from the outside world. Following the Institutional Grammar Tool developed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995), when In Order To motivational logics are combined with behaviours and triggers they are referred

to as institutional strategies; when As It Is Right that logics are combined with behaviours and triggers they are referred to as institutional norms.

As summarised in Table 41, it was evident from the fieldwork that strategies and norms could be posited as alternative explanations for all but three of the thirteen institutional rules found to be in evidence. The remainder of this section will discuss the evidence for alternative motivational logics, starting with the In Order To motivational logics before moving onto the As It Is Right That motivational logics. The section will conclude by considering the implications for the 'incompatibility theory'.

Table 41 Alternative motivational logics

	RULE			Alternative	Motivational Logics
	Behaviour	**Trigger**	**Motivational Logic**	**In Order To**	**As it is Right That**
Party Unity A (M1)	The ruling group should limit the powers of the initiative	When the initiative gives more power to backbench councillors	**Or Else** the ability to hold the group together will be undermined		**As It Is Right That** councillors act as partisans
Party Unity B (M2)	The ruling group should prevent the initiative from making contentious recommendations	When the initiative has the potential to provoke a 'crisis of representation'	**Or Else** the ability to hold the group together will be undermined		**As It Is Right That** councillors act as partisans
Representative Status A (M3)	Party groups should limit the powers of the initiative	When the initiative does not have sufficient democratic legitimacy	**Or Else** the ability to govern competently will be undermined		
Representative Status B (B1)	Councillors should ensure that the initiative has a central decision making role for councillors	When backbench councillors do not have a meaningful role	**Or Else** the ability to govern competently will be undermined		
Representative Status C (B2 /H1)	Councillors should make decisions independently of the views of the public.	When the public attending meetings do not have sufficient democratic legitimacy	**Or Else** the ability to govern competently will be undermined	**In Order To** ensure everyone's views are reflected **In Order To** ensure conclusions can be reached	**As It Is Right That** councillors act as trustees
Councillor Utility A (M4/ B4 / H4)	Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in initiative meetings	When meetings are seen as 'talking shops'	**Or Else** the ability to win elections will be undermined	**In Order To** bring more people into the initiative	**As It Is Right That** councillors act as elected managers

Councillor Utility B (M5/ B5)	Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in initiative meetings	When meetings are dominated by professionals at the expense of councillors	**Or Else** the ability to win elections will be undermined		**As It Is Right That** councillors act as elected managers
Councillor Utility C (B6)	Councillors should focus on championing local service issues in initiative meetings	When meetings are dominated by professionals at the expense of councillors	**Or Else** the ability to govern competently will be undermined	**In Order To** bring more people into the initiative	
Party Politics A (M6)	Party groups should ensure that councillors focus on championing local service issues in initiative meetings	When meetings have the potential to provide opponents with political opportunities	**Or Else** the ability to win elections will be undermined		
Party Politics B (M7)	Party groups should prevent the initiative from making contentious recommendations	When the initiative has the potential to provide opponents with political opportunities	**Or Else** the ability to win elections will be undermined	**In Order To** ensure that non partisan dialogue takes place	**As It Is Right That** participation happens outside of normal politics
Devolved Politics A (B3)	Councillors should focus primarily on devolved issues in initiative meetings	When backbench councillors do not have a meaningful role	**Or Else** the ability to govern competently will be undermined.		**As It Is Right That** councillors act as community champions
Devolved Politics B (H2)	Councillors should focus primarily on devolved issues in initiative meetings	When initiatives threaten to give more power to the centre	**Or Else** the ability to hold the group together will be undermined		**As It Is Right That** councillors act as community champions
Devolved Participation (H3)	Councillors should determine the format of the initiative according to local circumstances	When initiatives threaten to give more power to the centre	**Or else** the ability to hold the group together will be undermined	**In Order To** match initiatives with sub local circumstances	**As It Is Right That** councillors facilitate participation in their wards

f. In Order To motivational logics provided viable alternative explanations for a number of behaviours and particularly those associated with representative status

In Order To motivational logics were in evidence as viable alternative explanations for a range of councillor responses to participatory initiatives. This was particularly the case for behaviours associated with adopting a non participatory style of decision making (Representative Status C)[5]. Where representativeness was seen as a problem councillors saw their role as making up for the deficiencies of the initiative and ensuring that participatory mechanisms incorporated the views of the 'silent majority'. A second critique was that the initiatives in question were limited in their ability to make effective decisions. While, in the view of councillors, initiatives were suitable for capturing a range of views they were not well suited to reaching conclusions and this was properly the role of councillors.

Rational motivational logics were also in evidence, although to a lesser degree, as alternatives to Or Else logics for other inferred rules. An alternative explanation for the focus on service issues, for example, was that councillors were concerned to attract more people into initiatives and saw this as the carrot that would bring this in (Councillor Utility A). The fact that time was then not subsequently found for wider policy issues tends to undermine this as an explanation. Similarly the argument that contentious issues should be kept out of initiatives so that party politics did not spoil deliberation was present but seems difficult to sustain (Party Politics B). It is certainly not an argument that would be applied to the scrutiny function where party politics are also expected

[5] The references in brackets, and those that follow, refer to rows in Table 41.

to be excluded. Finally, an In Order To logic was expressed as the motivation for giving ward councillors control over initiative design in Hull (Devolved Participation). Here the argument was that the initiative would be more effective if adapted to sub local circumstances. While strongly expressed as a principle, it is worth noting that, in practice, the opportunity to 'let a 100 flowers bloom' was not taken up by councillors.

There were some observed behaviours that were not easily associated with In Order To motivational logics. Those associated with the Party Unity and Devolved Politics rules in particular seemed to have little to do with the desire to improve the initiative in question as a participatory mechanism.

g. As It Is Right That motivational logics provided viable alternative explanations for a number of behaviours and particularly those associated with representative status

As It Is Right That logics also provided credible alternative explanations for a number of behaviours. A useful form of shorthand here is to associate normative systems with the representative role types, such as trustee, delegate, politico, partisan, that are well established in the literature (Wahlke 1962; Searing 1994). Again, as with the In Order To logics, As It Is Right That logics were most prominent as alternative explanations for the behaviours associated with Representative Status C. Several councillors were able to point to the trustee representative role type as a powerful influence on their responses to initiatives. Even where the trustee role was not consciously articulated councillors drew on a sense of appropriateness to explain their behaviour and that of their colleagues. While these norms were clearly important for a number of councillors, however, they were far from pervasive. In a similar vein the

partisan representative role type was in evidence to a degree in respect of the Party Unity rules evidenced in the Merton case (Party Unity A, Party Unity B).

Two further role types, less prominent in the established literature, were suggested as important normative motivations in the case studies; the 'parochial' community champion and the elected manager (see Newton 1976; Copus 2006 respectively). The community champion role was associated with the desire to see the initiatives, particularly in the Bristol and Hull cases, focus on devolved matters (Devolved Politics A, Devolved Politics B). Many councillors believed that focusing primarily on sub local issues was the appropriate way for councillors to approach their work; indeed, for many 'making a difference in the community' was the reason that they had become a councillor in the first place. The second role, of elected manager, was particularly evident in Hull where councillors saw fixing service problems as an appropriate way to make a difference. This role could be seen as an explanation for the focus on service issues and complaints that were prominent in many meetings (Councillor Utility A, Councillor Utility B). Other As It Is Right That logics suggested by the cases included the idea that public participation should be conducted away from 'normal politics, associated with Party Politics B, and the idea that councillors were the appropriate facilitators of participation in their own wards, associated with the Devolved Participation rule.

h. While the three case studies each presented a unique mix of motivational logics, Or Else logics were the most prominent type

While In Order To and As It Is Right That motivational logics were evident in each of the cases, their explanatory power was only partial. As noted above, it was not possible to infer these motivational logics as alternatives to the Or Else logics for all of the inferred rules; four of the inferred rules have no

alternative logics associated with them at all. Second, in the view of the researcher, where alternative logics were evident, these operated alongside, rather than instead of the parallel Or Else logics. The effect was therefore complementary and reinforcing; there was nothing to suggest that one motivation might displace another.

There are two implications that follow for the theory. The first is about credibility; the claim that Or Else motivational logics are the primary cause for councillor responses to participatory initiatives stands up in the face of alternative explanations. There was no indication from the interviews, for example, that the former should be rejected in favour of the latter. The second point relates to actuality; in the case studies Or Else logics were found entwined with In Order To and As It Is Right That logics and it seems reasonable to suggest that this will be true in any given problem setting. The combinations of these logics are likely to be as unique in each setting as they will be difficult to disentangle.

Having reviewed the evidence relating to the combinations of behaviours, triggers and motivational logics in the three cases the next step is to consider the degree to which local governing codes had an effect. That will be the focus of the next section.

8.3 Local Governing Codes in Evidence

A central assumption of the 'incompatibility theory' is that the operation of Or Else logics will be shaped by the governing code prevailing in a given locality. These codes are the strategic decisions made by local political élites in the face of the political circumstances that they find themselves in. Ultimately local governing codes are the answer to the question; 'how can we win elections

and govern effectively?' Hence variations in local governing codes can be captured as differences in electoral strategies and power models.

In conducting the case studies the intention was to seek evidence of the influence of these local governing codes. This was done in two ways. First it was possible to observe the political choices made by the local politicians in each case and the degree to which these choices influenced councillor responses to the participatory initiatives. Second, once the cases had been completed it was possible to observe the differences between the cases. These differences provide valuable evidence as they may point towards a genuine locality effect.

i. Local governing codes had a powerful influence on the operation of institutional rules in each of the three cases

In each of the three cases there was a clear observable connection between the rules in evidence and the prevailing local governing codes. While not all aspects of the local governing codes were prominent and nor were all aspects influential on the participation initiatives, some aspects were certainly both.

In Merton electoral battle lines were very much drawn at the borough level. This was reflected in an emphasis on centrally managed strategies fought out on national issues to a large extent. The Community Forums represented a problem of political management in this context. Group leaderships were not keen for party politics to be played out in these areas where central control could prove difficult. Hence the Community Forums were kept away from 'normal' politics and contentious issues routed elsewhere. At the same time party groups were not keen to devolve power down to backbenchers; an authority model operated within the groups themselves. Not that this was a

given. A significant proportion of councillors in Merton had a 'community' rather than a 'party' orientation and saw the sub local as the place to get things done. Tensions between the advocates of these two approaches could be inferred as a key influence on leadership responses to the Forums and the potential difficulties of party management that they represented.

In contrast the party groups in Bristol were more comfortable that the sub local could operate as an arena for electoral competition. This was partly a consequence of election by thirds and partly a result of the close electoral balance between the main parties. While this meant that the parties regarded the Neighbourhood Partnerships as within 'normal' politics and were relaxed about the nature of the issues being considered, there was nevertheless a negative influence on participation. Solving community problems was, for some councillors, a legitimate election strategy and this worked to ensure that these types of issue were being discussed at the Partnerships at the expense of policy issues. Linked to this was a devolved model of service delivery, itself reflecting an autonomy model within the party groups. Indeed, with the emphasis on sub local politics more significant than in Merton, say, an autonomy model, providing for a clear differentiation between the 'high politics' of the centre and the 'low politics' of the wards, may have been the most practical arrangement to ensure group cohesion. The effect, however, was to exclude, intentionally or otherwise, city wide issues from the practice of the Partnerships.

Hull had much in common with Bristol. The devolution associated with the Areas represented an autonomy power model within the groups. At the same time councillors were relaxed about the presence of party politics in the Ward Forums as the influence of group decisions was not felt in these arenas.

Again, like Bristol, electoral benefits were associated with solving community problems and, to a greater degree, service complaints. Linked to this was an aspect of the governing code that was distinctive in Hull; the direct involvement of councillors in decisions about service delivery. This culture of 'elected management' reinforced the emphasis on service complaints within the Ward Forums. The cumulative effect of these factors was to turn many of the Ward Forums into 'super surgeries' at the expense of their participatory function.

A comparison of the survey results between the three cases provides further evidence of the distinctiveness of the three cases or otherwise. The survey instrument included five questions designed to capture similarities and differences between the cases. Two of these questions were taken directly from the MAELG pan-European survey of councillors so that wider comparisons could be made. While the small numbers involved mean that results need to be interpreted cautiously, they nevertheless provide a useful temperature check for each case.

Table 42 Councillor notions of democracy across the cases

People have different ideas about how local democracy should function. Please indicate how important for local democracy you feel the following requirements are:	**Merton** (n=28/60)	**Bristol** (n=49/72)	**Hull** (n=26/59)	**MAELG** (n=11,349+)
Answer Options	*Mean score* (rank)*			
Residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives.	3.57(1)	3.29(1)	2.73(2)	3.09 (1)
Local politicians should try to generate consensus and shared values among local citizens/groups.	2.81(=2)	3.02(2)	3.00(1)	(not available)
Residents should participate actively and directly in making important local decisions	2.81(=2)	2.87(3)	2.54(3)	2.79 (2)
The results of local elections should be the most important factor in determining council policies	2.63(4)	2.28(5)	2.30(5)	2.78 (3)
Council decisions should reflect a majority opinion among the residents.	2.42(5)	2.39(4)	2.40(4)	(not available)
Political representatives should make what they think are the right decisions, independent of the current views of local people.	1.70(6)	2.04(6)	2.17(6)	2.16 (4)
Apart from voting, citizens should not be given the opportunity to influence local government policies	0.96(7)	1.09(7)	1.00(7)	1.33 (5)
Where 4=of utmost importance, 3=of great importance, 2=of moderate importance, 1=of little importance, 0=not important at all				

Table 42 suggests that, ideologically speaking there is little to choose between the three councils when it comes to notions of democracy. Responses to a MAELG question about how democracy should function (see Heinelt 2013b) suggest that it is a position incorporating elements of both traditional representative and participative democracy that has the strongest support. The levels of support for the seven statements about democracy are broadly similar across the three cases. In each case the three most strongly supported statements of the seven are: that residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives; that local politicians should try to generate consensus and shared values among local citizens/groups; and that residents should

participate actively and directly in making important local decisions. For reference the mean scores from the MAELG survey are also included (from Heinelt 2013a). The comparison with these scores suggests that, in terms of the ranking at least, the beliefs held by councillors in the three cases are in line with the profile of Europe as a whole. Overall, for this normative question, the locality effect appears to be limited.

Table 43 Councillor voting preferences across the cases and in European comparison

If there should be a conflict between a member's own opinion, the opinion of the party group in the council or the opinion of the voters, how should, in your opinion, a member of the council vote? Choose one option					
Answer Options	**Merton** (n=25/60)	**Bristol** (n= 43/72)	**Hull** (n=23/59)	**MAELG** United Kingdom (n=700)	**MAELG** Country Mean (n=11,926)
Vote according to his/her own conviction	28.0%	60.5%	48.3%	58%	57%
Vote according to the opinion of the party group	60.0%	14.0%	43.5%	25%	28%
Vote according to the opinion of the voters	12.0%	25.6%	8.7%	17%	15%

Table 43, however, suggests strong differences between the three cases. This second survey question, also drawn from the MAELG questionnaire, sought to establish role orientation from the perspective of voting intention. In contrast to the previous question the responses suggest that the different councils have markedly different profiles. While these questions have been often used to gather evidence for role preferences they can also be used to evidence the existence of power models. So, while the options to 'vote according to his/her own conviction' or 'vote according to the opinion of the voters' are consistent with a delegated/autonomy power model, the option to 'vote according to the opinion of the party group is consistent with a centralised / authority model.

The survey results in Table 43 support the other observations from the case studies. In Merton, where an authority model was evident, the survey shows 60% preferring to vote with the party group while in Bristol, at 14%, this was significantly less the case. In Hull the pull of the party group at 43.5% appears more pronounced than in Bristol but is still less than in Merton. The levels of support for siding with the voters are also interesting to note. It appears that councillors in Bristol are twice as likely to vote in this way (25.6%) as those in Merton (12%) and three times more likely than those in Hull (8.7%).

It is further worth noting the comparisons with the findings from MAELG large-n survey (Karlsson 2013, p. 99). Most apparent is the variation between the UK and Europe-wide means and those of the three cases. Indeed, the profiles of the three cases have much more in common with the profiles of other European countries than with the UK as a whole so that;

- The UK profile is 58% vote with own conviction, 25% vote with the party group, 17% vote with the voters;
- Merton's profile (28%/60%/12%) is most similar to Spain's profile (32%/56%/13%) that itself has the highest 'party soldier' score (56%) of any European country; Merton at 60% beats even this;
- Bristol's profile (61%/14%/26%) is more similar to Italy's (63%/18%/19%);
- and Hull's profile (48%/44%/9%) resembles Austria's (50%/39%/11%) most closely.

A third and a fourth question are summarised in Table 44 and Table 45. These questions were designed specifically for this research and sought to

understand councillor strategies for getting things done. From the first question (Table 44) it is apparent that councillors in Bristol had a stronger preference for working through the community (81.3%) than in Hull (69.2%) who had a stronger preference than those in Merton (53.6%). While these findings further support the existence of autonomy power models in Bristol and Hull and an authority model in Merton, there is clearly nothing approaching unanimity. Indeed, even in Merton, it seems that a majority of councillors might prefer to work through the community rather than work council wide.

Table 44 Councillor opinions about how they can make a difference across the cases

Councillors can a make a difference in a number of different ways. In your opinion, how can a Councillor make the biggest difference? Please select one			
	Response Percent (n)		
Answer Options	**Merton**	**Bristol**	**Hull**
Through work in the community that the councillor represents	53.6 (15)	81.3 (39)	69.2 (18)
Through work to change council wide policies	46.4 (13)	18.8 (9)	26.9 (7)
Through work that benefits the political party that the councillor is a member of	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	3.9 (1)

The fourth question sought to understand what strategies councillors would consider effective for achieving their aims (Table 45). The findings from this question, however, are less supportive of the conclusions about the different power models in the three different councils. Here Merton and Bristol look very similar and it is Hull that stands out. Perhaps the most notable difference is the lower level of inclination in Hull to work with the public, ranked the fourth most effective strategy for achieving the aims of councillors compared with the same option being ranked the most important option in Merton and the second most important in Bristol. One clear conclusion from Table 45 is that councillors in all three councils have low levels of confidence

when it comes to getting things done through council meetings or the party group compared to other routes.

Table 45 Councillor strategies for achieving their aims across the cases

Please indicate how effective you feel the following strategies are for councillors when working to achieve their aims:	**Merton n=28/60**	**Bristol n= 50/72**	**Hull n=29/59**
	Mean score (rank)		
Work with the relevant council officers	2.56 (2)	2.82 (1)	2.93 (1)
Work with the public to get support	2.74 (1)	2.72 (2)	2.03 (4)
Raise the issue with the relevant cabinet member	2.33 (3)	2.25 (3)	2.64 (2)
Raise the issue within the councillor's own local party group	2.19 (4)	2.24 (4)	2.39 (3)
Present a motion to a council meeting	1.36 (5)	1.69 (5)	1.82 (5)
Where 4=Extremely effective, 3=Very effective, 2=Moderately effective, 1=Slightly effective, 0=Not effective at all			

A final question, designed for the research, sought to gather councillor perceptions about why the public vote in the way that they do. Understanding councillor assumptions about voters is an important aspect of understanding their electoral strategies. Table 46 shows variations between the cases which support the differences in electoral strategy suggested previously. While councillors in Bristol and Hull rank solving community problems and service complaints as the most important consideration for the public when voting, in Merton political party and, to a lesser extent, the record of running the council, are ranked relatively higher. Councillors in Merton are a little more inclined to believe that party unity is important although, overall this does not seem to be an important factor compared with others. Similarly the degree to which the

councillor is seen to act independently and the councillor's support for public participation are low ranked across the cases.

Table 46 Councillor perceptions of public voting considerations across the cases

Please indicate how important you feel the following considerations are for the public when they vote in local elections:	**Merton n=27/60**	**Bristol n= 48/72**	**Hull n=28/59**
	Mean score	(rank)	
The ability of the candidate to solve problems in the community	2.85 (4)	3.23 (1)	3.38 (1)
The experience of having a personal complaint dealt with successfully by the candidate	2.96 (2)	3.10 (2)	3.25 (2)
The political party that a candidate belongs to	3.07 (1)	2.65 (3)	3.00 (3)
The extent to which the political party that the candidate represents has a good record of running the council	2.92 (3)	2.63 (4)	2.74 (4)
The extent to which the candidate supports greater public participation in local politics	2.19 (7)	2.54 (5)	2.41 (5)
The extent to which the candidate's political party is united	2.48 (5)	2.17 (7)	2.07 (6)
The extent to which the candidate has an independent opinion regardless of the policy of any party they may belong to	2.23 (6)	2.35 (6)	2.00 (7)
Where 4=of utmost importance, 3=of great importance, 2=of moderate importance, 1=of little importance, 0=not important at all			

In terms of the 'incompatibility theory', the evidence from the three cases broadly supports the claim that local governing codes are influential when it comes to councillor responses to participatory initiatives. The different electoral strategies and power models can be clearly associated with the institutional rules in evidence in each case. The existence of a locality effect was further evidenced by the findings from the survey. The comparison of the survey results with the results of the MAELG pan-European survey of councillors shows that there may be big variations between the preferences of councillors in a given locality and the preferences of councillors expressed as a

national average. This finding reinforces the need for situated analyses of local political behaviour and points to a limitation of large-n studies.

What the case studies also suggest is that while useful, the concept of the local governing code will need to be treated with care. Within the party groups there were a range of opinions and differences about the best ways to win elections and maintain power. In this context, if it is possible to describe a governing code then it is as a tendency within a group rather than as a clear direction shared by all. It may also be difficult to talk about electoral strategies and power models as always being conscious decisions. While this was certainly the case sometimes, for example Bristol's devolution agenda, there were other examples, such as the preference for elected management in Hull, that were more a case of 'this is the way we do things round here'. Hence it may be difficult to separate strategy from culture.

Having considered the locality effect present in the case studies it is now time to move to the most abstract level and to discuss what the findings say about the local political élite and about the posited Or Else logics as properties of that social structure. That will be the purpose of the next section.

8.4 Properties of the Local Political Élite in Evidence

One important claim of the 'incompatibility theory' is that the Or Else motivational logics of holding together, winning elections and governing competence are emergent properties of the local political élite. The case studies, therefore, provided an opportunity to examine that claim. Furthermore, as Sayer suggests; 'explaining why a certain mechanism exists involves discovering the nature of the structure or object which possess that mechanism or power' (Sayer 2000, p. 14). Hence observing how motivational logics play

out in case studies can help to shed light on the properties of the local political élites in those cases. For critical realists, however, such properties of social structures exist, however, in the realm of the real and cannot be directly observed. Instead their existence must be inferred from their effects and checked with relevant actors. The purpose of this section, therefore, is to consider the evidence for the posited Or Else logics and review what can be inferred about the local political élites in Merton, Bristol and Hull.

j. The Or Else logics of holding together, winning elections and governing competence were evident as powerful constraints on councillors

The existence of the posited Or Else motivational logics was evident in two ways. First they provided coherent explanations for the councillor responses to participatory initiatives. It was a straightforward exercise to construct institutional rules using the three Or Else logics suggested. Second, interviewees were asked directly about these motivational logics. In none of the interviews was their existence disputed nor was their association with councillor responses to the initiatives. While this evidence is far from being a 'smoking gun' it does lend credibility to the theory.

The need to hold the party group together was a prominent feature in all three cases. As has been suggested earlier, the power models adopted in the different cases were, in part at least, a response to the need to ensure group coherence. In Merton, the authority power model, with its high degree of central control was not only intended to support a borough wide approach to contesting elections, but also intended to stop back benchers 'walking off'. Similarly, in Bristol and Hull the autonomy power model reflected not only the desire to contest elections at the ward level but also a settlement between the leadership and backbenchers allowing the groups to function without

damaging internal conflict. Finding a way to work together was an important concern in all three cases.

In terms of winning elections the cases underlined the prevalence of this motivation. First it was apparent that this was a concern that affected councillors outside of formal election periods; vote seeking was an activity that needed to be conducted all year round and in years when elections were not taking place although the practice of election by thirds served only to heighten the level of electoral alertness. This sense of ongoing 'investment' in the electorate is captured by one of the survey responses:

> It is quite possible for a single candidate to "buck the trend" by his/her previous work. In my ward I was elected when others in my party were being beaten. I had a personal following linked to my party following. The personal following swayed the day. *Survey response, Hull*

A second linked observation is that vote seeking takes place in both the local, i.e. council wide arena, and the sub local, i.e. ward, arena simultaneously. While the activity in these different arenas can be reinforcing, tensions can also arise such as when constituents disagree with party group policy. Hence vote seeking can imply different things for group leaderships and backbenchers.

Similarly governing competence, in other words exercising power and influence, while a constant and challenging problem for all councillors, implied different things for those in leadership roles and those who were not. It is telling, for example, that so few councillors responding to the surveys saw the council wide mechanisms of presenting a motion to Council, talking to a Cabinet Member or even raising an issue at a group meeting as effective means of getting things done (see Table 45). The introduction of the Cabinet system, and the subsequent question of finding a role for backbenchers, was a

prominent issue in all three cases and provided the backdrop to discussions about participatory initiatives. The finding from the survey that 'working with the public' was perceived by councillors as the best was to get things done (see Table 45) supports the idea, suggested by Copus (2010), that councillors see public support as an important card to play when seeking influence over partner agencies and even council officers.

k. Cohesion is a different problem for local political élites than it is for their national counterparts

The case studies suggest that holding together represents a different challenge for local political élites than it does for their national counterparts. This is in part because, as illustrated above, the Or Else logic of holding together, at times, comes into conflict with both the winning elections and governing competence logics, both of which can create tensions between leaderships and backbenchers. This says something about the local political élite as a social structure; it suggests that cohesion is a negotiated state.

The existence of the autonomy power models observed in Bristol and Hull points to a lower degree of cohesion than might be found in national politics. At the same time, while local politics in Hull was explicitly described as factional by observers, the other two cases also displayed a diversity of councillor approaches to the business of local politics. Individual councillors were perhaps more influential than their national counterparts within their groups. The numbers involved suggest this should be the case; while a councillor has 1/30th influence with a local group, an MP has something more like 1/300th. Of more significance, perhaps, is the gravitational pull of the ward. Councillors are closer to their constituencies, which are smaller than those of MP's. Where elections are decided by 10s of votes rather than 100's small

groups can make a difference and demand attention. A concern to respond effectively to the community was reflected in the interviews:

> I'm sorry, but I think the link between Councillor and party is not as strong as the link between the MP and party, so I think that a lot of Councillors are very independent minded and so I think the influence the party can have is probably limited. *Councillor M*

All of which calls into question the extent to which local political élites can be described as unitary actors at all. As Frey argues, as well as demonstrating shared characteristics, groups must display behavioural cohesion if the status of unitary actor is to be claimed (1985). While accepting that 'few important group actors obtain perfect coordination among their members' behaviors all the time' (Frey 1985, p. 144), it was nevertheless apparent from the cases that local political élites may struggle to achieve coordination a lot of the time. However, again following Frey, as it is difficult to imagine smaller units that would provide a more effective analysis; the élite concept should still be applied.

These inferences about the local political élite represent the most abstract of the findings from the case studies and the final implications for the 'incompatibility theory' taken from the three case studies. The final section that follows will consider one further question namely 'did the fieldwork suggest situations in which the theory might not apply?'

8.5 Limits of the Theory

One further reason for undertaking the case studies was to determine what the limits of the 'incompatibility theory' might be. For critical realists the purpose of theory building is to not to establish general laws but rather to

specify the circumstances in which any given causal mechanism might be active. Throughout the fieldwork, therefore, evidence was sought of conditions in which the institutional rules found to be in evidence might not operate. The purpose of this section is to draw together that evidence.

l. High levels of public pressure and an established civic infrastructure are likely to promote the effectiveness of participatory initiatives

One theme common to all three case studies was that public pressure and the right civic infrastructure could have a significant influence on councillor responses to participatory initiatives. In Merton, for example, it was those Community Forums that attracted higher numbers of attendees that were maintained after resources were reduced. It was no coincidence that these were the areas where residents groups were established and able to provide proactive input. The social geography of the Borough created a dynamic whereby different parties had different experiences. In the north of the Borough attendance was significantly higher and organised residents groups played an important role. In the south, on the other hand, there was significantly less public interest. Hence the geography of the borough was felt to play an important role in the effectiveness of the Forums.

In Bristol there was a general perception amongst councillors that their city was a place with a relatively active citizenry and community sector. One suggested reason that the public engagement initiatives were working well in Bristol was partly to do with political will but also partly because of 'a reasonably switched on electorate, who expect to be able to have some involvement in the decision making' (Councillor M). It was in the Neighbourhood Partnerships that incorporated existing community organisations that the effect of public pressure was most obvious. In these

Partnerships councillors participated as partners and were less able to impose themselves as 'the boss' although these relationships were not without tensions. In contrast, in the areas where the Partnerships were newly introduced there was inevitably less pressure on councillors to work with the community in making decisions and the style of decision making was therefore down to the personality of the particular councillor.

In Hull, a high turnout at the Ward Forums was strongly associated by those interviewed with issues of public concern. The Wilkinson and Craig report (2004, p. 5), for example, referred to 'a contentious wheelie bin issue' as well as house demolition proposals and meetings of over 200 residents. They concluded that 'It was clear that when issues of real concern were being discussed, turnout grew exponentially' (Wilkinson and Craig 2004, p. 5). Similarly, councillors in the interviews referred to the surge in public involvement when the Ward Forums were used to consult residents on the transfer of council housing to a third sector body. These higher numbers placed a pressure on councillors to respond to public wishes that they found difficult to ignore. In Hull, however, there was not the same level of civic infrastructure that existed in Bristol. Outside of the big contentious issues, therefore, there was less pressure on the councillors to respond to public wishes and demands.

The implication is that the incompatibility between local politics and participatory initiatives may not apply where there is a switched on, organised and active citizenry. Public pressure may serve to counter the influence of Or Else motivational logics.

m. National government and political parties are unlikely to influence the effectiveness of participatory initiatives without significant incentives or sanctions

During the fieldwork interviewees were asked whether they thought that national government or political parties might influence the effectiveness of participatory initiatives in terms of their ability to shape council wide policy and decision making. Certainly, in all three cases, it was the influence of the Labour Government's modernisation agenda that has inspired the setting up of the different initiatives. It seemed plausible to suggest, therefore, that a concerted push by national government or political parties might influence the responses of local politicians to their respective participatory initiatives.

By the time of the fieldwork, however, the mood had changed significantly in all three cases with a strong sense from politicians on all sides that local government had seen more than enough top down initiatives. One councillor said 'my own belief is we don't need any more of that. I don't want to see any more formal guidance up from central Government saying you've got to do this, that or the other' (Councillor A). Another said: 'I really wish that government would get the hell out of local government... I have seen the power of local councils diminish under governments of different colour and I think it's a great shame' (Councillor D).

It seemed clear that any new initiatives that sought to enhance the impact of participatory initiatives would meet resistance from politicians on all sides unless they were underpinned by a punitive legal framework or significant financial incentives. Without such measures it seemed highly unlikely that new initiatives could affect the institutional rules that govern councillor behaviour.

Similarly the influence of the political parties on the attitudes and behaviours of the councillors towards the participatory initiatives seemed to be of little significance and appeared unlikely to become more so. Interview respondents pointed to the way in which politics operated 'with a small p rather than a large one' (Officer F) suggesting that the ideological concerns of national parties did not translate into differences between councillors on the ground. As one councillor suggested:

> I think that most Councillors are quite pragmatic about these things and even if their party is opposed to something, they probably just get on with what they've got to do anyway on the ground. It doesn't really make any difference what broad national policy or even local policy might be on it. *Councillor M*

At the same time it wasn't obvious to those interviewed how parties would enforce any given approach, how they might practice 'chasing up and checking' (Councillor B).

n. Close electoral competition appears to diminish the prospects for effective public participation

One important contextual condition was the close electoral competition present in each of the three cases. As noted in Chapter Four, Lowndes *et al.* have argued that such competition is likely to make political élites more amenable to public participation (Lowndes *et al.* 2002, p. 3), however this was not evident from the three cases. Indeed, close electoral competition diminished the impact on the participatory initiatives in question. In Merton, the close balance of the council and the perception that elections would always be closely fought meant that both of the main political parties were highly sensitive to any contentious political issues. This goes some way to explain the

emphasis upon party management and may have intensified the feeling that the Community Forums should be kept away from 'normal' party politics.

In Bristol, the unstable leadership of the Council, a consequence of close electoral competition, influenced the devolution agenda which in turn limited the ability of the Neighbourhood Partnerships to deal with city wide issues. Similarly, in Hull, antagonistic party politics, characterised by the 'slug fest' of council meetings, made it difficult to deal with the outcomes of participation centrally. At the same time, the practice of election by thirds in both Bristol and Hull, served to ensure that electoral 'battle stations' were observed almost continuously which in turn contributed to a focus on solving community problems and service complaints in the Neighbourhood Partnerships and Ward Forums at the expense of more strategic discussions.

The implication is that participation initiatives may need distance from closely fought elections if they are to have an impact council wide. This might happen in two ways. It might happen in areas where one party dominates council wide but where smaller parties do not feel challenged in their respective wards. In this context the outcomes from participation may be seen as less of a threat. The wider implication for local democracy in such a benign local state might not be so appealing. A second scenario is for elections to take place less often and certainly not by thirds. Again, the implications for local accountability might not be attractive.

One further possibility is that effective participation becomes part of the narrative of local elections. In this scenario voters demand that their politicians not only facilitate effective participation but act upon the outcomes. Councillors in the three cases, however, did not believe that the public were interested in this as an issue. While the initiatives in the three cases were not

considered as appropriate by councillors to feature in their respective campaigns, the survey data shows that councillors perceive that their ability to promote public participation is not an important consideration for voters (Table 46).

8.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to draw together the findings from the three cases studies and to set out the implications for the 'incompatibility theory' elaborated in Chapter Three. In total 14 findings have been discussed as follows:

Summary of Key Findings

a. The case studies reveal a diversity of institutional rules, which explain councillor behaviour, across and between the cases

b. The Party Unity, Representative Status and Councillor Utility rules were all in evidence although not in all of the cases and not in the same form

c. Three rules not suggested by the theory were in evidence; Party Politics, Devolved Politics and Devolved Participation

d. Seven different limiting councillor behaviours, both intended and unintended, were observed

e. Five different types of trigger were associated with the limiting behaviours of councillors although different combinations of triggers were found in each case

f. In Order To motivational logics provided viable alternative explanations for a number of behaviours and particularly those associated with representative status

g. As It Is Right That motivational logics provided viable alternative explanations for a number of behaviours and particularly those associated with representative status

h. While the three case studies each presented a unique mix of motivational logics, Or Else logics were the most prominent type

i. Local governing codes had a powerful influence on the operation of institutional rules in each of the three cases

j. The Or Else logics of holding together, winning elections and governing competence were evident as powerful constraints on councillors

k. Cohesion is a different problem for local political élites than it is for their national counterparts

l. High levels of public pressure and an established civic infrastructure are likely to promote the effectiveness of participatory initiatives

m. National government and political parties are unlikely to influence the effectiveness of participatory initiatives without significant incentives or sanctions

n. Close electoral competition appears to diminish the prospects for effective public participation

Broadly speaking these findings support the credibility of the theory. While the evidence from the case studies does not indicate the need for major revisions, some refinements are suggested. First, it is probably wrong to say that local governing codes are 'adopted' by local political élites. This suggests an active decision that is not always taken. Rather it is better to say that local political élites acquiesce to, or fall in with, local governing codes. Second, the experience of the case studies suggests a greater diversity of institutional rules than was proposed by the theory. Whereas three categories of institutional rule were originally proposed in Chapter Three, a total of 13 have been elaborated in the Chapter. Given that these are the findings from only three cases a greater diversity still might be expected. As only the Representative Status and Councillor Utility rules were found to be in evidence across the three cases these can be referred to as the most likely to be found. Third, a further claim can be added that highlights the importance of the strategies and norms, with their different motivational logics, operating alongside the relevant institutional rules.

It is now possible to state the 'incompatibility theory' as a set of four claims:

1. Or Else motivational logics are powerful constraints on local political actors. They are clearly understood sanctions that derive from a social structure. It is these Or Else logics that shape councillor responses to participatory initiatives;

2. The Or Else motivational logics that shape the responses of councillors to participatory initiatives are emergent properties of the local political élite specifically the need to hold together, the need to win elections and the need to gain and maintain power;

3. 'Or Else' motivational logics can only be understood in the context of a given locality; they are translated through the local governing codes that local political élites acquiesce to;

4. Diverse configurations of behaviour, trigger and Or Else motivational logic, explain councillors' responses to participatory initiatives; the representative status and councillor utility rules are the most common;

Having drawn together the findings from the case studies and set out the implications for the 'incompatibility theory', the final task is to provide a conclusion to the thesis. That will be the purpose of the final chapter that follows.

9. Conclusion

> All our wisdom consists in servile prejudices. All our practices are only subjection, impediment, and constraint. Civil man is born, lives, and dies in slavery. At his birth he is sewed in swaddling clothes; at his death he is nailed in a coffin. So long as he keeps his human shape, he is enchained by our institutions.
>
> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, 1762 (Rousseau and Bloom 1979, pp. 42-43)

This thesis has addressed the question of why the outcomes from local government sponsored participatory initiatives have had such limited impact on local policy and decision making. This question follows from the simple observation that the participatory initiatives sponsored and managed by UK local government have made little impression to date. Over the last half a century, an abundance of time, effort and resource have failed to achieve the impact that policy makers and practitioners had sought. In resolving this question it might be possible to decide whether a more participative future is a realistic prospect for UK local government. When it comes to the prospects for participatory initiatives to have a genuine impact are there grounds for optimism or is the case for pessimism stronger?

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to capture the contribution made by this thesis in respect of this question and the subsequent implications. It will set out how this contribution has been made and, in doing so, it will provide the 'so what and what next?' for the research. The chapter will proceed in five stages. First the primary contribution will be assessed. In particular this section will consider what a theoretically developed and empirically tested

incompatibility conjecture means for the problematic relationship between local government and public participation initiatives. The secondary contributions to a number of related literatures, engaged with during the course of the research, will then be briefly elaborated. The first two of these are the literatures around the conjectures approach proposed by Klijn and Skelcher (2007) and the Institutional Grammar Tool developed by Crawford and Ostrom (1995; Ostrom 2005). Following this, contributions to élite theories and empirical studies of local politics will then be highlighted. In the third section the implications for policy and practice will be considered. A fourth section will provide suggestions for future research before a final short section presents some concluding remarks from the author about the experience of conducting the research. First, however the primary contribution of the thesis, and how it was arrived at, will be outlined.

9.1 Primary Contribution

While the problematic relationship between local government and participatory initiatives can be explained in a number of different ways, the assumption of policy makers and practitioners, as well as many academics, has been that institutional design is the key; with the right level of commitment, expertise and experimentation, the failure of initiatives to have a significant impact can be overcome (Prior *et al.* 1995). Indeed, shortly after the introduction of the local government modernisation agenda in the UK, Lowndes *et al.* (2001, p. 214) were able to point to 'a commitment and enthusiasm across local government for innovation in this area' demonstrating 'a sense of ownership within individual authorities of the democratic possibilities'. Without downplaying the barriers, the optimists seemingly had every right to feel confident.

However, despite the high levels of commitment, expertise and experimentation evident over the last decade or so the impact of participatory initiatives has remained limited. This research suggests that there are other explanations for this limited impact beyond the challenging nature of participatory practice. It challenges the optimistic view and suggests that the barriers to a hybrid of representative and participatory democracy may be extremely difficult to overcome, if not insurmountable. Specifically it suggests that the élite structures of local politics may provide the biggest challenge of all. It supports those who have previously argued that, barring radical change, the expectations of those advocating extra electoral public participation in local government may need to be reduced (Pratchett 1999a; Wilson 1999).

This research has challenged the optimistic view in two ways. The first was to draw out from the literature credible alternative positions; namely the incompatibility, instrumental and resistivity conjectures. Each of these conjectures, being founded upon coherent assumptions and empirical evidence, provided an explanation at odds with the more orthodox transitional conjecture. In undertaking this exercise in Chapter Two, the argument was not that the optimistic, transitional position should be rejected but rather to point to the credibility of the alternatives.

The second way that this research has challenged the transitional conjecture was to develop the incompatibility conjecture in a comprehensive way; something that had not been done previously. Chapter Three set out a theory of this conjecture. Chapters Four, Five, Six, Seven and Eight told the story of how that theory was tested and refined through three longitudinal case studies in Merton, Bristol and Hull. Following this fieldwork, and

notwithstanding some refinement, the 'incompatibility theory' was found to stand up under scrutiny.

In seeking to explore and develop the 'incompatibility theory' the research sought to lay bare the mechanics of how and why councillors limit the impact of participatory initiatives. In this sense the research has sought to look inside the black box of local politics. By using the Institutional Grammar Tool it has been possible to identify 13 separate institutional rules in evidence and to highlight additional institutional strategies and norms. Through the identification of Or Else motivational logics, a connection has been made between the councillor behaviours responsible for limiting the impact of participatory initiatives and the social structures associated with élite local politics. Even if the strength of this connection is questioned, the research nevertheless offers insights into the forces shaping the actions of local politicians in the participatory problem setting.

What this research does not do, however, is to offer a proof for the incompatibility conjecture. The weight of evidence; one study using three cases, is not sufficient to provide definitive conclusions. Furthermore, what critical realist research offers is a specification of how certain mechanisms are likely to operate in given contexts; not general laws that will cover all cases. Rather the suggestion here is that the incompatibility conjecture is theoretically credible and can provide a satisfying explanation when applied to individual cases in the UK. While certainly not the only game in town, this research suggests that 'incompatibility' may well be a sufficient explanation for the limited impact of local government sponsored participatory initiatives.

9.2 Secondary Contributions

While the primary contribution of this thesis has been concerned with the local government and public participation literature a number of other contributions have been made. The purpose of this section is to briefly outline four secondary contributions.

9.2.1 Contribution to the conjectures approach

In drawing out different positions from the literature as to why the relationship between local government and participatory initiatives is so problematic, the conjectures approach was used as the framework of analysis (see Chapter Two). Conjectures can be used to problematise in theory the relationship between two arenas of practice that might seem commonplace to actors in their day to day experience. In essence they are *a priori* theoretical framing devices that between them provide the universe of possibilities within which explanations can be located (Klijn and Skelcher 2007; Jeffares and Skelcher 2009). As noted above, by organising the local government and public participation literature into the transitional, incompatibility, instrumental and resistivity conjectures it was possible to highlight the orthodox nature of the transitional conjecture and the potential for development of the incompatibility conjecture.

In using this approach the thesis has contributed to an emerging tool for analysis. First, by using conjectures to explore a different relationship to that considered by Klijn and Skelcher, who first used it to explore the relationship between democracy and governance networks (2007), the wider applicability of the approach has been demonstrated. Second, the conjectures have been used here in a way that more explicitly refers to underlying assumptions and

traditions in social science in order to connect empirical propositions to wider theoretic positions than was the case with the original use. Third, the instrumental conjecture, first proposed by Klijn and Skelcher, has been recast to a certain extent and pointed towards the importance of macro socio-economic factors and a Marxist analysis. Fourth, a new 'resistivity' conjecture has been added to the menu of conjectures which emphasises post structuralist ideas and the importance of factors at the micro level in understanding a particular relationship. Taken together it is hoped that these contributions can add to the development and use of Klijn and Skelcher's conjectures approach.

The conjectures approach opens up possibilities but it also has limitations. The conjectures are heuristic framing devices, not full blown theories. What they provide is a starting point for the further careful work that is needed to develop their internal theoretical relationships (Klijn and Skelcher 2007). Each has the potential to be developed and of course critiqued. Ultimately their further use and development in any field will depend on their initial credibility.

9.2.2 Contribution to the Institutional Grammar Tool

A second analytical tool that has been utilised for this research is Crawford and Ostrom's Institutional Grammar Tool (1995; Ostrom 2005). This tool provides a parsimonious means of organising a diversity of institutional understandings into a single manageable framework and offers insights into the way in which institutions shape the behaviour of political actors (see ***APPENDIX B***). The suggestion here is that, while the broad thrust of Ostrom's work on institutions has been widely appreciated in the local government literature, the Grammar of Institutions itself has received little attention. While this is also broadly the case in the wider politics literature there has been some

recent interest in applying the Tool in disciplines such as policy analysis (Siddiki *et al.* 2011). There is a growing literature around the use of the Institutional Grammar Tool (for example Schlüter and Theesfeld 2010; Ostrom and Basurto 2011; Siddiki *et al.* 2011) and the broader Institutional Analysis and Development Framework in which it sits (Blomquist and deLeon 2011; McGinnis 2011). This thesis has sought to contribute to that literature in three ways as follows.

First, by applying the Institutional Grammar Tool to a new field, that of local politics, this research demonstrates a wider application. Local politics has distinctive features and concerns to which the Tool can be applied. This research has shown how institutional statements can be used to capture the formal and informal conventions that have previously been observed by local government scholars (Grant 1971; Saunders 1976). Furthermore, the Tool allows the 'rational' goal seeking motivations of politicians (Searing 1994; Strøm 1997) to be considered within the same framework as those 'particular sets of norms which underlie relevant legislative behaviour' (Wahlke 1962, p. 8). Hence Crawford and Ostrom's (1995) idea of capturing institutional diversity within a single framework has been shown to have a particular benefit within the local politics field and that of representative politics more widely.

As well as demonstrating a wider application, this research has also sought to add to the Tool. The first of these contributions is broadly presentational. A more simplified way of using the Tool than that originally proposed by Crawford and Ostrom has been offered. By breaking down institutional statements into three sub components; behaviours, triggers and motivational logics these statements can be presented in a simpler and more user friendly way. The original scheme divides institutional statements into six

syntactic components; the attribute, the deontic, the aim, the conditions, the or else and the object. While these components are a fundamental aspect of the tool, the benefit of the simplification is that institutional statements can be communicated more easily to those unfamiliar with the details of the scheme.

A further, more technical contribution to the use of the Institutional Grammar Tool is the addition of the In Order To and As It Is Right That motivational logics. While the original scheme requires that the Or Else logic is stated for rules it does not require that a similar logic is stated for either strategies or norms. While these additional motivations may be superfluous in terms of the Tool as originally stated they allow more detail to be provided within institutional statements which, as a result, carry more explanatory power.

Finally, by underpinning the Institutional Grammar Tool with the assumptions of critical realism the thesis provides an example of how the Tool can be given explanatory depth. Although associated with rational choice approaches the Institutional Grammar Tool is intended to be neutral in terms of underpinning assumptions; the researcher may apply their own preferences. Here the suggestion has been that the motivational logics captured within institutional statements are causal mechanisms as critical realists would understand them (Sayer 2000). Furthermore, such statements parallel the context-mechanism-outcome configurations developed by Pawson and Tilley (1997) to explain social phenomena.

9.2.3 Contribution to élite theories of local government

While the term local political élite is often used its use is rarely underpinned by clearly described concepts or explicit theoretic assumptions

(Woods 1998). There is plenty of scope, therefore, for élite analyses of local government to be developed and explored. This thesis has provided a number of contributions in this area.

First, the research has shown that the conceptual framework developed by Jim Bulpitt to describe UK national government can be adapted to provide a satisfying account of local élite politics. Bulpitt's notion of the centre and the linked concept of statecraft have been used to redescribe local politics. This has meant placing the importance of holding the party group together, winning elections and achieving governing competence centre stage as an explanation for political behaviour at the expense of ideas and ideology. At the same time the élite approach has been given theoretic depth through the introduction both of critical realist assumptions and an institutionalist framework (see Buller (1999) for a discussion of Bulpitt's compatibility with the former and Bradbury (2010) for a discussion of compatibility with the latter). While statecraft and its associated concepts may be far from a perfect fit for local politics there is nevertheless much that can be read across from the national to the local.

Perhaps the most valuable conceptual innovation of a Bulpittian approach to local politics offered here is that of the local governing code. This concept and its associated language of electoral strategies and power models provide a useful analytical tool for local government scholars to use. Local governing codes provide a means for analysing the choices that local élites are able to make in the context of structures that limit their room for manoeuvre and in the face of the challenges that they have to face. For this research, thinking about local governing codes led to important insights from the fieldwork and provided a parsimonious means of capturing the locality effect of local politics.

Finally, some limitations and difficulties of using élite approaches have also been highlighted. Bulpitt's notion of the centre in particular may not be easily applied to local political groups. The small size of local political élites compared to their national counterparts in itself marks a significant difference as does the consequently greater influence of the individual within those groups. Moreover, this research has raised questions about the extent to which local political élites demonstrate behavioural cohesion and whether they can be described as unitary actors at all. Choices have been made that others might disagree with. Nevertheless, by offering one interpretation of élite local politics this thesis seeks to lay down a marker in a sub field that has been little explored to date.

9.2.4 Contribution to case studies of local politics

As well as the theoretic contribution highlighted above, this thesis presents an empirical contribution that is intended to be of value in its own right. Three longitudinal case studies of co-governance initiatives in local government settings have been described in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. As well as telling the 10 year story of a participatory initiative, each study has said something about the local political environment in which the initiatives operated as well as the interactions between the two. These interactions have been carefully mapped as institutional statements which have in turn provided the foundation for describing why, in each case, the impact of participatory initiatives on council wide policy and decision making has been limited. The case studies, then, have been undertaken using an explicitly institutionalist framework and provide an example of how such empirical work can shed light on wider theoretical questions. As Lowndes and Roberts have argued, 'the

greatest theoretical leverage is to be gained by studying the institutional frameworks within which political actors operate' (2013, p. 7).

These cases should also have wider value for those interested in the way in which local government adopts and adapts central government policy. They provide insights into to the way in which the Labour Government's modernisation agenda, with its introduction of the cabinet system and its intended reform of the councillor role, has taken shape on the ground. Furthermore they provide examples of local councils and local politicians getting to grips more widely with the public participation agenda.

The empirical research in this thesis has also pointed to how situated case studies can complement large-n studies. The use of a question on voting preferences from the MAELG survey (see Table 43 in Chapter Eight), for example, illustrated both the limited value of national averages when talking about the political cultures of different councils but also the value of such survey tools when it comes to gauging such cultures. Once again the importance of finding methods of capturing the locality effect of local politics was highlighted.

Finally, and in the broadest terms, the case studies presented here contribute to a wider tradition of work that seeks to understand problems of local politics holistically and in context. While Cockburn's *Local State* (1977) dealt explicitly with local government and participatory initiatives others have reflected more generally on the issue of public participation at the local level notably Hampton (1970), Dearlove (1973), Newton (1976) and Saunders (1983). As Laffin (2008) has argued, these studies remain important for the way in which they highlight the realities of local political life. While it is not claimed that the case studies presented here represent scholarly work on the level of

those cited above, they nevertheless provide contributions to the library of local government case studies available to researchers.

9.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

While the overall tone of this conclusion has been one of pessimism the possibility of a more positive future for local government sponsored participatory initiatives is not entirely closed down. Indeed, for the critical realist, the future does not necessarily follow from the past. As Sayer has argued: 'Because events are not pre-determined before they happen but depend on contingent conditions, the future is open' (2000, p. 15). The research has suggested some avenues that advocates of public participation might explore. Therefore, following Stoker's (2012) advice, that research should be solution focused, this section offers some directions that might be explored; first for policy makers and then for practitioners.

The main implication of this research for those national policy makers who advocate greater public participation in local government is that initiatives cannot be introduced in isolation; the policy context needs to be right. As the gatekeepers between initiatives and policy and decision making councillors need to be willing and able to transmit outcomes into wider democratic processes. The constraints associated with élite local politics are, however, difficult to overcome. The need to hold the party group together, the need to win elections and the need to find effective ways of governing have more influence over councillor behaviours than the participatory impulses that individuals might have. What policy makers need to do, therefore, is introduce new structural elements into the participatory arena that counteract the influence of these mechanisms and change the structure of incentives and

sanctions. National policy makers do have the ability to do this if they wish; they can change the formal rules of the game.

What changes could be made? First policy makers could consider financial levers. The Bristol case provided the example of government funded regeneration initiatives acting as an important incentive to operate community involvement structures. Linking grant money with initiatives and formally monitoring impact as a condition might provide a powerful incentive. A second strategy would be to introduce legal mechanisms as is the case in many places outside of the UK (Gaventa 2006). Several interviewees in the case studies pointed to the way that a greater use of petitions had been brought about by a change in the law. Again, consideration would need to be given to both monitoring and enforcement. A third approach, complementary to the previous two, would be to place effective public participation at the heart of performance monitoring. Although the power of this lever has been diminished by the abolition of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in England, the significant responses of Councils such as Hull to criticism coming through this type of process demonstrates the potential influence it can have.

More fundamentally national policy makers could consider the formal institutional structures of local government. This research has pointed to the important influence both of elections and of the way that decision making is organised through the cabinet system. Where backbench councillors have responsibility for facilitating participation initiatives, closeness to constituencies pulls councillors towards dealing with community and service problems at the expense of more strategic concerns. At the same time many councillors are perpetually on election battle stations, particularly in areas where there are elections by thirds, and this creates an electoral gravity that is difficult to escape

from. It may be that a different electoral system, perhaps one using party lists, might serve to counteract this. The difficulty here is that such systems strengthen the hand of the party leadership as they become the 'selectorate' that individual councillors need to appease if they are to be included on party lists. Perhaps the best that can be hoped for is to dilute the effects of elections both by removing the option for 'election by thirds' and by introducing larger, multi-member wards that reduce the significance of highly local issues and individual complaints during elections. On these grounds perhaps Single Transferable Vote would be the 'least worst' system. As Farrell (1998) argues, it is a system that diminishes the power of party élites while giving voters the chance to consider both the parties and the individual candidates when making their choices.

At the same time, the cabinet system, introduced to make decision making more efficient, has emphasised the difference between group leadership and backbenchers with the latter feeling more excluded from policy making processes. If backbenchers could be given more of a role, perhaps through parliamentary style law making processes, then perhaps their engagement with the public on more strategic matters would be more meaningful.

While national policy makers can change the formal rules of the game, for practitioners operating in local government settings the challenge is to play the game more effectively. This means working with the prevailing institutional strategies, norms and rules in play in any given local setting. A number of practical measures are suggested by this research. While it may be difficult, and potentially inappropriate, to influence councillors directly, practitioners do have control in two areas; first they can advise on the

institutional design of initiatives and second they can work to build up the civic infrastructure that might support initiatives. Each will be considered in turn.

Thinking about the élite aspects of local politics can help the designers of participatory initiatives to ensure that they work with the grain of local politics. The Institutional Grammar Tool can be used to provide an assessment of the prevailing rules, norms and strategies or, at the very least; conversations with councillors can provide a vital source of intelligence at the design stage of participatory initiatives. More specifically the potential triggers for limiting councillor behaviours can be addressed at this point. Through the research the following five triggers have been identified for the limiting behaviours of councillors:

1. Where the initiative presents a threat to group cohesion by, for example, highlighting differences between community wishes and group policy;

2. Where the initiative has insufficient democratic legitimacy because there are too few attending, because those attending are unrepresentative of the community or because no elected representatives are involved;

3. Where the initiative is perceived as a 'talking shop', in other words, nothing is seen to be happening as a result of meetings;

4. Where the initiative has the potential to provide political opportunities for opponents where this is unwanted by councillors; and

5. Where the initiative is seen to be dominated by professionals so that councillors either feel that they have been sidelined or feel that they should take sides with the community against the professionals.

By carefully considering the characteristics of initiatives it may be possible to reduce the extent to which they trigger negative reactions from councillors.

A second way that practitioners might improve the impact of participatory initiatives is by improving the civic infrastructure that sits underneath them. The research has suggested that public pressure is perhaps the mechanism most likely to counteract the élite constraints acting on councillors. The Merton case illustrated how an organised civic infrastructure, namely residents associations, had a powerful influence upon councillors. In Bristol the councillors felt obliged to work with community established partnerships when setting up the Neighbourhood Partnerships. Even in Hull, where organised community groups did not appear to feed into the Ward Forums, organised pressure, such as that associated with tenants' issues, for example, was recognised by those interviewed as influential. The message here, therefore, is that investment in the civic infrastructure feeding into initiatives is perhaps at least as important as the design of the initiatives themselves. This echoes Barnes *et al.'s* assertion that democratic renewal through public participation is 'more likely to occur in forums that had their roots in social movements, community activism and service user struggles' (2007, p. 204).

Finally, the case studies highlighted examples of councillors willing to buck the trend. By seeking out and working with these individuals practitioners may be able to develop new institutional frameworks. One of the Hull councillors, for example, had been instrumental in developing their Ward

Forum into a 'Ward Conference' for the area that mixed problem solving with priority setting while experimenting with different participatory techniques to get the public involved. Priorities developed through these conferences were then championed by the Area Committee. While only one example, it did suggest that the right mix of norms, electoral strategy and power model, in this case those associated with the Liberal Democrats, might create an environment conducive to a participative style of representation enacted thought co-governance initiatives. As the councillor in question put it:

> I think it's partly my values, which is I very much agree with localism and making decision at the lowest level that is physically possible, if you like and people having a say in what affects them in their local area and whilst I would say that's something that I've always believed in, I do also think it's a very Lib Dem thing, so those two things. I don't know how you separate those two things. [Laughs]. *Councillor V*

Again, this supports the conclusions of Barnes *et al.* who argue that political renewal rests in part with 'those leading change within public service organisations – to challenge the dominant rules and norms and to question the ways in which the rules of the game are defined' (2007, p. 201). Within the context of local politics, however, the suggestion of this research is that such challenges need to provide new electoral strategies and power models for local politicians that are consistent with public participation. The challenge for practitioners, therefore, is to work with the councillors who offer such innovations.

9.4 Avenues for Future Research

As well as suggestions for policy makers and practitioners a number of areas for future research have been suggested. The purpose of this short section is to briefly highlight four of these avenues.

The first avenue for future research would be case studies of participatory initiatives that do have a significant impact upon local policy and decision making. Such counterfactual examples could provide an important challenge to the 'incompatibility theory' and point to the conditions in which it does not apply. Such examples were sought but not found in the course of conducting this research. As this research had a UK focus and looked only at co-governance initiatives it may be profitable to examine different types of initiative in international contexts such as, for example participatory budgeting. The aim, as with this research, would be to explore the responses of local politicians and the rules, norms and strategies that shape those responses.

Linked to this, a second avenue to explore would be a comparative analysis of co-governance initiatives in an international context. Studying similar participatory innovations to those considered here in different cultural and social economic contexts might provide useful insights into the relationship between structure and context when it comes to the relationship between local politics and such initiatives. As John (2006) has suggested, local government research lends itself well to this type of comparative research.

A third line of research flowing from this thesis relates to the further use of the Institutional Grammar Tool in local government settings. The use of the tool for this research has provided valuable insights within the participatory 'problem setting' and its application could add value in other arenas where the

practice of representation can be problematic such as, for example, governance networks and central local relations. As well as the benefits for research in these areas, further application will help refine the tool and improve its applicability in a local political context.

A final avenue for future research is to apply the local governing code concept to further explore the locality effect for local politics. This effect, observed previously (Carmichael 1994; Lowndes *et al.* 2006a), is an important aspect of local government continuity and change. The local governing code concept represents a parsimonious way to capture this locality effect. It might be used by local government scholars to explore research problems where a diversity of local government responses is a significant factor such as, for example, the 'diverse yet limited' impact of the political leadership reforms associated with the UK local government modernisations reforms (Lowndes and Leach 2004). As with the Institutional Grammar Tool, as well as providing insights, further use of the local governing code concept will further its refinement and applicability.

9.5 Concluding Remarks

This final section concludes the thesis with a few personal observations on the process of completing the research and the impact it has had on the author; both as an academic and as a practitioner working in local government. This thesis has been completed part time over seven years and time has been dedicated to it as far as a full time job, working as a scrutiny manager for a local council, would allow.

In terms of the process, many of the most valuable insights and 'breakthroughs' have come from presenting papers at departmental seminars

and, in particular, academic conferences. From a practitioner perspective, a great deal has been gained from attending several Public Administration Committee and Political Studies Association conferences as well as one European Group for Public Administration conference. Some of the most useful ideas have come from listening to other people's presentations even where these have not been obviously relevant to this thesis. At the same time, informal conversations at these events and the subsequent advice and help that people have generously provided have been invaluable. The importance of academic social capital has certainly become evident over the period of undertaking the research.

This engagement with the academic world has also had an impact upon practice. Direct benefits have included being able to draw academics into work projects, seminars and conferences that have directly benefitted the author's own council. There certainly appears to be plenty of scope for more joint work of this type with value both for the academics and the councils involved. While local government often regards 'academic' as a dirty word, in these challenging times it needs to draw on all the resource and help that it can. At the same time local government academics are concerned to ensure that their work is both grounded and impactful. More collaboration between local government and academic institutions feels to be something worthy of further development.

Engagement with academia has changed the way that research problems are approached in the author's full time work. Partly this is reflected in a greater concern to state methods and assumptions but there is a more general change. While local government, by and large, expects officers to be experts; to provide succinct answers to any presenting problems, the onus in academia is more upon critical reflection. Paradoxically, then the process of completing a

thesis has given the confidence to be less of an expert; to be able to say "I don't know" when this in fact the case.

Finally, one of the reasons for undertaking this particular research was an interest in what shapes the behaviour of councillors; people that the author works with directly on most days. The experience of meeting and interviewing councillors in different council settings, and the opportunity to reflect on this experience has reinforced thoughts that existed prior to the research. The first is that, when you get down to the level of individual councillors, it is very difficult to generalise. Each councillor has their own set of circumstances and personal beliefs. It is only when you 'zoom out' to the politics of the council groups that patterns begin to emerge. The second reflection is that councillors, on the whole, want to change the world for the better and to make a difference for their communities. They do not come into politics to win elections or to achieve governing competence; these are means to an end that become necessities and then constraints. To borrow from Rousseau; councillors come free into local politics but everywhere they are in chains.

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Appendices

A. The Implications of Critical Realism for the Research

The philosophical foundations underpinning this research are the assumptions of critical realism. The purpose of this appendix is to set out these ontological and epistemological assumptions and their implications.

Critical Realist Explanation

Critical realism, associated primarily with the work of Roy Bhaskar (Blaikie 2000), proposes a 'stratified ontology' whereby the real, the actual and empirical are clearly differentiated domains of existence. For critical realism; the domain of the real is independent of our knowledge of it and includes the 'structures and powers of objects'; the actual refers to 'what happens if and when those powers are activated, to what they do and what eventuates when they do'; and the empirical refers to the 'domain of experience', in other words, 'what we know' (Sayer 2000, p. 12). Some structures may not be observable but we can infer their existence by reference to 'observable effects which can only be explained as the products of such entities' (Sayer 2000, p. 12). Social reality, therefore, flows from material but unobservable social structures (Blaikie 2000).

Critical realism rejects a Humean concept of causation that places centre stage the search for regularities from which general laws can be induced as 'what causes something to happen has nothing to do with the number of times we have observed it happening' (Sayer 2000, p. 14). Instead explanation depends on 'identifying causal mechanisms and how they work, and discovering if they have been activated and under what conditions' and 'discovering the nature of the structure or object which possesses that mechanism or power' (Sayer 2000, p. 14). The critical realist researcher is

interested in 'how, for whom, and in what circumstances particular mechanisms generate particular outcomes' (Smith 2010, p. 45). Importantly causal mechanisms can produce different results under different conditions and different causal mechanisms can produce the same results.

Prediction is impossible because social phenomena operate in open rather than closed systems that are complex and themselves unpredictable. As Blaikie argues:

> These structures and mechanisms are nothing more than the tendencies or power of things to act in a particular way. The capacity of a thing to exercise its powers, or the likelihood that it will, depends on whether or not the circumstances are favourable. (Blaikie 2000, p. 108)

The relationship between structure, context and events are summarised in Figure 4 below.

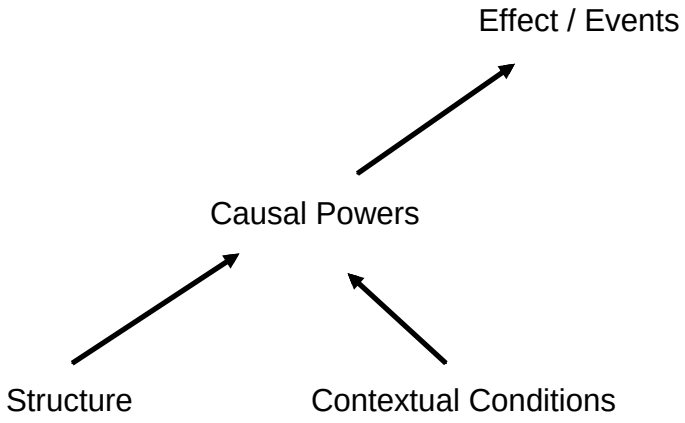

Figure 4 Critical realist explanation from Sayer (2000)

The interplay between structure and agency is also an essential element of critical realism. Within this approach there is a refusal to privilege either structure or agency, or to conflate the two. Rather the aim is 'to develop a

model that accounts for both the constraints due to the structures that actors must face and their freedom of action, it is necessary to recognize the ontological specifities of both actions and structures' (Leca and Naccache 2006, p. 269). Social structures exist prior to human action but actors both reproduce and change social structures. Structure and agency are separate entities that are nevertheless locked in a dynamic relationship (Leca and Naccache 2006, p. 631). In other words; 'people make history, though not in conditions of their own choosing' (Pawson and Tilley 1997, p. 72).

Implications for Theory Building

Critical realist assumptions imply a research process that draws on both abductive and retroductive modes of inference in order to build satisfying explanatory theory (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Blaikie 2000; Danermark *et al.* 2002). Abduction refers to a process whereby the researcher takes known phenomena and recontextualises them within a new or alternative conceptual framework. This can also be understood as a process of theoretical redescription that considers and integrates alternative theories where possible (Danermark *et al.* 2002). Retroduction , on the other hand, refers to the process of postulating what conditions must be present for certain phenomena to exist (Danermark *et al.* 2002). For critical realists this means drawing on previous research to identify potential causal mechanisms, while carefully considering what conditions they may be active in, the nature of the structures that give rise to these mechanisms, and the elements of context that may trigger them (Sayer 2000; Smith 2010, p. 45). As opposed to much of social and natural science, theory building is the first stage of the research process.

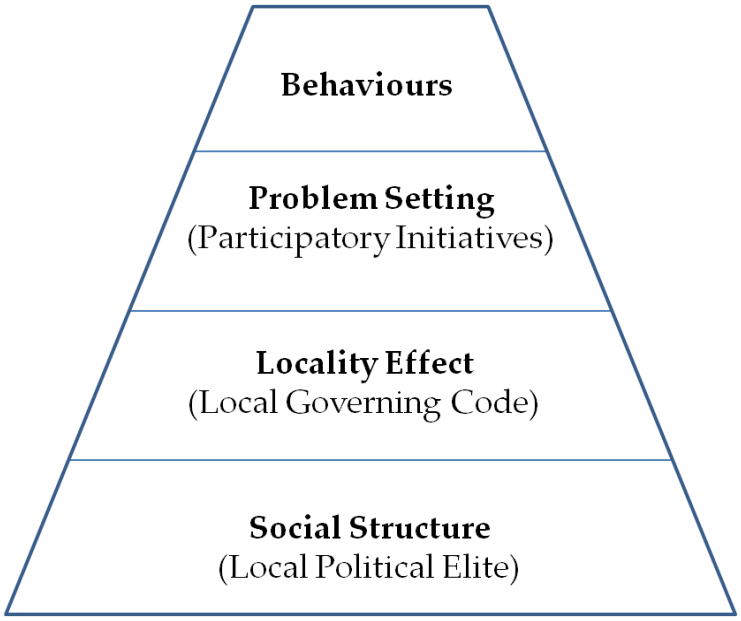

Figure 5 The four levels of theory building

The theory building process itself starts with the abstract and descends to the concrete at which point testable hypotheses can be established (Danermark *et al.* 2002). As show in Figure 5 the process of theory building followed here has four levels. First the general properties of the social structure under consideration are posited. Following this, consideration is given to how these properties may be affected by the locality within which they operate. Next the conditions associated with the relevant problem setting are set out before the causal mechanisms responsible for the behaviours under study can be specified. For the purposes of this research the social structure is the local political élite, the locality effect the local governing code and the problem setting is that of participatory initiatives.

The use of the term 'specified' is important here. The aim of critical realist inquiry is 'specification' rather than 'generalisation'. This reflects both the importance of context for realist enquiry and the realist doubt that, given the complex and changing nature of social reality, social knowledge can be

anything more than transitory and context specific (Pawson and Tilley 1997, p. 86). Social science cannot, therefore, be predictive. Working through the four levels of theory building represents stages of increased specification. The 'best explanations' proposed at the end of the theory building process are subsequently tested empirically and the results used to refine and develop the theory. Hence the researcher proceeds from the abstract to the concrete and back again.

B. The Institutional Grammar Tool

The Grammar of Institutions was developed by Crawford and Ostrom in response to a 'simmering theoretical debate about what institutions are' (1995, p. 582). They argued that rather than having to choose between conceptions of institutions as strategies, norms or rules, researchers should work within a single framework that encompasses all three. The Institutional Grammar Tool, which is the way that the Grammar is intended to be applied, is an element of the wider Institutional Analysis and Development Framework that has been developed and refined by Ostrom and her colleagues over 30 years (Blomquist and deLeon 2011; McGinnis 2011; Ostrom 2011).

Crawford and Ostrom use the term *institutional statement* to include these seemingly competing concepts where:

> *Institutional statement* refers to a shared linguistic constraint or opportunity that prescribes, permits, or advises actions or outcomes for actors (both individual and corporate). Institutional statements are spoken, written, or tacitly understood in a form intelligible to actors in an empirical setting. In theoretical analyses, institutional statements will often be interpretations or abstractions of empirical constraints and opportunities. (Crawford and Ostrom 1995, p. 583)

These statements associated with the Grammar are not in themselves institutions but rather a reflection how institutions are perceived. Nevertheless, if the statements are accurate and if the accounts of actors are reliable then they should provide a solid basis upon which descriptions of institutions can be based. It is relatively straightforward for researchers to derive institutional statements from written or spoken statements although in both of these cases confirmation should be sought through observation that the institutions referred to are genuinely in-use. Where institutions are not explicitly

articulated, the researcher will need to prompt actors to see that that they are recognised ways of doing things. However institutions are understood they must be both shared and known by actors (Schlüter and Theesfeld 2010).

Shared strategies, norms and rules are all types of institutional statement. They can be clearly and precisely differentiated by being broken down into five structural components; ATTRIBUTES, DEONTIC, AIM, CONDITIONS AND OR ELSE:

> Regardless of how institutional statements are expressed in natural language, they can be rewritten in the ADICO format, where:
>
> **A** ATTRIBUTES is a holder for any value of a participant- level variable that distinguishes to whom the institutional statement applies (e.g., 18 years of age, female, college-educated, 1-year experience, or a specific position, such as employee or supervisor).
>
> **D** DEONTIC is a holder for the three modal verbs using deontic logic: *may* (permitted), *must* (obliged), and *must not* (forbidden).
>
> **I** AIM is a holder that describes particular actions or outcomes to which the deontic is assigned.
>
> **C** CONDITIONS is a holder for those variables which define when, where, how, and to what extent an AIM is permitted, obligatory, or forbidden.
>
> **O** OR ELSE is a holder for those variables which define the sanctions to be imposed for not following a rule.
>
> All shared strategies can be written as [ATTRIBUTES] [AIM] [CONDITIONS] (AIC); all norms can be written as [ATTRIBUTES] [DEONTIC] [AIM] [CONDITIONS] (ADIC); and all rules can be written as: [ATTRIBUTES] [DEONTIC] [AIM] [CONDITIONS] [OR ELSE] (ADICO). The syntax is cumulative: norms contain all of the components of a shared strategy plus a

> DEONTIC; rules contain all the components of a norm plus an OR ELSE. (Crawford and Ostrom 1995, p. 584)

More recently Siddiki *et al.* (2011) have proposed adding a sixth component to the grammar; that of the OBJECT. They define it as 'the inanimate or animate part of a statement that is the receiver of the action described in the aim and executed by the agent in the Attribute' (Siddiki *et al.* 2011, p. 85). With this addition to the grammar shared strategies, norms and rules can be written ABIC, ABDIC and ABDICO respectively.

This scheme, however, should not be considered uncontroversial. Schlüter and Theesfeld argue that 'neither the distinction between strategies and norms nor the distinction between norms and rules is clear-cut' (2010, p. 467). They point to the difficulty in finding any strategies which are not in some sense normative and in distinguishing between norms and rules if the 'or else' is not juridical and precise, concluding that 'the creation of infallible boxes for institutional statements, similar to a language grammar, is impossible' (Schlüter and Theesfeld 2010, p. 468). For Schlüter and Theesfeld, however, the identification of these problems reflect a concern for refinement and development rather than a disagreement with the underlying value of the grammar.

C: A Value Scale for the Outcomes from Participatory Initiatives

Outcomes from participatory initiatives include the ideas, proposals and recommendations that these initiatives have generated. They can be captured via formal mechanisms such as minutes, action notes or reports. They may also be transmitted into policy and decision making processes informally by councillors or council officers. The degree to which such outcomes are accorded value by policy and decision makers is a measure of the impact of such initiatives.

As there is no obvious available framework that can be used to specify the value of the outcomes from participatory initiatives a scale was developed for the research. This scale takes two of the strands that Burton suggests need to be considered when conceptualising participation. The first strand is the level or scope of the decision where: 'At one end of the continuum are decisions that affect everyone in a particular constituency or jurisdiction, while at the other end are those affecting only a few' (Burton 2009, p. 269). Building from this it is possible to distinguish between those decisions that are strategic, affecting the whole local authority area, and those that are local, affecting one community or population group. Burton's second strand is what he calls the participatory relationship, in other words 'the relationship between those people who choose to or are invited to participate and those who retain formal responsibility for making the decision in question' (Burton 2009, p. 270). For this purpose it is possible to distinguish between those cases where the difference made is *decisive* and where the initiative has been *informing*.

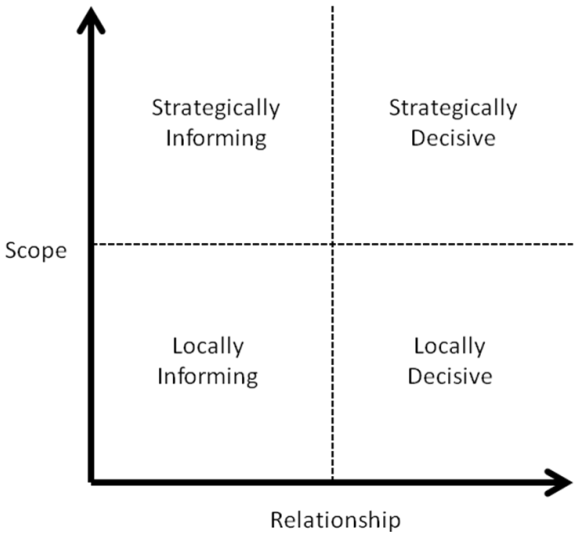

Figure 6 Describing the value of outcomes from participatory initiatives

Putting the strands together as axes on a chart (Figure 6) establishes four types of value within the local policy making process; locally informing, locally decisive, strategically informing and strategically decisive. With the addition of a category for 'no value' a five category scale of value can be described as follows:

- ***High Value*** (Strategically decisive) Outcomes either substantially change the intended decision / policy or bring a clear direction where the way forward was in doubt. We would expect this to happen in connection with council, cabinet or even strategic partnership meetings.

- ***Medium Value*** (Locally decisive; strategically informing) A substantial change or a clear direction is affected at a local level through say an area committee. Alternatively the influence is council wide and the outcome has been clearly taken into account but as one of many considerations of which others were decisive.

- ***Low Value*** (Locally informing) The outcome has been clearly taken into account by local councillors or officers acting locally but it cannot be said to be decisive.

- ***No Value*** (Neither decisive nor informing) Nothing has happened as a consequence of the outcome.

D. Interview Schedule

Code	Date	Location	Description
A	15th February 2010	Merton	Councillor (Labour, Non Executive)
B	16th February 2010	Merton	Councillor (Conservative, Executive)
C	17th February 2010	Merton	Councillor (Independent, Non Executive)
D	25th January 2010	Merton	Councillor (Conservative, Executive)
E	26th January 2010	Merton	Councillor (Independent, Non Executive)
F	25th January 2010	Merton	Officer (Council, lead role)
G	25th January 2010	Merton	Officer (Council, support role)
H	26th January 2010	Merton	Officer (Council, lead role)
I	16th February 2010	Merton	Officer (Council, support role)
J	12th January 2011	Bristol	Councillor (Liberal Democrat, Non Executive)
K	2nd December 2010	Bristol	Councillor (Liberal Democrat, Executive)
L	2nd December 2010	Bristol	Councillor (Labour, Non Executive)
M	1st December 2010	Bristol	Councillor (Liberal Democrat, Non Executive)
N	10th March 2011	Bristol	Councillor (Conservative, Non Executive)
O	11th January 2011	Bristol	Officer (Council, support role)
P	11th January 2011	Bristol	Officer (Council, lead role)
Q	12th January 2011	Bristol	Officer (Council, lead role)
R	12th January 2011	Bristol	Partner (Voluntary sector)
S	14th February 2013	Hull	Councillor (Party not specified, non executive)
T	15th February 2013	Hull	Councillor (Labour, Executive)
U	15th February 2013	Hull	Councillor (Labour, Non Executive)
V	14th February 2013	Hull	Councillor (Liberal Democrat, Non Executive)
W	13th February 2013	Hull	Councillor (Labour, Non Executive)
X	14th February 2013	Hull	Officer (Council, lead role)
Y	15th February 2013	Hull	Officer (Council, lead role)
Z	14th February 2013	Hull	Partner (Police)
AA	15th February 2013	Hull	Officer (Council, support role)
AB	13th February 2013	Hull	Officer (Council, support role)

E. Sample Interview Script

Before we start…

- Thanks!
- Business card – about me
- OK to be recorded? It is for my use only as will be my notes
- Everything will be confidential and any comments will be anonymised if used
- OK for time? Check that we won't be interrupted?

Interview

- Let me start my explaining a little about the research
- The research is about public participation and local government
- Lots has been done on what helps and hinders people from getting involved in initiatives and lots has been done on making the initiatives themselves work better – I've seen an area forum – seems to be working well!
- I'm interested in what happens to what comes out of these initiatives and in particular the ways that councillors perceive them – I think this has been neglected
- Ultimately I hope to come up with proposals to improve their impact
- I will be providing feedback for Hull Council from the survey

I'd like to start by asking some questions about Hull's Area Committees and Ward Forums

1. Could you tell me your perceptions of why and how they have developed and what impact they have had?

2. How do councillors see the committees and forums? Do they value them? Do they consider them to be a legitimate part of 'normal politics'? Do they have particular concerns? (National involvement)
3. Have councillors had an impact on the design of the forums? How?
4. Do councillors influence forum meetings? How?
5. What impact do you think the committees and forums have had on the overall formal policy and decision making of the council?
6. Do you think they could or should have a greater impact – particularly city wide? Do Councillors?
7. Is the work of the committees and forums driven more by members or officers?
8. Do councillors treat forums differently to residents associations and other local groups? Why is this?

The Theory

- I want to discuss some more general ideas with you (Role as witness) – I want to get your views on some of the ideas that can be found in the academic literature on local government.
- Researchers have noticed that while councillors set up initiatives that promote public participation such as Hull's ward forums, these initiatives have little, if any effect on council policy making.
- The ways in which councillors think about and respond to these types of initiative are obviously an important factor. If the concerns of councillors are understood then we might be able to improve the design of the initiatives, for example.
- Which are more important – practical issues, ideas about democracy or 'political aims'?

Statement: What Influences How Councillors Think About Participation Initiatives?

[These statements were printed out and given to the interviewee for comment / discussion]

Practical Concerns

- How to make things work in the best way
- Value for money

Ideas about democracy

- Initiatives should be democratically legitimate
- Political parties and groups should maintain a central democratic role
- Individual councillors should be able to freely exercise their own judgement
- The views of the councillor's constituents should be represented
- The aims of the Council should be achieved
- The public should be directly involved in decision making wherever possible

Political Considerations

- Whether electoral chances will be damaged
- The need to keep the group together
- Whether the chances of gaining and maintaining political office might be damaged
- Whether the delivery of party programmes might be affected

External Sources of Influence

- Public pressure
- Political parties

- Central Government

Other influences?

Closing

- Thank you
- Anything else you want to say/ask?
- How have you found the interview process?
- If you think of anything else please let me know

F. Sample Questionnaire

Hull City Councillor Questionnaire

Dear Councillor

Survey of Hull Councillors
Public Involvement in the Ward and Neighbourhood Forums

I am hoping you will be willing to take a few minutes to complete this survey. You should have received a link via email for you to complete it online – if you have already completed the survey in that way there is no need to complete this one.

The survey is part of research I am undertaking for my PhD but, in return for the help I have received, I will also be providing feedback to the Council from this survey.

I have already conducted a small number of interviews with councillors from different political groups and I will be using the results of this survey to supplement the information I have gathered from those. If I have already interviewed you I would be grateful if you could complete this survey as well.

Just to let you know a little about me – I am doing my PhD part time in the Department of Politics, Swansea University but I also work full time as the manager of Swansea's Overview & Scrutiny Team. My interest is mainly academic but I also hope to gain knowledge that will be useful for my work role.

Any information you provide will of course be treated in the strictest confidence and your answers will be anonymised.

Please return this survey to either:

Member services

Or to me, using the pre paid envelope provided, at:

Dave Mckenna (PhD Student)
Department of Political and Cultural Studies
Swansea University
Singleton Park
Swansea, SA2 8PP
Wales, UK

Thanks again for your help!

Dave Mckenna

-1-

1. ***In your opinion what should be the main role of the Ward and Neighbourhood Forums?***
Please select one

Deal directly with local complaints and service problems..... ☐
Help the Council to listen to the opinions and concerns of residents..... ☐
Make recommendations to area committees about area-wide policies and decisons ..... ☐
Other? Please specify ..... ☐

2. ***How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about*** **Ward and Neighbourhood Forums*?***
Tick one box in each row

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Forums have relatively little democratic value.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Forums unnecessarily duplicate the role of councillors.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Forums are a democratic mechanism with as much value as any other.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Forums often provide a platform for political troublemakers.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Forums are able to solve local problems better than councillors acting alone.....	☐	☐	☐	☐

Any other comments?

The next questions are about the number of people who should ideally be attending a Ward or Neighbourhood Forum meeting.

3. ***What should be the MINIMUM number of members of the public attending a Ward or Neighbourhood Forum before it can be taken seriously?*** *Please tick one box only*

There should be no minimum number.....	☐	At least 30 people.....	☐
At least 10 people.....	☐	At least 40 people.....	☐
At least 20 people.....	☐	At least 50 people.....	☐

4. ***What should be the MAXIMUM number of members of the public attending a Ward or Neighbourhood Forum?*** *Please tick one box only*

A maximum of 30.....	☐	A maximum 0f 100.....	☐
A maximum of 50.....	☐	No maximum.....	☐
A maximum of 70.....	☐		☐

5. ***How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about how councillors operate in Ward and Neighbourhood Forums?***
Tick one box in each row

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Forums require councillors to work in challenging new ways.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
Forums are a natural extension of the councillor's role.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
Forums benefit the ward work of councillors.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
Forums create unnecessary extra work for councillors.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
Forums help councillors to ensure that local services are being well run.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
Forums make councillors more accountable to the public.....	☐	☐	☐	☐

Any other comments?

6. ***How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements about The future of Ward and Neighbourhood Forums?***
Tick one box in each row

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The Forums are an essential aspect of the area working arrangements....	☐	☐	☐	☐
Finding new ways of getting the public involved in the Forums should be a priority.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is unlikely that more people will come to the Forums unless there is an issue that directly affects them.....	☐	☐	☐	☐
Forums should be able to work differently in different wards to reflect local circumstances....	☐	☐	☐	☐
There should be a single city wide strategy for increasing public involvement in the Forums....	☐	☐	☐	☐
Forums should mainly be used when there are issues of major public concern - they are not needed at other times....	☐	☐	☐	☐
Forums work best when the meetings follow a regular pattern so that people know when to attend...	☐	☐	☐	☐

Any other comments?

7. ***Councillors can a make a difference in a number of different ways. In your opinion, how can a Councillor make the biggest difference?*** **Please select one**

Through work in the community that the councillor represents ..... ☐
Through work to change council wide policies ..... ☐
Through work that benefits the political party that the councillor is a member of..... ☐

8. ***Please indicate how effective you feel the following strategies are for councillors when working to achieve their aims***
Tick one box in each row

	Extremely effective	Very effective	Moderately effective	Slightly effective	Not effective at all
Raise the issue with the relevant Cabinet member	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Present a motion to a council meeting	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Raise the issue at an area committee meeting	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Raise the issue within the Councillor's own local party group	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Work with the relevant council officers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Work with the public to get support	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. ***If there should be a conflict between a member's own opinion, the opinion of the party group in the council or the opinion of the voters, how should, in your opinion, a member of the council vote?*** **Please select one**

Vote according to the opinion of the voters ☐
Vote according to the opinion of the party group ☐
Vote according to his/her own conviction ☐

10. ***People have different ideas about local democracy should function. Please indicate how important for local democracy you think the following requirements are***
Tick one box in each row

	Of utmost importance	Of great importance	Of moderate importance	Of little importance	Not important at all
Residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Apart from voting, citizens should not be given the opportunity to influence local government policies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Council decisions should reflect a majority opinion among the residents	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Residents should participate actively and directly in making important local decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Political representatives should make what they think are the right decisions, independent of the current views of local people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Local politicians should try to generate consensus and shared values among local citizens/groups	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The results of local elections should be the most important factor in determining council policies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. ***Please indicate how important you feel the following considerations are for the public when they vote in local elections***

Tick one box in each row

	Of utmost importance	Of great importance	Of moderate importance	Of little importance	Not important at all
The political party that a candidate belongs to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The extent to which the candidate's political party is united.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The ability of the candidate to solve problems in the community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The experience of having a personal complaint dealt with successfully by the candidate	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The extent to which the candidate supports greater public participation in local politics	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The extent to which the candidate has an independent opinion regardless of the policy of any party they may belong to	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The extent to which the political party that the candidate represents has a good record of running the council.....	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

12. **If you have any comments about any of the issues covered by this questionnaire please add them here**

ABOUT YOU

13. **Your name** (Please leave blank if you wish-the information is only used to exclude you from follow ups and reminders)

14. ***Your Age***

Under 35 ..... ☐ 50-65 ..... ☐

35-50..... ..... ☐ Over 65..... ☐

15. ***Your Gender***

Female..... ☐ Male ..... ☐

16. ***Your Party***

Conservative ..... ☐ Liberal Democrat..... ☐

Labour..... ..... ☐

17. ***When Did You Become a Councillor?***

In the last 5 years ..... ☐ Between 10 – 15 years ago..... ☐

Between 5 - 10 years ago ... ☐ Over 15 years ago..... ☐

18. ***What is Your Current Position within the Council?***

Cabinet Member . ☐ Backbencher..... ☐

Committee Chair or Vice Chair.... ☐

19. ***How Would You Describe the Ward You Represent?***

Very affluent..... ☐ Fairly deprived..... ☐

Fairly affluent..... ☐ Very deprived..... ☐

Overall, neither affluent nor deprived ..... . ☐

Thank you very much for completing this survey!