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Received 7 February 2011; in revised form 9 June 2011

Abstract. The neighbourhood in both the UK and Europe continues to dominate thinking about the quality of life in local communities, representation and empowerment, and how local services can be delivered most effectively. For several decades a series of centrally funded programmes in neighbourhood governance have targeted localities suffering deprivation and social exclusion in England. From these much can be learnt about the strengths and limitations of a local approach to achieving multiple objectives. We review the findings of a case study of neighbourhood governance in the City of Westminster and draw on evaluations of two national programmes. In the conclusions we discuss the problems arising from multiple objectives and examine the prospects for neighbourhood governance as the national paradigm moves away from 'big state' solutions towards the less-well-defined 'big society' approach and the reinvention of 'localism'. While the rationale for neighbourhood governance may change, the 'neighbourhood' as a site for service delivery and planning remains as important now as in the past.

1 Introduction

Over the past half century the neighbourhood has received special attention as a focus for policy making, as the primary building block for democracy, for reducing disadvantage, and as the arena for encouraging greater community participation in the planning and the delivery of services. A profusion of initiatives and programmes have been launched in the United Kingdom to address these objectives and to provide a comprehensive approach to deprivation and disadvantage. In the 1960s the US war on poverty (Levine, 1970) was a major influence, but in subsequent decades similar approaches were reinvented or renamed to fit the ideological stance of different political parties in power. Similar trends have been observed in European states such as France and Denmark (Hall and Hickman, 2002; Kennett and Forrest, 2006; Smith et al, 2007). The neighbourhood was also the primary focus of European Union sponsored initiatives such as the URBAN I and II programmes (Carpenter, 2006). But these trends raise important questions about why there is so much emphasis on the neighbourhood and why central government should devote political capital and resources to what appear to be largely local issues. Over time the focus has widened so that commentators such as Benington (2006) observe a shift from an early "remedial focus on small areas of poverty and disadvantage ... to a more strategic and comprehensive concern with neighbourhood development and citizen participation" (page 13).

Critics have defined the process as 'new localism' (Stewart, 1994)—a market-led approach involving "the decentralisation of responsibility, but not power, from the national to local level" (Coaffee and Johnston, 2005, page 165). Whilst area-based initiatives (ABIs) demonstrate a commitment to reducing deprivation and improving service delivery, the additional resources are often marginal compared with the

mainstream and tend towards a culture of short-term 'delivery', incrementalism, and measurable outputs (Chatterton and Bradley, 2000) at the cost of longer-term, sustainable outcomes. The literature is full of examples of contested, as well as consensus-based, communities (see chapters in Hoggett, 1997). Wallace (2010) questions New Labour's approach to the concept of 'community', arguing that "[It] has been used to territorialise the social into governable, spatially bounded sites which can function as 'partners' in networks of contingent relationships that constitute and implement public policy" (page 805).

Despite the validity of these critiques, as is demonstrated later, the neighbourhood retains its preeminence as the site for intervention at the local level, though the extent to which the lessons from one initiative are incorporated into the next and whether organisational learning is taking place can be questioned. Commentators identify the importance of pragmatism: for example, in New Labour's Third Way since 1997 (Tiesdell and Allmendinger, 2001, page 923). Likewise, Lawless (2004) defines the associated New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiative as "a pragmatic development of a long-standing reformist policy stream" (page 396).

In this paper we set out to explore the multiple meanings of the neighbourhood and in particular to review the various approaches to neighbourhood governance which have been piloted in England in the past decade. What experiments in neighbourhood governance have been carried out and with what impact? What assumptions have been made about delivery mechanisms and funding in particular localities? Is the model still viable in an era of economic austerity and deficit reduction? In answering these questions we will set out in the following section a brief history of intervention at the neighbourhood level. In section 3 we will discuss the rationale for the neighbourhood focus. In sections 4 and 5 we will explore the growing importance of the neighbourhood since 1997 and review the approach adopted in the City of Westminster in inner London. This will be followed by a discussion of two central government initiatives in neighbourhood governance drawing on the relevant national evaluation reports. In the penultimate section we will discuss briefly the policy shift towards the 'big society' paradigm which commenced in 2010, and in the conclusions we will argue that since the 1960s the neighbourhood has been the site of policy innovation and that, despite recent policy shifts, its importance as a site for service delivery and planning is undiminished. It will be argued that the various initiatives from New Labour tended to be top down, process driven, and primarily concerned with improving service delivery. The use of time-limited central funding, and reliance on additional staff and funding in each area rather than wholesale reform of mainstream services, meant that these strategies could be relatively easily dismantled with few political consequences.

For the purposes of this paper 'neighbourhood governance' is used as a generic term to cover the institutional arrangements for service delivery and community participation at the local level which arise from the targeting of deprived areas (however defined) by a (local or central) government initiative. 'Neighbourhood management' is sometimes used interchangeably, but this term is used here only when referring to policies so designated such as the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (NMPs).

2 Initiatives, pilots, and pathfinders
The focus on the neighbourhood in England has given rise to a profusion of ABIs, pilot projects, and pathfinders since at least 1968 when Education Priority Areas (EPAs) were first launched. The key characteristics of all these initiatives included the targeting of additional resources for a predetermined period in order to achieve defined policy objectives. Early initiatives such as EPAs, the Community Development

Projects, and the Urban Programme involved allocating additional resources to local authorities in deprived areas. In later periods—for example, with City Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)—it was partnerships of public, private, and voluntary sector organisations which were funded directly by central government. Although target areas were usually selected by central government, the exact definition of the boundaries of ABIs was largely left to local authorities to determine; however, this process was delineated by programme requirements and since the advent of New Labour has relied heavily on central government's regularly updated Indices of Deprivation (CLG, 2011) to identify the most deprived localities. Thus, target areas tended to be defined by their relative deprivation in relation to adjoining areas rather than in terms of social criteria such as residents' perceptions of communities of place and neighbourhood. This quantitative approach to the definition of neighbourhoods was applied to the major regeneration programmes launched by New Labour in the period after 1997 such as the NDC and the NMPs.

In reviewing the spectrum of ABIs, a number of themes can be identified. First, it can be argued that the size of target areas was often influenced by the budget available and the extent to which emphasis was placed on engaging and consulting residents. For example, the National Evaluation of NMP argued that "meaningful community engagement becomes more difficult with areas over 15—20 000 population. Unit costs become very high with small populations" (SQW Consulting, 2008, page 90). Second, initiatives were increasingly funded for longer time periods—for example, ten years for the NDC programme. This was because it had been argued that in previous initiatives too little time was available to demonstrate impact. Third, community engagement was given greater prominence, and over time the voluntary and community sectors were ostensibly, at least, given increasing influence over programme development and delivery by being included in the partnership arrangements established for ABI governance. This sometimes created tensions with elected members and raised questions about the 'fit' between new forms of participatory democracy and the existing system of representative democracy (Pierre, 2009). With the launch of NDC it was accepted that local residents should in most cases be in the majority on management boards, although this in turn created challenges relating to representation and accountability (see Taylor, 2003). Fourth, the policy focus gradually shifted from single issues such as education or housing to a multidisciplinary approach to 'wicked' issues such as poor health, teenage pregnancy, and antisocial behaviour. As is discussed later, final evaluations revealed that the impact of ABIs on different policy areas was often mixed and uneven between target areas. The difficulties of sustaining the continuity of programmes after central funding ceases and ensuring that mainstream services continue to deliver to standards achieved with additional funding were also serious challenges to ABIs.

As well as the limitations inherent in the delivery of neighbourhood-based programmes, Benington (2006) identifies a number of other conclusions to be drawn from a review of this area of government activity. The focus on the neighbourhood helps to develop an analysis at the microlevel but "makes it harder to analyse root causes or to develop strategic or preventative action at national government levels" (page 14). Not all problems can be solved at the local level, and attention also needs to be paid to wider political and economic forces. Many of the programmes and areas were launched without sufficient consultation with local authorities or local communities. Evaluation was carried out, but it is not clear how far findings were incorporated in subsequent programmes. Finally, government itself may be part of the problem in that services and funding streams may be partial, fragmented, and lacking in integration (page 14).

The rapid growth of the voluntary and community sectors in the past thirty years has meant that these organisations have sought a greater deliberative role at the neighbourhood level and in many cases have been conferred representation on management boards and local forums. While this might increase the potential for influencing decision making, critics have pointed to the dangers of cooption, tokenism, and uneven power relationships shrouded in the language of 'partnership' (Davies, 2001).

3 The rationale for the neighbourhood focus

The neighbourhood has particular attractions to policy makers because it is manageable in size and has many 'taken-for-granted' attributes of sociability, familiarity, and convenience in providing services and generating data (Kearns and Parkinson, 2001). Assumptions are made, often on the basis of limited evidence, about the interactions between residents and the extent to which they depend on local services in the immediate vicinity. Wider discussions about the impact of globalisation and the rise of the knowledge economy have hardly dented the rhetorical and practical commitment to this basic unit of democracy and community. The debates about the social construction of neighbourhood (Jacobs, 1994) and the complex interplay of the global and local (Brenner, 2004) have still had relatively little impact on policy makers. With increased mobility and wider social networks based on changing employment patterns and new technologies it can be argued that many social groups are much less dependent on social contacts in their neighbourhoods. On the other hand, large amounts of policy-related research, such as by Burgess et al (2001), have been putting the case for devolved approaches to local governance as part of a broader modernisation strategy.

As Kennett and Forrest (2006) argue, there are many different institutional arrangements across Europe for managing housing, planning, and related services, but the key unit for delivery is often the neighbourhood. However, this may be very differently defined according to variations in social, cultural, and administrative practices (page 716). As they conclude: "The need for vibrant, engaged and socially sustainable neighbourhoods has been a strong and pervasive element in the European social project to build a cohesive European society" (page 713). Yet, as Durose and Lowndes (2010) argue, "the definition of a neighbourhood is inevitably subjective, dynamic and multi-faceted" (page 343), which perhaps explains in large part its appeal to the policy maker.

Thus the broad policy trend from both European and national governments is that the 'local' has an important impact on quality of life and in reducing social exclusion. The assumption is often made that most neighbourhoods contain varying degrees and types of social capital and that this can be enhanced through capacity-building measures with direct pay-offs in terms of economic development and political participation (Putnam, 1993). However, neighbourhoods with evidence of bonding social capital can also possess negative characteristics of criminality, discrimination, and the exclusion of minorities which are much more difficult to reverse (see Portes and Landolt, 1996). As Wallace (2010) argues, one of the major criticisms of New Labour's 'turn to community' is that there has been insufficient research into how best to address neighbourhoods which are dysfunctional and discriminatory and where special remedial measures are required (Cantle, 2005).

Thus despite the relatively weak evidence base for using the neighbourhood as the primary administrative unit there are a number of ideological and administrative reasons for adopting a particular set of boundaries for government interventions through ABIs. It will be argued here—drawing on the Westminster case study, Lowndes and Sullivan (2008), and Kearns and Parkinson (2001)—that convenience, familiarity, representation, and efficiency represent the main justifications for 'neighbourhood' interventions.

3.1 Convenience

Fundamentally, the neighbourhood has the advantage of convenience in that it is a readily understood unit of social life and (sometimes) of administration which has immediate relevance to those living within its boundaries. Once ABI boundaries are defined, they quickly become adopted by residents and service providers and in many cases develop their own identities through, for example, community events and festivals supported by 'community development' programmatic funding strands. Particular advantages are that local services are easily accessible to citizens and that it is convenient for those administering them to consult with interested parties. Evidence from the NDCs suggests that residents may feel more strongly about some issues than others—such as crime, the quality of the local environment, and provision of services—and will be expected to contribute tacit knowledge to planning and service provision (CLG, 2010a, page 59). Neighbourhoods may be either homogeneous communities, which can express collective interests and locally elected representatives can get to know institutions and individuals identified as representing the community, or heterogeneous, where subgroups compete for political influence. The residual commitment to the neighbourhood may well reflect the past where populations were less mobile and more homogeneous than in many towns and cities today.

3.2 Familiarity

The rationale relating to familiarity is that the neighbourhood is perceived as the fundamental geographically defined social unit in towns and cities and is therefore the most important arena where social interaction takes place. It is argued that residents not only tend to know each other but are also willing to interact in order to achieve public goods such as an improved environment and better-quality services. The concept of social capital assumes that reciprocity and trust between citizens creates a resource which can be used to achieve wider societal goals such as regeneration. Where both bonding and bridging social capital exist neighbourhoods may prosper, but one or both are often largely absent in areas of greatest deprivation. The existence of social ties (with various degrees of bridging, bonding, and linking social capital) means that local governance is likely to be more effective and that new 'governance spaces' (Gaventa, 2004) can be created which enhance the quality of life in the area. Experiments in different forms of neighbourhood governance are much easier to establish where trust and reciprocity exist between residents and where service providers are already familiar with the needs and issues in the area.

3.3 Representation and accountability

Lowndes and Sullivan (2008, page 58) identify three key propositions regarding local representation and accountability. First, local residents are aware of the issues which affect them and can access the governance system more easily. Second, elected representatives are accessible and therefore more likely to be responsive to local opinion. Third, local democratic processes are likely to be more transparent since the consequences of different actions at the local level are likely to be visible, and therefore it is easier to hold representatives to account. Again, these are very much suppositions which are appropriated in policy discourse and which do not hold true in all areas. The debate about the 'democratic deficit', the new localism, and the need to empower citizens reflect a range of responses to contrary evidence.

3.4 Efficiency

Arguments about subsidiarity often include assumptions about greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services. It is argued that at the local level services can be targeted towards specific groups and policy objectives, thus reducing waste.

At the same time it is asserted that governance institutions can be designed to reflect local interests and to engage those stakeholders or interests that might be excluded if services were provided at a higher level. The use of information technology means that data can be collected more readily and processed more effectively to support local policies. Building on this base, it is argued that the quality of services can be enhanced by moving towards coproduction (Boyle and Harris, 2008) and citizen-centred governance (Barnes et al, 2008). While financial evidence on the impact of different forms of governance is hard to come by, there is anecdotal evidence (as revealed by the case study below) to suggest that increased expenditure through various forms of neighbourhood governance can lead to higher levels of resident satisfaction and reduced expenditure at a later date (for example, through crime reduction, improved health and life expectancy, and savings on financial transfers such as unemployment benefit and tax credits). This is sometimes called preventative expenditure.

It has already been suggested that neighbourhoods are socially constructed by those attempting to promote change in governance arrangements or quality of life. Although boundaries tend to be arbitrary, the assumption is often made that they contain between 1000 and 10 000 residents. However, there is an inevitable tension between the need to emphasise the 'local' and the desire to define larger areas where economies of scale can be secured. Once defined, they then become a basic unit of administration. Lowndes and Sullivan (2008, page 58) identify four forms or 'ideal types' of neighbourhood governance, each accentuating different priorities for change: empowerment of citizens and communities; partnership; government through new forms of representation and participation; and management in terms of more effective local service delivery. These forms are often overlapping and competing for staff time and resources. They reflect the complex and frequently contested local policy environment where different stakeholders are both working collaboratively and promoting their own priorities and policies. Although compromises are normally reached, objectives can become too complex making it very difficult to assess impact. As Coaffee and Johnston (2005) note: "Area committees have, for some UK local authorities, increased the complexity of local government modernisation by placing too many contradictory agendas on the table, and by adding to an already-complicated policy maze, which the inexperienced, in particular, find hard to navigate" (page 173).

4 Innovations in neighbourhood governance in England
Neighbourhood governance gained new political vigour with the election of the Labour government in 1997. The establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit and the publication of a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998) heralded a strong commitment to "bridging the gap between deprived areas and the national average" (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000, page 7) and addressing four key targets: worklessness, crime, health, and better qualifications. Linked to this strategy was the creation of a number of cross-departmental Policy Action Teams (PATs) to review the evidence and put forward recommendations.

Neighbourhood governance was seen as a priority at the time because it involved addressing issues of deprivation at the local level by working through local authorities and other service providers. It could also be linked closely with other initiatives such as the modernisation of institutions, the achievement of 'best value' in delivering services, and the active engagement of residents over and above traditional democratic processes. This convergence of attention towards the neighbourhood level was reflected in wider trends in society. Widening differentials in income and local housing allocation policies tended to aggregate the most disadvantaged populations in particular localities. Meanwhile, engagement with local democratic processes was in decline, and there

was a feeling that local government was becoming remote and failing to address local needs. This trend had been apparent at least since 1980 when a number of relatively short-lived experiments in decentralising services were established (see, for example, Burns et al, 1994). In addition, the perception of the loss of a sense of 'community' stimulated a revival in the debate about building capacity and social capital in deprived areas (see Taylor, 2007).

One of the early initiatives of the newly elected Labour government was to set up a series of cross-cutting policy reviews to be carried out by PATs. PAT 4 was established to consider neighbourhood management (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000). The report recommended setting up a series of neighbourhood management partnerships in deprived areas in order to test this approach and to identify best practice. In 2001 the government funded thirty-five Pathfinder partnerships in two rounds from 2001 for seven years each at a total cost of approximately £100 million. Each area was awarded £3.5 million over seven years to cover core management and running costs and to leverage projects. Each had an accountable body to manage the financial arrangements. While most were local authorities, a few were third-sector organisations or registered social landlords. From April 2007 all Pathfinder funding was delivered through Local Area Agreements (LAAs), overseen by the Local Strategic Partnership in each local authority. Thus funding was fully integrated into local funding streams for the lifetime of the Pathfinders. Projects were managed by boards made up of local authority officers and elected members, representatives of service providers, and local residents.

5 Neighbourhood governance in the City of Westminster

Running in parallel with the national programme, the City of Westminster Council launched its own experiment in neighbourhood governance. For this it relied heavily on the Paddington Development Trust (PDT), a third-sector organisation which had been formed in 1998 to deliver an SRB programme in north Westminster. In 2002 the Westminster City Partnership was formed, and the following year the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy designated four Local Area Renewal Partnerships (LARPs) in the wards with the highest levels of deprivation. The PDT became the accountable body for three LARPs, and a housing association took on the fourth. Of these, Church Street ward was submitted to central government for inclusion in the NMP programme in 2005. This was accepted, and it became one of only six national pathfinders with a third-sector accountable body. From 2007 funding from central and local sources to all LARPS was channelled through the LAA, and delivery agreements between the Council and PDT were effective until March 2011. Table 1 provides a summary of neighbourhood management arrangements in the City of Westminster.

In 2010 we were invited by PDT to evaluate the 'Westminster approach' to the organisation and the delivery of neighbourhood management, focusing particularly on the Church Street Pathfinder (see Pill and Bailey, 2010). Our methodology applied Lowndes and Sullivan's (2008) four forms of neighbourhood governance as a conceptual framework of ideal types. We also drew on Mathur and Skelcher's (2007) approach to evaluating democratic performance in situations of network governance where "we are concerned with the day-to-day behaviour of actors in a network governance system rather than the system's formal properties" (page 233). They argue that research should identify the hardware of formal organisational structures as well as the 'software' in order to make empirical judgments about performance (page 230). The project was executed by collecting relevant national and local policy documentation in order to establish the organisational 'hardware' and to explore in some depth the context in which the LARPs were embedded. The second stage involved carrying out twenty-five

Table 1. Summary of neighbourhood management arrangements in Westminster.

	Local Area Renewal Partnership			
	Church Street Neighbourhood Forum and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder	Westbourne Neighbourhood Forum	Queen's Park Forum	Harrow Road Neighbourhood Partnership
Full-time staff	9	4	4	3
Area covered	one ward	one ward	one ward	one ward
Approximate population (based on post-2001 estimates)	12 000	10 000	11 500	8 500
Accountable body	PDT	PDT	PDT	Genesis Housing Group and 5 other Registered Social Landlords
Annual revenue budget	£400 000	£185 000	£187 000	na
Membership of the board	6 local residents, 6 from neighbourhood organisations, 6 from statutory sector, 3 ward councillors, 1 young advisor	11 elected residents, 2 from community organisations, 1 business representative, 6 service providers, 3 ward councillors	6 elected residents, 4 from voluntary sector, 6 statutory bodies represented on board, 1 member nominated by PDT (ex officio), 1 ward councillor (ex officio)	Community organisations, key council departments and statutory bodies, ward councillors
Action plans	2005 Delivery Plan regularly updated, 'available' but not distributed widely	Neighbourhood Plan 2006–09	Neighbourhood Plan 2008–12	Renewal Plan 2007–11
Total public spend in the ward, 2008/09 (£ million)[a]	126	120	118	106

[a] The methodology for calculating these sums is set out in City of Westminster (2010, page 10).

semistructured interviews with key respondents from the City Council, PDT, officers from partnership agencies, board members, and local residents with a particular focus on the Church Street area. Interviewees were asked about the selection of areas, their role in the management and delivery of the project, their assessment of the value for money and the impact of neighbourhood management, and the costs and benefits arising from the Westminster approach. They were also asked a series of questions about options and prospects for the future. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. This enabled an exploration of the formal organisational and procedural structures, the informal negotiations and collaborative arrangements, and the relative importance of the four 'ideal types'.

There was substantial evidence that the civic, social, and political ideal types were being addressed through the location of area offices, staffed by highly motivated officers in each area, and that substantial resources were put into consulting, supporting, and enabling local communities to play a bigger role in neighbourhood management. The selection of PDT as delivery agent aided this process because it brought expertise and a strong commitment to community development as well as being credible to the community. Moreover, because several staff had been seconded from council departments they proved very effective operators in brokering and negotiating projects between different funding bodies and agencies through officer and political networks. As one senior council officer noted:

> "The LARPs' skills have developed and our skills on the other side in responding have been about finding ways through issues, and finding compromise, finding mediation, finding a solution. It has been a model of co-operation and partnership, but I think that has been helped by these soft linkages into the Council: relationships and trust and people getting to know each other."

In addition, new organisational arrangements were established to give residents a 'space' to express their views and opinions. The presence of residents on the boards of each LARP meant that processes of decision making became more transparent and democratic. In general, elected ward members also welcomed the opportunity to engage residents. One senior officer expressed the view that "there was a lot of hostility against the Council. That's now completely changed ... neighbourhood management enables us to reach out. One of the biggest benefits is to the Council's reputation."

There is less evidence in relation to the economic ideal type although many respondents welcomed the closer collaboration between the council and other service providers such as the Primary Care Trust and the police. There was substantial evidence that services were being more effectively targeted on very diverse populations and that new services were created to meet the specific needs of particular subgroups, such as young school leavers and recent immigrant communities. Evidence that neighbourhood management was either increasing the efficiency and quality of service delivery or increasing its cost was very hard to establish. However, many respondents referred to the benefits of having a targeted approach based on an agreed delivery plan. It was also noted by service providers that the LARPs were a very good way of providing feedback on the effectiveness of service provision and would often make suggestions for improvements. Westminster's commitment to community engagement in the LARPs helped gain the council a 'green flag' commendation in the 2010 Comprehensive Area Assessment. This assessment of all local authority activities, together with local performance indicators, was abolished by the incoming coalition government in May 2010.

With regard to the use of existing wards as the boundary of each LARP, most respondents felt that wards were the most appropriate definition of neighbourhoods, although they accepted that definitions were relatively arbitrary. One important justification for using wards was that they were already the primary unit of political representation. The manageable size of population, the ability to build on previous projects (such as SRB), and a relatively strong civil society in the form of many voluntary and community organisations were more important factors in defining target areas than geographical characteristics or a sense of community. Moreover, the presence of the neighbourhood management teams and the engagement of existing ward councillors meant that the delivery programme reinforced the approach that each area should be treated as a neighbourhood.

6 The strengths and limitations of national programmes

In this section we set the Westminster case study in the wider context of the key findings from the national evaluations of NMPs (SQW Consulting, 2008) and the NDC programme (CLG, 2010a; 2010b; 2010c).

Both the primary research conducted in the City of Westminster and the national evaluations found that the strengths of neighbourhood governance relate to the allocation of staff and resources to specific locations with populations of fewer than 15 000 residents whose role is to develop a strategy to reduce deprivation and improve service delivery (Pill and Bailey, 2010; SQW Consulting, 2008). Key stakeholders and residents are represented on a board which oversees strategy and implementation. Community involvement is a major aspect of neighbourhood governance in order to be able to assess and respond more effectively to local needs. Adopting a holistic approach is a major strength, yet evidence suggests that it is place-related issues which are more effectively addressed at the local level (CLG, 2010a, page 6). Also, different policy objectives may require differing time periods to achieve the required outcomes. Good organisational links with the local authority and other agencies, frequently facilitated through personal contacts, are vital for the success of these programmes.

The national evaluation of the NMPs (SQW Consulting, 2008, page 85) suggests that the most effective gains have been achieved in: policing and community safety; environmental services; improving the management of private rented housing; and improving the take-up of employment, training, and health services. The national evaluation of the NDC programme comes to broadly similar conclusions: at best, an area-based approach can integrate and coordinate delivery, focus larger agencies, and leverage additional resources in order to achieve sustainable change in the longer term. However, there are qualifications to this general endorsement: the evaluation suggests that not all policy objectives will be appropriate for treatment at the neighbourhood level. There have been examples where NDC partnerships have extended their boundaries for some types of intervention. "Generally, the evaluation suggests that the issues most effectively tackled at the neighbourhood level are some aspects of crime, environment, housing management and public health ... . In short, the services that are delivered best at neighbourhood level are those that interact at that level with service users" (CLG, 2010a, page 6). Moreover, the NDC teams had difficulties in identifying 'natural' boundaries, and few attempted to define the function of the area (page 9).

Both evaluations provide survey evidence to show a gradual, if modest, improvement in local conditions in the target areas. For instance, in the Pathfinder areas the percentage of residents satisfied with the area as a place to live increased by 4% between 2003 and 2006 in contrast to only a 1% increase in the comparator areas. The percentage satisfied with the police service in their area increased from 47% to 53% in the same period (SQW Consulting, 2008, page 87). Between 2002 and 2008 in the NDC areas there was an improvement in thirty-two of the thirty-six core indicators set by central government, and for twenty-six out of twenty-sven indicators this change was statistically significant (CLG, 2010c, page 6).

The initiatives discussed here have all the limitations of time-constrained area-based initiatives. Teams and representative boards are established, and additional funding is available for a fixed period. Resources can thus be targeted effectively, but in the longer term questions arise about whether the higher level of resource input can be justified and where revenue funding will be found, if at all, for the future. Critics of NDC, in particular, argue that the centrally imposed policy objectives and performance management system distracted the local teams from effective local delivery:

"far from proving a radical departure in relation to implementation and governance, the NDC programme became a mechanism through which to deliver a series of

mainstream projects within broad outcomes defined by central government" (Beatty et al, 2010, page 247).

In leading the national evaluation team of thirty-nine NDC areas, Lawless (2011) draws similar conclusions: "The NDC programme can be seen as a form of 'locality managerialism' rooted in a centrally imposed framework designed to re-embed deprived individuals within the mainstream through the delivery of routine projects and the spending of annual financial allocations" (page 530).

Other limitations of neighbourhood governance relate to the difficulties of collecting measurable data—for example, on the impact of community involvement strategies. In the primary research and the national evaluations, transparency and accountability were identified as significant issues since only those with direct contact tended to be aware of the projects. In the Westminster case the annual action plan for Church Street contained a large number of objectives with low levels of resources attached, and the plan was used mainly for internal purposes and was not widely publicised. In all cases evaluation teams identified weaknesses in procedures of monitoring and evaluation so that evidence of outcomes was not always collected on a regular basis. In the Church Street area a Performance and Evaluation Officer was employed for two days a week to collect evidence of impact and outcomes and to inform policy. Yet, when interviewed, he made it clear that:

"Not everything we do is informed by a solid set of data, a lot is based on anecdotal information and the knowledge that officers have of the neighbourhood. In all cases I haven't got the data to back up what we're doing, but the ideal scenario is that we do have a baseline before the intervention begins."

And:

"What I'm lacking in terms of my role is the evaluation side, partly down to capacity and partly due to it being difficult to do. And perhaps it's not so far been a huge priority."

It appeared that because of the emphasis on community involvement and the need to improve interagency collaboration the LARPs were less concerned about value for money and the cost of service delivery. The interviews suggested that the three elected members on the board were less concerned about value for money than in ensuring that Church Street and the LARPs received the resources to which it was felt they were entitled given their levels of deprivation. This suggests that of Lowndes and Sullivan's (2008, page 62) four ideal types the economic dimension of neighbourhood management was of lesser importance—in that, while policy innovation took place, the process became more important than the impact, and little attempt was made to keep records or to evaluate outcomes.

Because of the difficulties of data collection and calculation, neither the Pathfinders nor NDC evaluations gave much consideration to value for money. The Pathfinder evaluation calculates that "a Pathfinder model neighbourhood management partnership with a full multi-sector partnership, a neighbourhood manager and a team of 4–5 people based in a local office can be delivered for £200,000 per year" (SQW Consulting, 2008, page 86). Assuming an average population of 10 000, this works out at £20 per head per year. In reality, staff costs allocated to a particular locality can appear excessive when cuts in services elsewhere are being proposed. In addition, the development of new services and the replacement of existing facilities can add to both the capital and revenue costs of local authorities. On the other hand, early intervention through improved education, public health, and housing, for example, can reduce dependency on services at a later date by preventing unemployment, criminal activity, hospital treatment, and homelessness. These savings are extremely difficult to calculate.

The City of Westminster carried out a detailed review of its own spending patterns in 2010. The findings demonstrated that the wards with LARPs received the highest levels of public spending. For example, whereas the average City expenditure per ward in 2008/09 was £35 million, it was £68 million in Church Street ward. The average spend by all public bodies per ward in the same financial year was £75 million, but £126 million in Church Street (City of Westminster, 2010, pages 7 – 10).

The effective delivery of services through complex collaborative arrangements is time-consuming and difficult and often means that process becomes more important than outcomes. Both NDC and NMP were conceived as experiments with predetermined funding periods. The Westminster approach was abruptly terminated in late 2010 when the council announced that all funding for neighbourhood management would cease in early 2011. As a senior officer observed:

"I suppose it depends how much you value what they [the LARPs] do. I think if they just disappeared there would be a lot lost in terms of our knowledge, our intelligence, our ability to deliver some of those resident involvement structures ... . What we should be doing is looking at alternative sources of funding and thinking about the LARPs as models of delivery for those. There's also this idea about them moving to a social enterprise model. I don't really know what that means."

Many of the Pathfinders and NDC projects have established alternative organisational structures as part of their continuation strategy. Most have become community development trusts or social enterprises with income streams coming from assets acquired during the main funding period. This has contributed to the growth of what is known as the third sector (Office of the Third Sector, 2006).

7 Continuity and change

The coalition government emerged out of the general election in May 2010. For economic and ideological reasons its main priority was to reduce the economic deficit and thereby limit the role of the state. The 'big society' agenda is intended to fill the gap left after substantial cuts in public expenditure have been implemented at central and local levels. 'Localism' is the term being applied to a wide range of strategies emphasising devolving power down the hierarchy. As the coalition government's strategy document states: "It is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people. We will promote decentralisation and democratic engagement, and we will end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals" (Cabinet Office, 2010, page 11).

Recent research already suggests that local authorities have different understandings of localism; and, as their central funding is being cut by an average of 7.25% per year over four years, they are not "reconfiguring their organisations for localism with the same energy that they are for, say, budget cuts" (Deloitte, 2011, page 3).

Funding for new initiatives, so far as it is available, will come from a proposed 'big society bank' drawing on the dormant bank accounts held by the clearing banks. Social investment bonds are also being considered as a way of introducing private investment into welfare provision. Four local authority areas have been designated as 'vanguard communities' to develop particular self-help initiatives, although Liverpool City Council has already withdrawn. Any attempt at redistribution and the targeting of the most deprived areas prevalent in previous government-sponsored initiatives which gave rise to neighbourhood governance is conspicuously absent from this approach.

The previous government had advocated "double devolution", which is the transfer of power "not just to the town hall, but beyond, to neighbourhoods and individual citizens" (ODPM, 2006, page 8), although this commitment was conspicuously absent from a subsequent policy document on empowerment (Bailey, 2010; CLG, 2008).

More recently, the Conservative Party (2009) has argued for varying degrees of localism with a greater emphasis on community self-help. However, in advocating the transfer of responsibilities for unemployment benefits, community care, and crime prevention from central to local government, three influential Conservative local authority leaders make no reference to neighbourhood governance (Barrow et al, 2010). A number of other think tanks, mainly from a right-wing perspective, have argued for a combination of self-help, voluntarism, community organisation, and what is now called 'radical efficiency' as a means of plugging the gap left in the retreat of the local state (see, for example, Coote, 2010; Gillinson et al, 2010; Shakespeare, 2010).

The coalition government's commitment to the big society has been criticised on philosophical, political, and practical grounds, but it is not possible to examine all these arguments here in any detail. Kisby (2010), for example, refers to the 'vacuity' of the concept in that it attempts to revive ideas around 'small state', 'active citizenship', and volunteering promoted by previous Conservative governments. It tends to favour community organisations in more affluent areas (with high levels of social capital) and does nothing to challenge the growing levels of economic inequality or to reduce social exclusion. Powers are included in the Localism Bill (Houses of Parliament, 2010) to enable communities to prepare land-use-orientated neighbourhood plans but only where these set out new opportunities for development.

8 Conclusions

In this paper we set out to examine a number of questions relating to the significance of the neighbourhood in the delivery of different approaches to neighbourhood governance, within the broader context of the new localism. Evidence was reviewed from commentators, a study of the City of Westminster, and findings from the evaluation of two national programmes. The shrouding of the neighbourhood concept in a new set of ideological clothes since 2010 demonstrates the longevity of the idea.

Our main findings largely support those of Durose and Lowndes (2010) who argue that "the definition of a neighbourhood is inevitably subjective, dynamic and multi-faceted" (page 343). We concluded earlier that the main justifications for using the neighbourhood were for reasons of convenience, familiarity, representation, and efficiency. However, underlying these justifications are a number of factors which have often been overlooked in the evolution of neighbourhood governance.

First, the neighbourhood as defined in all the programmes cited above is often interpreted too narrowly as a static concept with a relatively stable, monolithic community. It was noted that in Westminster wards were used as proxies for reasons of administrative convenience and political representation. Both the NDC and NMP programmes selected neighbourhoods with a population of about 10 000 for similar reasons. Wallace (2010), in particular, offers "the central critique ... that New Labour's 'community' depoliticises social relations and assumes a degree of homogeneity and unity within neighbourhoods" (page 816). Benington (2006) is also critical of the lack of attention to "wider political and economic forces which shape local communities" (page 14). Moreover, the policy context is itself subject to constant change; and whilst the launch of a particular programme may emerge out of a particular political and policy context, it may be quickly wound up in a different economic or political climate.

Second, the typology of ideal types introduced by Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) provides a very useful framework for examining the multiple objectives underlying neighbourhood governance. Two common themes emerging are the increasing inclusion of new and interrelated policy areas which require complex collaborative arrangements between partners, as well as the increasing dependence on community engagement and involvement in management and delivery. Both these factors can lead to differential

expectations, objectives, and perceptions of outcomes from different stakeholders. In Westminster respondents tended to suggest that 'process' was often valued more highly than the ability to demonstrate impact. Also, as Pierre (2009, page 600) notes, there can be friction and a lack of transparency when network governance comes up against more traditional forms of local democracy.

Finally, the concepts of the 'social' and 'community' have evolved considerably since 1997. In 2006 Benington referred to the growing importance of civil society as a newly emergent force at the local level and as a bulwark between the state and the market. This trend has become particularly apparent with the discussion of the big society. There are unlikely to be further programmes with the characteristics of NDC and NMP where central government superimposes its own ideas about local area organisation, funding, and delivery on complex local political contexts in the form of area-based initiatives. For the foreseeable future it seems that the policy emphasis will focus on developing different forms of civil society but without large budgets, management of resources through LAAs, and a performance framework as was provided through the Audit Commission and national indicators.

What conclusions can be drawn about the changing meaning of neighbourhood? First, it is a geographical definition of space which confers identity and meaning for residents and other stakeholders. However, once boundaries are defined it takes on a new administrative, political, and sometimes socially constructed reality. Second, the definition of neighbourhood is based more often on administrative convenience and political representation than any objective study of social relations or ability to achieve economies of scale. Neighbourhoods can contain a variety of subgroups and features, some of which might be defined as dysfunctional. Third, the multifaceted characteristics of neighbourhoods are often overlooked in the interests of delivering a relatively standardised set of policy objectives. Fourth, taking action within the neighbourhood often disregards wider, structural processes which can influence, for example, education, employment opportunities, health, and life chances. Fifth, successive governments have devised complex programmes of intervention in order to ameliorate adverse circumstances and improve service delivery in the most deprived areas. Evidence from the programmes reviewed here suggests that these have had limited impact in challenging deep-seated inequalities but that community engagement has brought positive outcomes in many locations.

In the period since the 1960s the neighbourhood has been the site of innovation and experimentation around the selection of areas for special attention and the piloting of different ways of mobilising residents and delivering better quality services (Durose and Richardson, 2009). From 2010 the neighbourhood has retained its preeminent role as a locus for policy, but there has been a fundamental shift away from redistribution towards a philosophy of self-help with few if any additional resources.

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