Alan Lawton
Monash University Gippsland, Australia
Michael Macaulay
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Localism in Practice: Investigating Citizen Participation and Good Governance in Local Government Standards of Conduct

This article examines how, against a background of localism endorsed by the 2010 coalition government in the United Kingdom, a key component of local integrity and governance was fundamentally altered. The Localism Act 2011 abolished the English local integrity framework, which relied on the participation of local citizens in the policy making and implementation of local government standards of conduct. The article utilizes Henrik Bang's concepts of "expert citizen" and "everyday maker" to explore citizen participation in local standards committees. Using a case study approach, the article demonstrates how standards committees shaped processes and practices in the local governance of integrity. The authors argue that standards committees were crucial in promoting local participation and enhancing good governance.

There has been increasing international interest in local integrity systems in recent years (Head, Brown, and Connors 2008; Huberts, Anechiarico, and Six 2008; Matei, Matei, and Săvulescu 2010; Salminen and Ikola-Norrbacka 2009). Work from Australasia has increasingly looked at the ways in which integrity management relates to overall governance (Head 2012), leading one commentator to suggest that the development of local integrity shifts the debate from good governance to "good enough" governance (Evans 2012). This article builds on this international interest by examining the framework that was put in place for integrity management in the United Kingdom at the local level and the role of local citizens in that framework. In particular, it looks at the role of the standards committees of local authorities as part of that framework and the role of independent members in those committees. Recent legislative changes brought by the Localism Act 2011 fundamentally altered this framework and effectively abolished standards committees.

Our research was driven by three key questions: First, what were the statutory and nonstatutory roles that standards committees played in the local integrity framework? Second, in what sense were the standards committees a reflection of localism, that is, in what

ways did independent members influence the local integrity agenda? Finally, what forms of political participation did the independent members correspond to?

We argue that well-developed standards committees were prominent in promoting local participation and enhancing good governance, all within the perspective of localism. We investigate the standards committees using a multiple case study approach. The article is divided into four sections. It begins with a discussion of participation, integrity, and governance, drawing on a view of democracy and the role of the citizen. Second, it outlines the origins and development of standards committees within the context of the current localism agenda as presented in the Localism Act 2011. The article then outlines the methodology and empirical findings from the case studies and concludes with a discussion of the links between standards committees and participation.

Participation, Integrity, and Governance

The literature on democracy and democratic theory is long and honorable, and it would be impossible to attempt to summarize so much work here. Fukuyama (2011), for example, traces the role of democracy in human order from prehistoric societies. Dunn (2006) assesses the impact of democracy in terms of liberation movements in history. And Keane (2010) charts the impact of democratic principles on current political regimes and the reasons why democracy has begun to receive negative connotations globally. This supports other research that directly criticizes democracy as a dangerous ideal (e.g., Hawksley 2009).

The pursuit of good governance and the desire for greater participation by citizens in public affairs are tensions at the heart of discussions of systems of government (see, e.g., Dahl 1994). Balancing effectiveness and participation is central to democracy. The distinction is important, however, because it mirrors a wider discussion within democratic theory pertaining to democracy as both process and value. Lively (1975) outlines the

Alan Lawton is deputy head of the School of Business and Economics (Gippsland) at Monash University, Australia. He has held several professional appointments at U.K. universities and was part-time professor of governance and integrity at Vrije University in Amsterdam. He has published extensively in international journals, authored or coauthored seven books, and contributed numerous book chapters. He has acted as a consultant to the governments of Ethiopia, Lithuania, Norway, and Bulgaria.
E-mail: alan.lawton@monash.edu

Michael Macaulay is deputy director of the Institute for Governance and Policy Studies at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand. He is also visiting professor in public management at the University of Sunderland in the United Kingdom. His research interests are integrity and ethics. He has worked on numerous projects for nongovernmental organizations such as Transparency International. He has also worked on projects at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, and for the Council of Europe in Turkey.
E-mail: michael.macaulay@vuw.ac.nz

continuum of instrumentalist and participatory forms of democracy. The instrumentalist view of democracy is classically outlined by Schumpeter ([1947] 2010) and suggests that the value of democracy is in selecting a governing body. In this view, democracy has little intrinsic merit, but, through the process of voting, it allows an equitable and, more importantly, efficient system by which government not only can be instigated but also can be granted legitimacy.

Concerns with the democratic deficit and with new forms of citizen participation have highlighted these issues (John 2009; King, Feltey, and Susel 1998; Norris 2011). At the same time, the locus of democracy has also been the subject of much debate, as the relationships between, as well as citizens' trust in, national, regional, and local governments raise questions of local engagement and local governance. Participation has been strongly linked, for example, with the development of integrity (Wang and Van Wart 2007) and with the development of accountability (Devas and Grant 2003). Berner, Amos, and Morse (2011) suggest that participation may be regarded differently by stakeholders: professionals may view optimal public participation at a low level, whereas citizens strive for a more proactive approach.

Participation also has correlations with public trust. It is noteworthy that trust in local government, for example, is consistently higher than in either central government or political parties (see Standard Eurobarometer 78, which finds that 44 percent of survey participants tended to trust regional or local public authorities compared to central government, 27 percent, or political parties, 15 percent). Kim (2010) argues that higher levels of direct citizen participation increase trust; in the U.K. context, Cowell, Downe, and Morgan (2011) argue that levels of trust have a direct correlation with the ethical performance of local government, which reflects previous findings by Halvorsen (2003) that there are links between the quality of participation and perceptions of public service performance. Participation is an implicit component in each of the four functions of the integrity management system (Maesschalk and Bertók 2009): defining, guiding, monitoring, and enforcing integrity.

Yet the extent and type of political participation have been the subject of much debate in recent years, particularly following Putnam's (1995) work on the decline of social capital. The relationships between individuals, their communities, and the political process have been at the heart of such debates, recognizing that new forms of participation have emerged (Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary 2005; Fung 2003, 2006; Nabatchi 2010). Bovaird (2007, 848), for example, charts several levels of citizen coproduction according to the degree to which citizens are involved in the planning and delivery of public services.

Another useful distinction, in terms of participation, is the idea of *expert citizens* and *everyday makers* (Bang 2005, 2009; Bang and Sørensen 1999). Bang argues that politics is a lived experience in which citizens find new ways to engage and participate. In the changing landscape of public service delivery, where governance is exercised through networked organizations rather than government by, say, a local municipality, new political identities are forged. Bang conceptualizes expert citizens as full-time professionals, often working within community organizations, who are therefore "inside" the system of governance. They are interested in good governance and have expertise in networking and negotiating their way around the system, and they have a broad understanding of the political as a discursive construct. "Consequently, Expert Citizens are also a resource or political capital for democracy. In particular, they have a fund of everyday experience about how to deal with problems of exclusion based on ethnicity, gender, class/poverty etc." (Li and Marsh 2008, 250).

In contrast, everyday makers are skeptical of expert citizens, who are too concerned, they argue, with pursuing their own rather than local interests. Everyday makers are slightly skeptical of the efficiency of representative democracy, and they are concerned with how they can enhance their own personal capacity for self-governance and cogovernance. They are not interested in the grand dramas of national and party politics but in the local theater of everyday life. Everyday makers are part time and move in and out of politics depending on the issue. They are constituted by "a strong self-relying and capable individuality; a perception of politics as the concrete and direct handling of difference, diversity and dispute in everyday life; a notion of commonality as relating to solving common concerns; an acceptance of certain democratic values and procedures in the handling not only of centralized government but also of local governance" (Bang and Sørensen 1999, 326).

Where one sits along this spectrum is reflected in Bang's view of step-on/step-off citizenship, in which agents participate more directly in some situations than others. The key question for this view is the extent to which the citizen can choose to intervene and participate or not, but even this reflects the debate between instrumentalism and participatory views: whether the limits are imposed by a governing body or determined by the citizen himself or herself.

The cases presented here suggest that the distinction between governance, democracy, and integrity is by no means clear-cut. Thus, what is the value of local democracy? Is it an instrumental value (allowing for appropriate voting instruments to exist) or an innate value? (i.e., the very act of participation, however defined). Second, our case studies will demonstrate that, in terms of participation, the initial integrity framework enhanced both democracy and localism. In fact, it allowed local communities to shape their own governance arrangements in a number of ways.

Finally, this article will argue that these forms of participation have had an impact on citizens themselves in terms of both expert citizens and everyday makers (Bang 2005, 2009; Bang and Sørensen 1999; Li and Marsh 2008). We will show how local citizens, through participation in local standards committees, became both expert citizens and everyday makers of their own local governance. In so doing, we will extend the concepts that, in Bang's formulation, seek to distinguish these forms of participation as existing somewhat in opposition to one another. Instead, we will show that there is a developmental link between the two and that this formed a crucial role in helping overcome the tension between the right and the good in local governance.

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The Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act 2011, given royal assent in November 2011, is the most wide-ranging legislation on English local government in several decades. At its heart is the concept of *localism*—empowering local people to make decisions that affect them at the local level, which is part of a broader agenda that aims to "release councils from Whitehall control" and give them greater flexibility to meet the needs of their residents (DCLG 2010). Localism has been described by the coalition government as "a radical devolution of power to local level" (Communities and Local Government Committee 2011). Key elements of the Localism Act include new community rights to bid for land and buildings, new neighborhood planning rights, the transfer of public functions to local authorities in order to improve local accountability or promote economic growth, and the creation of a general power of competence for local authorities to develop innovative approaches to service delivery and governance. In this sense, localism is an extended form of subsidiarity, and it enhances participation in a number of specific ways; community rights have been expanded in terms of ownership of assets and the right to challenge local authority decisions.

The Localism Act 2011 has also had a major impact on the local integrity framework in England. That framework emerged in the Local Government Act 2000 as a response to a variety of issues in the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, including major corruption, fraud, and embezzlement, most infamously in Newcastle, Westminster, and Doncaster councils (Doig and Skelcher 2001). The framework covered 8,787 English local authorities (351 principal councils and 8,350 parish and town councils) and focused on the conduct of local politicians. It also covered appointed members of the boards of other bodies, including 43 police authorities, 31 fire and civil defense authorities, and six passenger transport authorities.

The government introduced the integrity framework in part III of the Local Government Act, which comprised four main pillars. It introduced a statutory code of conduct, rather than a voluntary code, that applied to all local politicians in every local authority. The act also created two new national bodies: a national regulator, the Standards Board for England, and the Adjudication Panel for England to oversee appeals and major hearings. Local standards committees, already present in some authorities, were made compulsory by the act and were given statutory authority to adjudicate completed investigations, as well as the general role of promoting high standards of conduct, offering advice on the code of conduct, and helping with training for local politicians. Finally, the act also instituted new registers of interests.

With the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the framework moved toward localism, with standards committees at the heart of the new arrangements. Prior to this change, standards committees were more or less engaged with the ethical agenda and have been described as *lapdogs, watchdogs,* or *guide dogs* (Greasley 2007). They now received allegations, conducted investigations, and were primarily responsible for promoting high ethical standards, making them more likely to take the role of guide dog. On the other hand, the Standards Board (later renamed Standards for England) was moved toward the role of a strategic regulator, overseeing the effectiveness of local ethical integrity frameworks, monitoring local arrangements, and engaging with authorities that

were experiencing difficulties. Standards for England still had an investigative function, but it was reserved for the handful of cases that were not suitable for local authorities to deal with themselves. Investigations, therefore, had already become localized.

Standards committees consisted of elected local politicians representing the political makeup of the council, full-time officers who serviced the committee, and independent lay members, appointed, usually after an interview, and with an interest in standards of conduct in local government. One of the authors of this article served as an independent member on his local standards committee. The independent members were part time and were sometimes paid a nominal fee, but often only expenses. In general, standards committees met a minimum of six times a year, and their main brief was to ensure that the code of conduct was adhered to and to investigate any allegations of breaches of the code by local politicians. As demonstrated in the case studies, many of the committees, over time, extended and developed a much wider remit.

The evidence suggests that the integrity framework was used, particularly by members of the public, as a mechanism for holding elected politicians to account for their behavior. The year 2008–09 saw 2,863 complaints made, with more than half made by members of the public. However, there was criticism that the caseload of the integrity framework was not sustainable for the costs that it incurred. Macaulay et al. (2010) show that, out of the 733 cases referred for investigation in 2008–09, only 233 were actually subject to a full investigation. Of these, only 66 (28 percent) led to a finding of the framework being breached, which equates to 9 percent of total investigations (Macaulay et al. 2010).

Part I, chapter 7, of the Localism Act 2011 made fundamental changes to the previous integrity framework. It abolished both Standards for England and local standards committees. Instead of the local standards committee, each authority must appoint an "independent advisor" (section 27:7) from among the public. Initial plans to abolish the code of conduct altogether were thwarted by a reading of the draft bill in the House of Lords, and therefore local authorities are now responsible for creating and maintaining their own code of conduct. One major addition to the new arrangements is the creation of a new legal duty to declare a pecuniary interest (sections 30 and 31). Section 29 of the act retains a register of interest, but there is no longer any requirement to declare gifts and hospitality, which would appear to undermine local integrity in both quantity and quality.

A number of competing explanations were offered by the central government for the abolition of the framework. One reason was that it was too expensive and cumbersome for the relatively trivial matters that it deals with—that the previous integrity framework was a "sledgehammer to crack a nut." The relevant government department, the Department for Communities and Local Government, argued that "[t]hese new measures, outlined in the Localism Act, will replace the bureaucratic and controversial Standards Board Regime, which ministers believe had become a system of nuisance complaints and petty, sometimes malicious, allegations of councilor misconduct that sapped public confidence in local democracy" (DCLG 2012). From this point of view, the framework was seen as unnecessary so long as local democracy was enhanced; local

democracy will be enhanced by promoting the value of localism. The Committee on Standards in Public Life was less convinced: "The Committee has significant concerns about the inherent robustness of the new arrangements. . . . .Unless local authorities have independent persons in place and they are seen to be effective, the new system will lack credibility and is unlikely to command public confidence" (Committee on Standards in Public Life 2012).

What is perhaps notable is that with the creation of standards committees, participation was at the center of the local integrity framework. Although statutorily established in the Local Government Act 2000, 40 percent of local authorities had already established a standards committee by 1999 (Doig and Skelcher 2001, 3), and, after the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, standards committees were statutorily obliged to be chaired by an independent member of the public. In fact, there was a statutory duty to have at least three independent members of the public sit on the committee. In early days, as Lawton et al. (2005) demonstrate, local authorities had difficulty finding and appointing independent members. The research indicated that many independent members, although displaying a keen sense of civic duty, may not see their role as champions of an ethical organization (Lawton et al. 2005, 103). Following the 2007 act, however, there was a much higher take-up of independent members, and some authorities were noted for their recruitment practices (Lawton and Macaulay 2009).

Independent members were appointed from outside the authority and, according to guidelines issued by Standards for England in 2010, should demonstrate a keen interest in standards in public life; a wish to serve the local community and to uphold local democracy; high standards of personal integrity; the ability to be objective, independent, and impartial; sound decision-making skills; questioning skills; leadership qualities; and the ability to chair meetings. Thus, they would contribute to both local democracy and effective governance.

In terms of including members of the public directly in the standards framework, local standards committees thus facilitated a greater degree of participation. Yet a number of questions remained. First, how did this participation translate into action in terms of the roles that standard committees conducted? Second, how did members of the public perceive themselves and their individual roles within the process? Third, what kinds of citizens actually participated—everyday makers or expert citizens? Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, did participation enable any transition to take place between these two poles?

In order to answer these questions, and to address our key research questions, it is useful to return to the notion of participation. If, for example, independent members were simply appointed to legitimize the framework by offering the appearance of participation, then one would not anticipate a very proactive standards committee (it may, of course, still be highly active in its reaction to whatever complaints and investigations came its way). In order to address these questions, our research adopted a multiple case study strategy designed to describe *specific instances* of standards committee activity and explore how this had an impact on governance processes with regard to promoting ethical behavior and local integrity.

Methodology

The research utilized a multiple case study approach that allowed for the investigation of phenomena across a range of organizations (Stake 2006; Stewart 2012) and the development of multiple perspectives on the same event, or phenomena that allowed for a more generalizable conclusion. As Stewart (2012) argues, multiple case studies are not necessarily subject to the same issues of validity and reliability that other methods may encounter; it is crucial, however, that they are regarded as "convincing," a conclusion that "is shaped by both by the research design (that is, the relationship between objective and method) and by the doing of the research" (Stewart 2012, 73). Multiple case studies are particularly useful in dealing with issues of ethics and integrity and within local government (e.g., Bovaird 2007). Case study approaches have recently been applied very usefully to reform and democracy in the Los Angeles neighborhood council experience (Musso et al. 2011).

The development of eight cases in this research allowed for cross-case comparisons to be made, where appropriate, which is often throughout the study. As with all case studies, the cases must build up a chain of evidence (Yin 2009) to create a narrative of the event. This approach required a multimethod approach, and cases used a range of research methods. These included desk-based research to develop a bank of documents, minutes of meetings, committee records, and other physical artifacts. Participant observation of standards committee meetings and other meetings was utilized wherever this was possible within the time frame of the case visits. Finally, key informant interviews were used to investigate the perspectives of other stakeholders, specifically, the monitoring officer, chief executive, and political leaders.

In selecting cases, we adopted a purposive sampling strategy, which enabled us to direct our research toward standards committees that had extended their role beyond statutory functions. The strategy was designed to elicit a sample from central government actors, street-level local government actors, and other key stakeholders. In this respect, our case study strategy has parallels with best practices research. The case studies are designed to help build and develop rather than test theory; therefore, we do not suggest that the standards committees under discussion do not necessarily provide an exemplar of the best in field. The cases embodied the criteria of completeness and comparability, as outlined by Bretschneider, Marc-Aurele, and Wu (2005), but do not have an underpinning theory of production. As such, the case selection is more in line with smart practice research (Bardach 2000, 2004), with its emphasis on qualitative research and flexibility of approach.

The limitation of smart practice research is that it can be difficult to identify relevant cases to begin with, unless some form of survey has initially been undertaken (Veselý 2011). To help overcome this obstacle, we were guided by advice from a steering group and from our own experiences from previous research and as practitioners

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Table 1 Overview of Case Study Authorities

Case Study	Type of Authority	Location	Population of Locale	No. of Local Authority Members	Size of Standards Committee	No. of Independent Members
1	Metropolitan	Southwest	420,000	70	7	4
2	Borough	Southwest	100,000	54	13	7
3	Police	Southeast	1,127,000	17	17	8
4	District	Midlands	112,000	46	15	4
5	District	East Anglia	130,000	59	19	7
6	Unitary	West Midlands	180,000	58	8	4
7	Borough	Southeast	83,000	42	7	2
8	Metropolitan	Northeast	271,600	78	17	4

in local standards committees to develop an initial list of potential "notable practices." From this list of possible candidates, we examined local authority Web sites to identify potential cases, focusing on the minutes and agendas of standards committees meetings before approaching potential case study authorities for an initial informal discussion. Once we had finished that pre–case study stage, we tried to ensure that our final sample encapsulated a broad range of different local authority types and locations around England. Table 1 presents an initial summary of the case study authorities.

Interviews were transcribed and open coding was used on interviews, participant field notes, and local authority documents. Following our analysis of each case, emergent themes were codified and broken down into three principal categories of good governance. Further analysis allowed us to discern subcategories that had enabled good governance to develop and explore links with localism and local participation.

Findings

In answer to our first research question, each of the cases demonstrated that the local standards committee developed roles far beyond its statutory functions, which had an impact on the broader governance of the local authority. These could be identified as notable practices in which each standards committee engaged. An initial analysis of the cases found three principal emergent themes of good governance: *external engagement, internal governance,* and *organizational learning.* Further categories of notable practice emerged from each of the cases to show notable practices that contributed to the principal theme. These principal themes and subcategories are identified in table 2.

External Engagement

In terms of *external engagement,* there were three notable practices. The first was case study 2, which looked at developing relations with parish and town councils through the deployment of a dedicated

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Table 2 Themes and Subcategories Emerging from Case Studies

Good Governance Theme	Notable Practice	Case Study
External engagement	Liaising with town and parish councils	2
External engagement	Community engagement	4
External engagement	Training and development	6
Internal governance	Member development	3
Internal governance	Recruitment and retention	5
Internal governance	Joint standards and audit committees	7
Organizational learning	Knowledge transfer	1
Organizational learning	Embedding standards	8

parish liaison officer. Figures showed that one of the most common sources of complaints against the code of conduct were town and parish councils, which accounted for around 50 percent of all complaints nationally every year since 2001. The parish liaison officer role was a full-time job involving evening work, typically three to four nights a week. The parish liaison officer also delivered training on site. The council previously had delivered training for parish councillors at the council offices, with mixed attendance; the arrangement that followed involved delivering the training in bite-sized chunks (30 minutes) at the parish council meeting. In addition, the parish liaison officer regularly networked with other local government organizations, such as the National Association of Local Councils, and regularly spoke at the County Association of Local Councils.

The Standards Committee took the view that its engagement with the community had to be *within* the community, and therefore, it was a strong advocate for the position. As a result of the introduction of the code of conduct and the register of interests by the Local Government Act 2000, there was concern among parish and town councillors that there would be a lack of citizens willing to put themselves forward for parish and town council elections, which account for the most local elections in England. The Standards Committee in this case believed that democratic engagement had to be nurtured by taking the town hall to its citizens.

Case study 4 displayed the notable practice of *community engagement,* particularly in working with local schools. The interaction with schools was led by the local standards committee and supported by the entire authority. This form of community engagement drew on the particular skills of members of the standards committee. One of the independent members was a magistrate heavily involved in schools engagement through the magistrates' service. A second member was a church minister with experience running discussion groups with young people (ages 14–18), and a third was a parish representative who was a retired deputy schools head. The schools engagement program explained key issues in local governance and the value of ethical leadership, and it was hoped that young people would be encouraged to vote and take part in local democracy and even stand for election as local councillors.

Case study 6 identified the importance of external relations with other standards committees through the notable practice of *training*

and development. The standards committee engaged in extensive use of joint working parties for training and development purposes, which involved numerous other authorities. The research team was fortunate to join one of the joint training sessions on the requirements of the new assessment panels and local hearings. The session was organized jointly by the case authority along with a neighboring county council, plus standards committee members from a local fire and rescue authority (totaling approximately 35 delegates). The standards committee also established a close relationship with the regional division of the National Association of Local Councils. The parish and town council representatives on the standards committee were both members of the Association of Local Councils, and there was a joint briefing session of the two organizations immediately before standards committee meetings.

Internal Governance

In terms of *internal governance* in case study 3, a local police authority standards committee moved beyond its statutory function of overseeing standards of conduct and took the lead on reviewing the effectiveness of the entire police authority. As a result, it developed notable practices in *member development.* A four-day workshop was part of the induction of new members to the authority, and 33 training courses were offered, not just on the code of conduct but also in areas such as equality and diversity, scrutiny and performance management, corporate governance, data sharing and security, audit committee conduct, risk management, chairing and recruitment of senior officers, and overview of the budget-setting process. The impact of any training was to be assessed, and elements of the self-assessment included a 360-degree appraisal, objectives setting, and a training log. Under the Integrated Member Development Process, each member had his or her own budget of £400. The focus was on five key areas: role and deployment, individual objectives and deliverables, self-assessment, personal development, and longer term. Clearly, the intention was to increase knowledge awareness and skills.

Case study 5 also looked at member development, but with a much more focused approach to *recruitment and retention.* This case had a long history of problems with standards, which were divided into two distinct categories: issues emerging from dealing with around 100 rural parishes and problems of entrenched political divisions among members. It had received 18 complaints in the 12 months prior to the research being conducted. As a result, it had to expand its standard committee independent membership. A working group was established to look at the complex issues surrounding recruitment, and, as the deputy monitoring officer explained, a key decision was that the committee wanted to appeal to "average people, not the usual high flying businessmen and academics." The working group also ensured that the committee received full training in recruitment. The issue that it faced was how to engage its local citizens to participate in an area of its work that was of increasing concern to it: how to draw in citizens who might be skeptical of the local authority and had no previous engagement with it.

A recruitment kit was created comprising an overview of the standards committee and a job description, a person specification, an application form (along with a description of the appointment process), and a copy of the code of conduct. A further key decision was where advertising should be placed. Previously, the advertisement had been placed in the public notices section of the local newspaper, and five candidates applied for two positions. In contrast, the new advertisement was placed in the situations vacant section of the local newspapers, and key organizations (including parish councils, local chambers of commerce, and the Confederation of British Industry) were directly targeted. Ads were also placed on a number of Web sites. The result was a threefold increase in applications. In all, 16 candidates applied for two positions; seven candidates were interviewed and, finally, three were chosen. As a result, all panels were given independent chairs, all of whom were given specific chair's training.

Case study 7 had the smallest number of independent members of all our cases, but the contribution to the internal governance of the local authority was quite profound. The case study authority had set up its joint committee as far back as 2003, partly to reduce the number of its other local authority committees and to fit in with its governance structure. Perhaps inevitably, there was an initial period of nervousness among committee members that they would be required to follow a much greater degree of scrutiny of accounting procedures than would ordinarily be assumed, but such fears were allayed relatively quickly. The joint committee was given clear roles from the outset. In addition to looking at reports from the chief audit officer (and carrying out its statutory functions as a standards committee), the joint committee annually reviewed the authority's constitution and looked into staff grievances and appeals, a role that had been assigned to the committee since its inception. All interviewees argued that the arrangement was highly valued, and staff felt appreciative that independent members were looking into their cases.

Organizational Learning

In terms of *organizational learning,* case study 1 developed a number of notable practices in *knowledge transfer.* Experimentation and the transfer of knowledge was attained by the sheer range of different work that the committee undertook, particularly in commenting on protocols, changes to the code, and other aspects of council business (in 2007, for example, the council adopted a new code of conduct that was heavily indebted to standards committee discussion; in 2008, the standards committee approved both the draft summary of the constitution and a local code of corporate governance, which set out six core principles to measure governance). In addition, the independent members of the standards committee regularly attended other meetings of the council and had a standing item on their own agenda to give feedback on the meetings they attended. They regularly reviewed their own workings, so, for example, they regularly debated their own powers. An even more explicit example of sharing notable practice and transferring knowledge was that the standards committee worked closely with networks of other authorities in the southwest, perhaps most notably, in the Regional Independent Members Committee conference, which in 2008 attracted 65 attendees from 32 authorities.

Finally, case study 8 was notable for the way in which it *embedded standards* through continual improvement and organizational learning. Originally introduced in 1999 as a joint standards/audit committee, the standards committee was not designed to tackle any particular problem but rather to reinforce the standards of the council. From its inception, it had been chaired by an independent

member and maintained three independent members as part of its structure. The authority had never experienced a complaint about a breach of the code of any sort until late 2008, when two complaints were leveled against members. As a result, the standards committee was involved in broader initiatives, such as the City of Peace campaign, to look at cultural awareness within the city. It was also involved in issues outside of its statutory duties. The notable practice most clearly identified in this case, therefore, was the ongoing and sustained engagement of the leadership of the authority, focusing on the triumvirate of political leadership, officer leadership, and independent leadership of the committee.

Discussion: Everyday Makers or Expert Citizens?

The Localism Act 2011 replaced standards committees with a single independent person to act as an advisor. In so doing, it was directly looking to replace everyday makers with an expert citizen. Our research suggests, however, that this is somewhat of a false dichotomy. Although we cannot present here a microanalysis of the contributions of each individual member of the public, it can be seen that, through direct participation in local standards committees, the independent members transformed themselves into expert citizens. Furthermore, their activities allowed other stakeholders to develop their own sense of everyday making of local governance. The independent members were both "inside" the system and were considered to be a resource, but they were not full time, and nor did they pursue their own interests. At the same time, they were not solely concerned to offer alternative forms of governance but rather to enhance the legitimacy of representative democracy by holding local politicians to account by means other than the ballot box. Thus, Bang's categorization could have an additional element: the *everyday expert.*[1]

From this, a number of interesting points emerge. First, it is apparent that even if the initial inclusion of independent members in standards committees was for legitimacy and some small degree of community involvement, in the cases we looked at, this evolved into considerable scope to participate directly in the development not only of ethical governance, and the identification of the good, but also of governance as it is more generally understood. The "high road" to ethical governance has become more frequently traveled (Lawton and Macaulay 2004; Rohr 1978). Although such participation may at first appear to be limited to a small number of individuals, the work of standards committees was generally outward facing and promoted participation throughout other authorities, smaller councils, schools, and, indeed, the broader community of social media. It is worth noting that in the most troubled local authority (case study 5), the action was to include more local citizens by increasing the number of independent standards committee members, which illustrates the substantive role that these members played. Through participation, independent members helped shape the policy agenda working with and through, not against, the statutory committees of the local authority, local public officials, and local politicians. What is of interest in this policy area is that party politics was much less evident than in other policy areas of local government, such as planning or housing.

> Although we cannot present here a microanalysis of the contributions of each individual member of the public, it can be seen that, through direct participation in local standards committees, the independent members transformed themselves into expert citizens.

The standards committee cases are not, we suggest, examples of coproduction in the sense of Bovaird's (2007) categorization. Independent members were involved in a range of activities, from exercising their judgment on whether a local politician had breached the code of conduct, thereby enhancing public accountability (Fung 2003), to helping develop an ethical culture within the local authority, to seeking to engage with members of the wider community in building trust in local government. Our research underlines the fact that coproduction necessitates participation, but not all forms of participation result in coproduction.

Thus, local politicians were being held to account by their citizens in ways other than through the ballot box. They did not always like it, arguing that the electorate should pass judgment on their activities. However, when the turnout at local elections is less than 30 percent of those who are entitled to vote, representative democracy does not appear to be working too well. Yet, as electoral turnouts may go down, citizens find other ways of engaging (Dalton 2008). Indeed, participating in local governance through membership of the standards committees can be considered part of the 8.3 percent of the U.K. population engaged in citizen governance (John 2009). Independents may not have been appointed as experts in the terms of expert citizens, but, it can be argued, through their own understanding of community values, they introduced a broader range of perspectives and developed different priorities than those of elected and appointed officials (Fung 2006).

Notwithstanding this, our independent members included those who had no previous engagement with local politics but were motivated by standards of conduct and a keen sense of what citizens should expect in terms of the behavior of elected politicians. Their expertise developed over time, not just in terms of the statutory requirements of a code of conduct but also in terms of widening their understanding of the remit of integrity. At the same time, the development of this understanding committed public officials to widening their understanding of the ethical framework. Through participation, the knowledge, understanding, and contribution to local governance was enhanced. Independent members acted within the system but also, at the same time, sought to expand it. In many respects, then, our research builds on previous studies such as Wang and Van Wart (2007) and Devas and Grant (2003), in that direct participation has led to concrete improvements in accountability, trust, and integrity in local authorities. It also supports research from other European countries of the positive impact of participation on civic skills, policy making, and legitimacy (Michels and De Graaf 2010).

Conclusions

A limitation of this research is that standards committees have now been abolished, which makes future research very difficult. A recent survey (Macaulay, Hickey, and Begum 2012) suggests that some standards committees have been retained as nonstatutory bodies, but currently, their roles have not yet been defined. Future research is essential, first to map the impacts that will occur as a result of

the further changes wrought by the Localism Act 2011 and, second, to see what forms of participation may manifest.

Our research shows, however, that there are much broader lessons to be learned in terms of the value of local participation. Although we cannot argue that the case study standards committees represent all such bodies, the range and diversity of their roles demonstrates the importance of participation for developing local good governance. Through participation in the local integrity framework, citizens were transformed from everyday makers into expert citizens whose work had a broad impact on other stakeholders. Unfortunately, the new legislation removes, or at the very least severely limits, these opportunities. Citizens have been replaced with a single, more professionalized person who now acts as the independent overseer of local standards.

We asked the question, in what ways did independent members influence the local authority agenda? We do not suggest that a relatively small number of independents have transformed trust in local government. Rather, the cases indicate ways in which committed individuals can seize the opportunity to help shape the legitimacy of their local authority in ways that go beyond the ballot box. In so doing, effective governance of standards of conduct was enhanced. In this policy area, technical expertise in a code of conduct, for example, is not sufficient. Hard-pressed officials will inevitably seek recourse in the legislation, but in making just decisions, independent members can offer practical wisdom from a range of different perspectives. In many cases, we saw grateful public officials welcoming the advice and support of independent members in often politically charged environments.

Previous research has identified the challenges facing appointed public officials in this new—for them—policy area and their sense of isolation (Lawton et al. 2005). In this case, citizen involvement can lead to better decision making and is consistent with the findings of other researchers (Yang and Pandey 2011). Clearly, there are multiple ways of engaging with local government (Arnstein 1971) and different arrangements through which the quality of governance can be improved and trust enhanced, including coproduction or the involvement of neighborhood councils (see Berry, Portney and Thomson 1993).

Contrary to the concerns of McKenna (2011) and Vigoda (2002), our research suggests that giving citizens a direct and concrete assignment/appointment is also more conducive to participatory democracy than just having open-ended town hall meetings every week or flooding citizens with policy information through the Internet.

We also asked, what forms of political participation do the independent members correspond to? Our research suggests that the previous arrangements of standards committees were examples of the value of localism, enacted through direct participation in local governance that went beyond community representation to forwarding an active integrity agenda. In so doing, the independent members may well have legitimized the framework, but this legitimacy was an outcome rather than a prerequisite, and the actions of standards

> Perhaps most interestingly, our research suggests that through participation in local standards committees, the independent members themselves underwent substantial development until they exhibited the behavior of both expert citizens and everyday makers.

committees encouraged and facilitated participation among a much wider group of stakeholders. Perhaps most interestingly, our research suggests that through participation in local standards committees, the independent members themselves underwent substantial development until they exhibited the behavior of both expert citizens and everyday makers. Our research, therefore, extends Bang's (2005) suggestion that there is a marked distinction between these two groups. Most importantly, all of our research suggests that participation in local standards committees allows citizens to directly develop and expand their own concept of good governance. By developing different forms of local practice, standards committees paved a way for refining concepts of the local good.

Note

1. We would like to acknowledge one of the *PAR* reviewers for suggesting this phrase to us.

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