



## Ingredients for Community Engagement: The Civic Pioneer Experience

September 2006

research study conducted on behalf of the  
Community Empowerment Division (DCLG)

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1. Background

It is well recognised that local authorities play a crucial role in civil renewal. In response to this the Community Empowerment Division (formerly at the Home Office but now part of the Department for Communities and Local Government DCLG) in partnership with the Local Government Association and the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives developed the **Civic Pioneer initiative**. Civic Pioneers are councils who have signed up to say they are committed developing ways to involve citizens in the decision making process. The Together We Can website<sup>1</sup> defines a Civic Pioneer as:

*“...in essence a local authority committed to the ethos of community engagement, regarding participatory democracy not as a threat to or substitute for, but a vital complement to representative democracy.”*

*- Together We Can*

A full list of current Civic Pioneer authorities along with a list of the three core characteristics of Civic Pioneers is included in Appendix A.

DCLG is currently working with a number of Civic Pioneer authorities to examine how they have developed and are developing their approaches to engaging local people in shaping public policies and services. This information has been useful in contributing to shaping proposals in the forthcoming Local Government White paper which has as one aim the greater involvement of citizens and communities in influencing the nature of service delivery.

The Civic Pioneer authorities use a range of different models for citizen engagement, reflecting the local context in which individual authorities operate. Currently, the authorities are conducting a stock-take of their engagement arrangements and following this they will develop and implement an Action Plan to strengthen these arrangements.

## 1.2. Objectives of the project

The main aim of the ‘Community Engagement: Ingredients for Success’ is to carefully examine different approaches to engagement being used and to assess what works and under which circumstances. Clearly different approaches are likely to be more applicable to different areas: what works for local neighbourhood involvement in a diverse urban area may be different to what works in a more homogeneous rural one. Therefore, the main aim of the research is to identify **transferable features, or ingredients**, that can be applied to different policy developments/areas.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.togetherwecan.info/pioneers/>

The outputs of the exercise are to establish the key influences on successful citizen engagement. As well as looking at the structures in place to enable citizen engagement, this project also explores the views of those citizens involved in the different arrangements, to gauge what they feel does and does not work and how their involvement has changed their views and behaviour about engagement and decision-making.

### 1.3. Structure of the report

This report draws on the research findings from each stage of the project in order to produce a set of key ingredients that enables community engagement to be successful. It is structured as follows:

**Executive Summary** – this section summarises the main findings of the research and includes implications for the future development of community engagement.

**Methodology** – this section details the methods used to conduct this research.

**Understanding of Engagement** – this section explores how community engagement as a concept is viewed from different perspectives. Civic Pioneers also reflect on why they engage (their motivations) and how they go about doing it (their approaches).

**Evaluating Engagement** – this section looks at the factors that Civic Pioneers consider denote ‘good’ engagement. It also explores how these can be measured and the extent any area has been involved in any measurement exercise.

**Ingredients for Engagement** – this and the following 10 sections take each of the ingredients for successful engagement in turn to look at their wider context, how they translate into a local context, and also their importance for engagement.

**Interactions between Ingredients** – this section shows the core ingredients for successful engagement and how they interact with each other.

### 1.4. Interpretation of the findings

#### Qualitative data

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research is not designed to provide statistically reliable data on what those within local authorities as a whole are thinking. It is illustrative rather than statistically reliable and therefore does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the *extent* to which something is happening.

Instead, qualitative research is intended to shed light on *why* people have particular views and *how* these views relate to demographic characteristics and the experiences of individuals in the areas concerned. It also enables researchers to test the strength of people’s opinions. It is important to bear in mind that we are dealing with *perceptions* rather than *facts*.

## **Context**

Throughout this document, where we believe it may be helpful, we have included information about the wider context in which this debate is taking place. Information given in the Context sections are the opinions of Ipsos MORI (supported by published evidence where relevant) and are designed to supplement data gathered in the primary research. However, this is not based on detailed desk research so should be considered as indicative of the debates rather than an in-depth analysis.

### **1.5. Publication of the results**

As with all our studies, these findings are subject to Ipsos MORI's standard Terms & Conditions of Contract. Any press release or publication of the findings of this survey requires the advance approval of Ipsos MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

### **1.6. Acknowledgements**

Ipsos MORI would like to thank all the Civic Pioneers who were able to contribute to the online consultation. We would particularly like to thank the six 'case study' areas for their help identifying and recruiting participants for the depth interviews and discussion groups. We also pass our grateful thanks to all the participants, without whom the research would not have been possible.

## 2. Executive Summary

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*“A civic pioneer is in essence a local authority committed to the ethos of community engagement, regarding participatory democracy not as a threat to or substitute for, but a vital complement to representative democracy.”*

*- Together We Can*

DCLG is currently working with a number of Civic Pioneer Authorities to examine how they have developed and are developing their approaches to engaging local people in shaping public policies and services. This project was designed to use the experiences of the Civic Pioneers to develop an understanding of what ingredients work together in order to help achieve successful engagement.

The project involved a three stage methodology. Stage one was an online bulletin board, open to the 21 Civic Pioneers<sup>2</sup>. For the second stage we chose six diverse Case Study areas where we conducted interviews with key figures within the councils and their partner organisations, and discussion groups with members of the public who have been involved through local engagement structures. The final stage was a concept testing workshop in London, attended by representatives of the Home Office, ODPM, SQW and of course the Civic Pioneers, with whom we developed our thoughts and hypotheses in order to inform this final report.

### **Civic Pioneers see engagement primarily as a way to improve services but find measuring the impact challenging**

Over recent years there has been increasing emphasis on the value of engagement, both implicitly and through central government initiatives such as ‘Together We Can’. This has been welcomed and readily adopted by the Civic Pioneers. In particular, they see engagement as a valuable tool in improving service delivery.

*“You do have to involve the citizens in the decision-making process. The actual running of services, to have a say in what they should be, what they think is important to them, and how the council can work with them to help them meet their needs.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

To a lesser extent some of the Civic Pioneers also mentioned or alluded to the broader impact of social capital. However, this was generally seen as a means to

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for a full list of Civic Pioneers – Cumbria and Middlesbrough became Civic Pioneers after the online consultation was complete.

an end (i.e. leading to increasingly citizen led engagement) rather than an end in itself. Finally, some see engagement as a tool to gain the support of citizens, particularly where difficult decisions have to be made, although they warn that using engagement in this way can be harmful if not approached correctly.

Several Civic Pioneers are currently exploring techniques for measuring the success of engagement. Most are formally or informally monitoring outputs such as number of events, people taking part and types of participants engaged. However, measuring outcomes is seen to be more challenging. Examples include changes in the relationship between the local authority and citizens, the direct impact on participants and the resulting quality of decision-making.

## **Successful engagement requires encouragement, enablers and empowerment (but less jargon)...**

When seeking to engage the public they first need to be encouraged, the key elements of which are providing reassurance, removing barriers, and feeding back about previous exercises to display the value and impact of engaging and show that there is something 'in it for them'. Secondly, it is important to have enablers in place - in particular, making sure people have the information they need, having a range of accessible mechanisms and providing the support and skills needed. Finally, empowering – at least to the extent that people who do engage are able to influence decision-making – is seen to be important.

*“It’s better when you know what to expect, like what the format’s going to be and who’s going to be there. You feel more comfortable saying your piece then.”*

*- Active citizen*

Currently there is some concern that a lack of shared understanding of the key terms used with respect to citizen engagement is creating problems. In particular, it can lead to misunderstandings within and between organisations, and to difficulty when talking with the general public.

## **Nine key ingredients interact with each other, and with local area characteristics, to form the foundations of successful engagement**

The ingredients identified in the research through an iterative process of discussion with the Civic Pioneers are discussed in detail below. Here we aim to give a brief overview of each. However, it should be noted that the ingredients interact with each other and therefore should not be considered in isolation. The four core ingredients identified were leadership/ champion, local involvement structures, organisational culture and agency partnership working. Money/ resources were seen by many to underpin all the ingredients. The other four ingredients were seen to be more secondary. Each of the four core ingredients interacts not only with the other core ingredients but also with the secondary ones. These interactions are explored in detail in the main report.

Civic Pioneers also identify a number of Local Area Characteristics which interact with the ingredients. Again these are dealt with in more detail in the main report, but it is important to note that the specific conditions a local authority is facing will impact on the relevance of each of the ingredients as well as the success of engagement.

The ingredients are as follows:



**Leadership/Champions:** Having good leaders who are committed to engagement, and appropriately placed champions in both the executive and elected arms of the council working with community champions is seen to be very valuable in establishing and facilitating successful engagement. There is some concern that leadership is not constant and therefore, on its own, leadership cannot be relied upon. Equally, leadership can be a powerful barrier to successful engagement if they are not supportive.

*“There’s no question; if the Chief Executive is not interested then it won’t happen.”*

- Civic Pioneer

**Organisational Culture and Structure:** Civic Pioneers feel that culture and structure have an important role to play in setting the foundations for engagement. Many are experimenting with different ways to position community engagement within their organisations in order to maximise its effectiveness and have arranged training courses to encourage a shared understanding of engagement. An organisational culture aligned to engagement is seen to be vital in achieving and maintaining trust of citizens – without which, many feel it is extremely difficult to engage.



*“It shouldn’t all focus on whoever happens to be in your community engagement team. Engagement is actually part of everyone’s role and job description which they all have a duty to undertake”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

**Local Involvement Structures:** Identifying which particular structures or mechanisms work best is outside of the scope of this exercise (such as how to decide between a Citizen Panel or an ad hoc survey, or between a workshop and an Area Forum). However, structures themselves are seen as an important ingredient for achieving successful engagement. There is some debate about whether devolved budgets are appropriate, but complete agreement that clarity about what each structure is designed to achieve and what it can and cannot influence is vital. Ultimately, it is recognised that one-size does not fit all and that successful engagement will require a range of tools.

*“The key thing is this area has been working with existing district based structures...close enough to the community to be able to listen, engage and know what’s going on, and big enough to make a difference.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

**Agency Partnership Working:** Increasingly local authorities are seeking to work in partnership with other organisations (statutory sector and VCS) in order to achieve common goals. Partnership working is seen to have particular benefits for engagement including reducing consultation fatigue, appearing joined-up and being able to respond more easily to citizens needs. There are also opportunities to learn from partner organisations as well as the clear financial advantages of sharing the costs of engagement.

**Money/Resources:** Underlying the ingredients, money and resources are key drivers and facilitators of engagement. Some areas have dedicated budgets for engagement, feeling this emphasises the importance, while others prefer not to as they feel it could possibly lead to engagement being treated as an ‘add-on’ and consequently find the money for engagement within other budgets. Some sources of funding lead to particular challenges for local authorities, for example those that are time limited or only available to specified areas. However, there is consensus that without resource and money engagement will be difficult, if not impossible.

**Community-Led/Driven:** This bottom-up approach to engagement where the community drives the agenda is held up to be the ‘purest’ form of engagement. In particular, the community leading or driving the agenda, either through existing mechanisms or outside of the current involvement structures is seen to be indicative of people who care about their local area. However, Civic Pioneers recognise that a situation where everyone is willing to come forward of their own accord is unlikely to happen, and some are concerned about the self-selecting nature of those who do come forward, and consequently

they note that although community-led engagement is ‘nice-to-have’ it is not essential for successful engagement.

**Single Issues:** Strongly linked to community-led engagement, single issues are identified as a useful way to reach a wider audience. Each Civic Pioneer could identify at least one salient issue which ‘fires up’ local residents. The challenge is to harness this interest and use it to channel ‘fresh blood’ into existing mechanisms.

*“[Single issues] can be a trigger to bring people to the table who wouldn’t previously have got engaged.”*

*- Workshop participant*

**Targets/Performance Indicators:** Targets were probably one of the most highly debated ingredients. On the one hand, most participants recognise that due to the nature of local authorities, targets are important if engagement is to be taken seriously. However, along with general issues with the number of targets set for local government, there are also some specific issues (as discussed above) about whether it is possible to set meaningful targets for engagement given the difficulties in measuring impact.

*“I think certainly from my point of view the CPA has really focussed the mind of the leadership and community engagement is a key line of enquiry and certainly they are sitting up and paying attention.”*

*- Workshop participant*

**Stability:** Stability of personnel, structures and political control are all seen to potentially impact on the success of engagement. Many of the Civic Pioneers spoke about issues arising when an area undergoes changes and the impact this can have. Although it is recognised that change can be needed to instigate engagement, to then sustain engagement requires stability, particularly so that partner agencies and citizens are aware of the main route into the local authority (both key individuals and local involvement structures – ideally with involvement structures taking precedence over the individuals involved).

## **3. Methodology**

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For this project we have adopted a three stage, iterative methodology.

### **3.1. Stage 1: Online bulletin board**

This involved open consultation with officers/ identification of case study areas/ identifying existing data for case study areas. This involved an online ‘bulletin-board’ discussion hosted by Ipsos MORI to which each of the 21 Civic Pioneer leads along with up to two colleagues were given log-in details. Questions were posted that relate to the current forms of engagement that exist, barriers and enablers to engagement (including the nature of the area), and how engagement has influenced local decision-making. The discussion guide is included in Appendix B.

### **3.2. Stage 2: Case studies**

This stage consisted of six to ten depth interviews with stakeholders in each of six chosen case study areas and a total of 11 discussion groups with members of the public currently involved in engagement programmes spread across the case study areas, combined with analysis of existing data available for the case study areas.

The areas chosen were Harlow, High Peak & Derbyshire Dales, Newcastle, Portsmouth, Southwark and Wolverhampton, to ensure a mix of the following key characteristics:

Unitary/metropolitan/district council

Rural/urban

Ethnic diversity

	Pop ( <sup>3</sup> '000)	Type	Area	% BME <sup>4</sup>	CPA	IMD <sup>5</sup> (rank / 354)
Harlow (CPA Score for Essex)	78	District	Urban	2% Asian 1% Black	'05 4* '04 Good	120
High Peak/DD (CPA for Derbyshire)	160	District	Rural	1% Other	'05 4* '04 Excellent	211, 252
Newcastle	267	Metro	Urban	4% Asian 1% Chinese	'05 3* '04 Good	20
Portsmouth	189	Unitary	Urban	2% Asian 1% Chinese	'05 3* '04 Good	88
Southwark	254	London Borough	Urban	4% Asian 26% Black 3% Chinese	'05 3* '04 Good	17
Wolverhampton	237	Metro	Urban	14% Asian 5% Black	'05 3* '04 Fair	35

Full details of the local area information that was used to select the case study areas are included in Appendix C.

The interviews with Civic Pioneers aimed to understand how practitioners understand engagement and what type of activity is currently underway in the authority. We also tested reactions to the relevance of each ingredient for successful engagement.

The discussion groups explored ways citizens get engaged and what motivates them to do so. We also explored their opinions of their authorities' approaches to engagement and how they think it could be improved.

The topic guide for interviewees and groups are in Appendix D and E.

### 3.3. Stage 3: Concept testing workshop

The half-day workshop was attended by eight Civic Pioneers as well as representatives from three other organisations with an interest in community engagement. (A full list of organisations is included in Appendix F).

The aim of the workshop was firstly to report back our findings from Stages 1 and 2, and secondly to gain further insights into the ingredients identified in stage 2, and how they interlink. It also explored what engagement means to different groups of people (central government, local government, community activities and 'ordinary' members of the public) and what messages participants would like to give to the central government team preparing the imminent Local Government White Paper.

<sup>3</sup> Source: 2001 Census

<sup>4</sup> Source: 2001 Census

<sup>5</sup> Source: Indices of Deprivation 2004

A combination of plenary sessions and exercises in breakout groups was used, in order to make the day interactive and interesting for participants. We also gave participants a task to complete before the day. This involved placing each ingredient in categories of ‘necessary’, ‘sufficient’, ‘nice to have’ and ‘not relevant’ for engagement. They were then asked to rank each ingredient in order of its importance. The agenda for the day is included in Appendix G.

## 4. Understanding of Engagement

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The issues of community engagement and community empowerment are not new. Any examination of ministerial speeches over the last eight years will find numerous references to involving and engaging people. Efforts have been made across a number of services to effectively engage with people: all local authorities are obliged to consult residents much more than previously through mechanisms such as BVPI<sup>6</sup> surveys; in regeneration, the SRB<sup>7</sup> and NDC<sup>8</sup> initiatives have consciously sought to empower and involve local communities; Public and Patient Forums have been set up in the Health Service to encourage dialogue between users and healthcare providers; and area governance initiatives, for example ward sub-committees and local area forums, have been promoted widely by and for local government.

However, the issue of engagement has become even more of a focus recently, as represented in *Together We Can: The Government Action Plan for Civil Renewal 2005*. This aims to “transform the relationship between citizens and the state, to pass more power, control and influence from the centre to local communities<sup>9</sup>”. It seeks “to build the capacity of communities to influence public policies and services and to develop more opportunities for that capacity to be exercised”. The importance of community engagement and how to get people more actively involved is also a key policy theme in the forthcoming DCLG white paper local:vision.

The State is to move from simply a leadership role to an increasingly enabling and supportive role. It is believed that this will not only optimise public services and bolster democratic engagement, but will also increase feelings of engagement in society as a whole, potentially boosting social capital:

*“the new social contract must be about new forms of decentralisation, community engagement.....to help support civic pride and community involvement”*  
- David Miliband June 2005

These three themes – improving service delivery, enabling re-engagement with politics and building social capital - underpin the majority of public engagement initiatives, and are reflected in what are felt to be the core values of participatory practice in the UK<sup>10</sup>:

People have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives

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<sup>6</sup> Best Value Performance Indicator

<sup>7</sup> Single Regeneration Budget

<sup>8</sup> New Deal for Communities

<sup>9</sup> Together We Can: The Government Action Plan for Civil Renewal, Home Office, 2005

<sup>10</sup> As identified by Involve in *People and Participation*: see [www.involving.org](http://www.involving.org)

Beneficiaries of public policy can add value to its development and implementation

Participation should lead to change for the better

Whilst this project did not set out to explicitly test such models, which abound in the literature, it is notable that these themes/values were mentioned by the majority of interviewees and discussion group participants, usually couched in similar terms. However, the Civic Pioneers focus predominantly on tangible improvements to public services and in doing so, recognise the additional benefits community engagement can have on increasing and strengthening social capital. Few spontaneously mention the value of strengthening democratic engagement, although this may not be surprising given their focus on services and building local communities. Additionally, they do not mention engaging as an end in itself, but always as a means to an end.

*“There is no point having an all singing, all dancing community involvement exercise for the sake.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

The importance of **improving service delivery** is reflected in the reasons given for engaging with the public. Some interviewees and discussion group participants talk about citizens bringing ‘local expertise’: they believe it is important to recognise that the people living in an area will have valuable insight into what would and would not work in their area. Engagement is also seen as important because it can identify the needs and desires of local people – which can then be kept in mind when making decisions about delivery. Consequently, services can be improved and be better targeted than they otherwise might be.

*“It means involving people, residents and users of the town in the council’s services, the delivery of those services, and how those services are ultimately affecting policy from the grassroots level.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

*“You do have to involve the citizens in the decision-making process. The actual running of services, to have a say in what they should be, what they think is important to them, and how the council can meet their need and work with them to help them meet their needs.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

**Social capital** refers to the extent of connections between citizens and the values of trustworthiness and reciprocity which can arise from these networks. The World Bank<sup>11</sup> uses the following definition:

*“Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions... Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together.”*

*- The World Bank*

Civic Pioneers also mentioned or alluded to the broader impact on social capital, recognising that successful engagement can increase this. Participants felt this had many benefits; not least the hope that increasing social capital means that communities will be better enabled to engage again. It was also hoped that increased social capital would lead to communities becoming more pro-active in approaching the council rather than waiting to be asked, thus leading to an increasingly community-led approach.

*“Citizen engagement is about ensuring that we do reach out to the groups that maybe have less confidence to engage and take up the services that are out there for them, and encourage them to do so by giving them confidence to do so. So I think for me it's about ensuring that we are fully inclusive of all citizens within the community.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

One of the most commonly used phrases when talking about why to engage the public is “*getting people involved in decisions that affect their lives*”. Reflecting this, some general public participants suggest that because the decisions have a direct impact on citizens, they should be able to contribute to them. Finally, some talk about using engagement to ‘**bring on-board**’ citizens, arguing that if people feel that they have been involved in making a decision, they are then more likely to support it and advocate it. However, there is a cautionary note around this point: some of the general public in the discussion groups who had been involved in engagement exercises were sceptical about why they had been involved, and some felt they had been ‘used’ to make decisions without really understanding the decision they were making. This led to some feeling in the general public groups that public involvement was merely rubber stamping decisions that had already been made:

*“Sometimes I think that they have already made up their minds before they ask us what we think.”*

*- Active citizen*

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/scapital/index.htm>



## 4.1. The principles of successful engagement

Involve<sup>12</sup> also identify eight accompanying principles of successful engagement, all of which were again mentioned to some extent by the interviewees and discussion group participant – which suggests that these principles reflect Civic Pioneer’s understanding of engagement:

**Makes a difference:** *The purpose of participation is to achieve change in relation to the purpose identified; it may also make a difference to all those involved in terms of learning, confidence and sense of active citizenship. This requires active commitment to change by all parties.* All participants were convinced that successful engagement should make a difference to the lives of those taking part, predominantly in terms of the community being able to impact on positive change in their local area. There was also some mention of participants being able to make a difference to their own lives through increased social interactions and friendships.

**Transparency, honesty and clarity** *about the purpose, the limits of what can and cannot be changed, who can be involved and how, and what happens as a result.* Both practitioners and members of the community feel that this principle is crucial for sustainable engagement. Furthermore, they intimate that not being transparent or honest can result in people becoming disillusioned and can be dis-engaging. Some members of the public feel that occasionally the council has a hidden agenda when engaging with them: e.g. the activities are more about ‘being seen to be engaging’ than actual interest in their views.

**Accessibility** *so that no participant is excluded because of lack of physical access to meeting places, timing, appropriate support (e.g. child care), etc.* All participants agree that engagement activity should be open and accessible to all. Most mention ensuring this happens through using interpreters, providing childcare facilities, holding meetings in the evening in community venues and providing transport as ways to ensure all citizens can participate. However, many also state that money and resources are needed to pay for and coordinate this.

**Learning and development:** *Participatory processes should seek to support a climate of mutual learning and development among all those involved.* This principle was mentioned by some interviewees and in many of the general public discussion groups. Learning and development was considered important for both practitioners to enable them to do their job properly, and also for those participating in engagement exercises, so they can ‘step up’ to the roles that are expected of them. Again, it was felt that this kind of development and capacity-building is resource intensive and requires some degree of funding.

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<sup>12</sup> Involve is a think-do tank committed to exploring how new forms of public participation can strengthen Britain’s democracy. For more information visit [www.involving.org](http://www.involving.org)

**Power:** *Participatory processes should have sufficient power to achieve the agreed objectives. This may require a change in the existing power sharing arrangements.* Although all participants talk about ensuring that engagement can make a difference, this is not necessarily always associated with changing power sharing arrangements. There is some discussion about whether the devolution of power through engagement mechanisms is appropriate. Some believe it is important to devolve budgets to communities while others feel that although the community should have a say they do not necessarily need to – or should be allowed to – make the final decision.

**Appropriate participants:** *representative and/or inclusive, depending on the purpose of the exercise, with traditionally excluded groups given special support and encouragement when their involvement is appropriate.* Currently there is a strong focus among Civic Pioneers on being inclusive and reaching beyond the ‘usual suspects’ to ensure that engagement is representative. However, for some of the structures set up for the general public (such as community forums) a few Civic Pioneer participants mentioned that sometimes the concern is about getting people involved at all, rather than worrying about whether they are ‘appropriate’.

**Adequate resources:** *to manage the process well and to deliver on the results.* There is a lot of discussion about the importance of having the resources to facilitate engagement and ensure that enough time is allowed for participation. For some, resources are talked about as a facilitator of successful engagement rather than as a principle on which it should be based, while for others the provision of adequate resources are seen as an important sign of commitment to the engagement agenda.

**Voluntary:** *People may be encouraged to be involved, and even paid for involvement, but effective participation requires them to choose to be involved. Participation cannot be compulsory.* No one raised the issue of whether or not engagement should be compulsory or voluntary, and consequently discussion around this point was minimal. The ingredients and approaches explored in this report are based on the assumption that current practice of citizens ‘opting in’ will continue. A handful of interviewees mention the importance of making sure there is something ‘in it’ for the people who are getting engaged (in addition to feeling they’ve made a difference/contribution) in order to motivate them to come along, such as providing a social opportunity or combining engagement with other activities.

## 4.2. Confusing language and overlapping concepts are not helping

Whilst the direction of the move towards more localised and responsive services is generally understood, it is clear from the range of definitions used by politicians, practitioners and the public in the discussion groups that there is no consensus about what the terms and concepts surrounding engagement actually mean.

Despite all the interviewees in case study areas using similar terminology when talking about engagement, such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘shared decision-making’, it was clear that people meant different things when asked to define this further. Many started talking about the processes of engagement – *how* to engage – whilst others talked about the aims and objectives of engagement – *why* to engage. For some there was a lack of clarity about where the emphasis lay and what the role of the Local Authority is/should be, as demonstrated in the discussion below between two workshop participants:

*M1: What sort of behaviours are we trying to encourage?  
Is this about the outcomes? Is it about making things better because things are bad or worse than they should be, or is it about promoting an engagement culture about citizenship and that part of what you do as belonging to this society is to participate in things like this?*

*F: I think it's both of those things*

*M2: I think local authority's more about being a good authority and delivering quality value public services. That's my perception of it.*

Other phrases that were frequently used include:

*‘giving communities an equal footing’,  
‘having a relationship with people in your area’,  
‘knowing what people in the area want and providing them with the opportunities to contribute to decision-making that affects their lives’*

Some interviewees used this opportunity to highlight the difficulties that they believe current terminology is creating. In particular, they feel that the ‘jargon’ surrounding community engagement is not helpful when trying to communicate with the public, who find it hard to understand what is being expected of them and what their role in the process is.

During the workshop, concerns were raised about the impact of this confusing language and overlapping concepts. Whilst there was agreement that basic

models of participation, as propounded by Arnstein<sup>13</sup> 25 years ago, tend to be too simplistic to apply today, and do not fully capture the complexity of different groups' inter-relations, some of the participants felt there was a danger in overcomplicating the debate.

Some participants believed there was a danger of repeating what were felt to be the mistakes linked to the community cohesion agenda, where terms and concepts were not felt to have been clearly defined. This was felt to have an impact on effectiveness of its implementation, with energy and focus wasted through debates about terminology and people becoming increasingly confused about the complexity of the concepts – all of which were felt to hinder delivery.

### Portsmouth

One interviewee, mentioned difficulties with jargon when talking both within the council and to the public. In particular, the terminology could act as a barrier to communication with the public: meaning it could be difficult for them to understand exactly what the council expected of them.

*“I don't think that terms like active citizenship and civil renewal mean a sausage to anyone else and sometimes even to us – we're kind of putting people off with this jargon”*  
- Civic Pioneer

### Wolverhampton

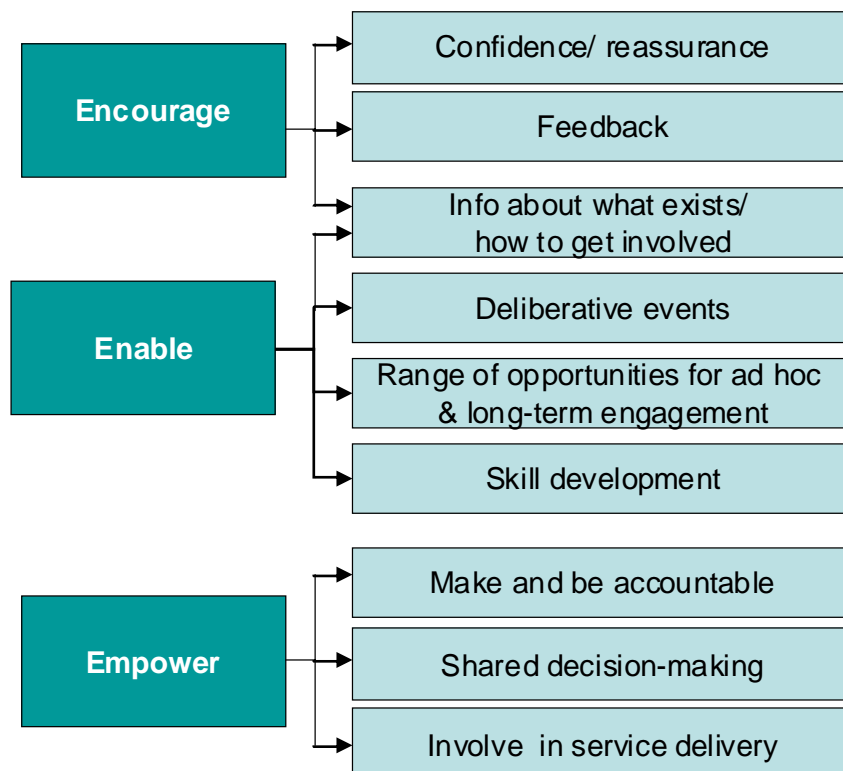
In Wolverhampton a suite of training courses have been developed including introductory taster sessions covering a range of techniques and audiences. There are also a variety of two day courses covering public involvement in more detail. These are delivered and accredited by Birmingham University.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Arnstein proposed a 'ladder of involvement' in 1969. This had 5 levels of involvement through which it was believed people moved: starting with informing, progressing through consulting; deciding together and acting together and culminating in supporting independent initiatives.

<sup>14</sup> Community and Public Involvement Training - organised on behalf of the Wolverhampton Partnership by the Citywide Involvement Network and supported by Wolverhampton City Council and the Wolverhampton City Primary Care Trust.

### 4.3. Effective engagement requires encouragement, enablers and an element of empowerment



When talking about what engagement requires, both practitioners and the general public talked around three key themes: encouraging, enabling and empowering participants. It is notable that, at this stage of the research project, they approached this topic from a participant rather than organisational viewpoint, which informs the focus for much of the subsequent discussion.

**Encouraging** people to become engaged by removing the psychological barriers – getting the message out that opportunities exist and allaying possible participant concerns - is identified by many as an important first step in the process. Many of the Civic Pioneers expressed concern that some people who it is felt would benefit from both the process and the results of engagement activities are not currently coming forward because they lack the confidence to do so, or possibly because they have had a previous experience that was negative. Reassuring potential participants that the council is keen and willing to hear their point of view is therefore crucial to remove these psychological barriers

This reassurance is provided in a number of ways: the importance of taking an active approach – going out into communities with innovative forms of outreach that target all members of the community – is emphasised, in particular combating the attitude that the public should come to the authority and not vice

versa.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, effective communication is also seen as being key, with a number of interviewees saying that this provides a ‘way in’ to discussions about getting involved, particularly when evidence is provided showing both what happens *in* engagement activities and *as a result of* engagement activities. This is felt to validate the process in the eyes of a number of otherwise sceptical members of the public:

*“It’s better when you know what to expect, like what the format’s going to be and who’s going to be there. You feel more comfortable saying your piece then.”*

*– Active citizen*

A handful of Civic Pioneer interviewees and some adult active citizens mentioned the role of citizenship classes in schools in installing an understanding of the importance of engagement and an understanding of what engagement entails from an early age. However, some of the young people in the groups were less sure about the impact of such classes in their current format as they often failed to inspire interest and enthusiasm.

*“That’s a doss lesson – you get to stay with your friends in your form and talk...They have so many worksheets and they all have silly answers on them so you don’t take them seriously.”*

*- Young active citizen*

*“One of the problems is that half of the kids in the room just don’t care”*

*- Young active citizen*

Some young people suggested that such classes might work better if led by relevant people from outside the school (such as local councillors) in order to give them more weight.

*“Why can’t people come in who are doing it as their jobs every day and come in and talk about it”*

*- Young active citizen*

This has already been tried in High Peak and there is some evidence that this has been a success.

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<sup>15</sup> This is an increasingly important theme in the literature of engagement; starting from where the participants are rather than from where the organisation is – see [www.involving.org](http://www.involving.org) for further discussion

### **High Peak and Derbyshire Dales**

Local councillors have visited Citizenship Classes in schools to talk about what they do and to explain to young people how they can get more involved. As a result they are now seeing more young people attending councillors' drop in surgeries than before.

### **Wolverhampton**

Wolverhampton has recently completed a Scrutiny Review into citizenship in schools. The Citizenship Review consulted with young people across Wolverhampton's Secondary Schools to gain their views on citizenship teaching in schools. The Youth Council also played an integral part in the Review process and were involved throughout.

The outcomes from the Review include raising the profile and gaining recognition for the subject across the City, further support to schools and to ask a youth organisation to undertake further consultation with pupils for the LEA.

**Enabling** engagement by removing practical barriers once people have made the decision to be involved – as opposed to the more psychological barriers tackled by encouragement - was also discussed. In particular, both practitioners and the general public talk about the importance of ensuring the public has up to date information about what opportunities for engagement exist and how to go about accessing them. There was also a call from some for more deliberative events, where people taking part are provided with enough information about the topics being covered to enable a more considered and thoughtful contribution to be made. The importance of transparency is key here, in particular making sure that participants know from the beginning what engagement can and cannot achieve.

Enabling engagement is also about ensuring there are a range of opportunities/mechanisms that will appeal to different people with different lifestyles. Although the importance of on-going relationships between the Council and participants (particularly with respect to giving feedback) is recognised, interviewees also reflect that ad-hoc involvement can have a place, particularly for those who do not want to commit a lot of time. Many believe the process of engagement should be iterative: recognising that needs will change over time and that mechanisms should reflect this. They also talk about having the right mechanisms in place to achieve different and varied objectives, and refer to using the ladder of participation or the spectrum of involvement options as necessary.

Practical points about making engagement accessible such as choosing appropriate venues, being aware of travel requirements, holding the events at appropriate times of day, providing childcare facilities and so on also arose during

the interviews. The issue of incentives arose, particularly non-fiscal ones such as free food, nice venues and providing opportunities to socialise. There was not much mention of paying financial incentives, although a few mention that whilst they would like to use them, these are rarely paid due to budget constraints.

There is also a strong call for capacity building and recognising that lack of skills can otherwise be a barrier to successful engagement. In some areas lack of key skills such as literacy or speaking English can act as major barriers to getting more involved and participants recognise that until this lack of capacity is overcome, these audiences will struggle to become completely engaged.

Finally, **empowerment** of participants is mentioned as an important element of (or, to a lesser extent, is mentioned as a result of) engagement. There are differing interpretations of the terminology related to empowerment: some believed it is about handing over strategy decisions and subsequent accountability to participants, allowing citizens to set the council's agenda and ensuring that priorities reflect this. For others, empowerment is about sharing decision-making, both making the decisions and accepting responsibility for them. Finally, a handful of interviewees talked about empowerment as involving citizens in service delivery (e.g. Neighbourhood Watch supporting the police) and sharing responsibility as co-producers rather than as passive recipients of services. It is notable that no one – neither the Civic Pioneers nor the general public - talked about ways to empower the general public through service evaluation (for example, young people rating their care homes); this could be seen as an example of where the current policy debates around this topic are divorced from the reality of what is happening on the ground.

Interviewees' opinions were also mixed on the value of empowerment, with some feeling that devolving budget and responsibility is the 'carrot' people need to encourage involvement (and equally that once budget is taken away, interest and enthusiasm could potentially decrease) while others see devolved decision-making as a good in itself.

#### **4.4. A varied toolbox**

As mentioned before, this research was not focussed on actual engagement mechanisms or tools as this has been covered in detail in a number of other reviews. However, it is worth noting that there are a number of tools for engagement utilised across the different local authorities. The most common methods are:

**Area-based forums, with and without an allocated budget:** forums based on a geographical area (usually combining several adjacent wards for practical reasons). The different Civic Pioneers use these in different ways and consequently different representatives go to the forums. The most successful are seen to be those where senior figures from the council and relevant partner agencies attend, because, in theory this enables decisions to be made 'on the spot'.



**Thematic forums, addressing specific issues or involving specific audiences:** there are many examples of these including youth forums, older people's forums, Patient and Public Involvement (health) forums and so on. In each case a particular needs group or a particular issue has been identified which cannot necessarily be addressed using the traditional area based forums (e.g. because of low penetration of target group or because a cross-area strategy is needed).

**Outreach, e.g. road-shows:** It is recognised that some people are unlikely to ever attend the forums for a variety of reasons including the psychological and physical barriers discussed above. Many of the Civic Pioneers have responded to this challenge with outreach events. These are designed to take engagement into communities and make it easier for people to interact with the local authority and its partners. Examples include road-shows where the work of the council and partners is displayed to communities and they are invited to interact, or events days where the council sponsors activities (e.g. a climbing wall) and then engages people in conversation while they are there.

**Ad hoc:** In all areas there are examples of ad hoc exercises, although these tend to focus more on community consultation and involvement rather than engagement per se.

**Regeneration specific (exist to spend regeneration budgets):** In some of the case study areas there are areas that are entitled to regeneration funding. In these areas there are specific mechanisms designed to enable members of the community to impact on how the funding is spent.

All areas use more than one method, in recognition that a 'one size fits all' approach to engagement does not work. The examples below illustrate where each tool is being used by one of the case study areas.

### **Area-based forums (with community controlled budget)**

#### **Southwark**

The eight Community Councils each have an annual budget for the community to decide how to spend. This allows residents to get involved in a very direct way and see the tangible results of their engagement. It is also felt to have led to increased attendance at the meetings.

### **Area-based forums (without community controlled budget)**

#### **High Peak and Derbyshire Dales**

The Community Forums are an example of joined-up working in High Peak and Derbyshire Dales. The forums are held in various locations across the region to ensure that each is able to focus on local issues. They are open to everyone and

the fact they are attended by senior figures in relevant organisations as well as councillors gives public increased confidence that issues will be addressed.

## **Thematic Forums**

### **Wolverhampton**

The City is home to a variety of communities of interest forums (e.g. over 50s, disability etc.). In the main these are well supported and generally well-attended and many ensure groups have a voice in decision-making.

### **Outreach**

#### **Newcastle**

Once an area or community has been identified in need of extra support, activity is focused on engaging with them. A recent example is 'Have A Gay Say Day' which involved working with the LGBT community to improve their access to services. The day resulted in an action plan and the employment of a dedicated community development worker monitored by the LGBT community.

### **Ad Hoc**

#### **Harlow**

Recently council tenants were invited to roadshows to feedback on how their kitchens and bathrooms should be decorated. This was deemed successful because a fairly high number of people attended compared to previous forms of consultation. Also, people were able to see the direct outcome of their input.

### **Regeneration Specific**

#### **Portsmouth**

Community Boards have been formed to decide how SRB monies should be spent. Resident representatives were initially recruited in a variety of ways including advertising widely and outreach initiatives. Over time they have become increasingly empowered and co-ordinated in their approach, to the point where the five different boards now work well together, as well as individually.

## 5. Evaluating Engagement

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When considering the impact of policy initiatives in general, it is usual to look at both outputs (measurable ‘hard’ data) and outcomes (the wider impact of the initiative, reflecting its broader aims). Responses from the Civic Pioneers as to how they attempt to evaluate the impact of engagement activities can be grouped into these two categories, although not all interviewees explicitly separate the two.

*“The way I would say you can measure it is through improvements in the take-up of service and access to services... You can also measure confidence through the feedback you get from customers... And willingness for the community to get involved... It may not always be tangible measurements but at least you can see there is some evidence.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

### 5.1. Outputs

A number of data-based outputs are being used to measure the success of projects, including:

The total number of people taking part in the activity and the total number of activities

The demographic profile of participants – including age, gender, social class, where people live and so on and the extent to which it matches the population as a whole/target population for the engagement exercise

The behavioural characteristics of participants, such as whether they have taken part in any engagement activities before

Some also mention the possibility of using administrative data relating to changes in service provision or delivery to show that engagement has had an impact, e.g. residents’ surveys.

However, these measures are often informal and not necessarily written down or monitored, particularly as Civic Pioneers note there are often very limited resources available for evaluating engagement formally.

## 5.2. Outcomes

Interviewees discuss outcomes in more detail than outputs, and most feel these are the most meaningful measures of success. However, many are by their nature, less tangible, and therefore difficult to quantify. The main outcomes that interviewees are (trying) to measure are:

**Better decision-making:** Interviewees feel that engagement should result in a noticeable improvement in service provision, as the communities' input should lead to better decision-making amongst service providers.

**Establishing/strengthening relationships:** Civic Pioneers believe that ideally engagement should be approached as a partnership, and that it should build trust between citizens and the council – each recognising each others' strengths. They believe it should leave the citizen feeling a sense of joint ownership over the results and hopefully feeling empowered. It should also leave the participant with increased confidence in their own abilities and in the council's intentions. Some believe that engagement is most successful when it establishes an ongoing dialogue, either with individuals or with networks, which can help to access individuals in future.

**Impact on those involved:** interviewees believe successful engagement should mean an interesting and enjoyable experience for community participants. It should also leave them feeling that their views are valued.

**A positive engagement culture:** some believe that achieving buy-in from officers can be an indicator of success, as can receiving proactive approaches from the public to get more involved in decision-making (especially when it's not the 'usual suspects') as this can indicate that people see the council as open and willing to listen.

As mentioned above, most Civic Pioneers use both outputs and outcomes to measure the impact of engagement. Some areas are currently developing an evaluation framework for community engagement to be used by the public sector organisations (for example Wolverhampton City Council and Portsmouth City Council).

### Wolverhampton

As part of their Local Area Agreement, Wolverhampton City Council has set the objective: *"To increase the capacity of local communities so that people are empowered to take part in decision-making and are able to influence service delivery."* They are in the process of developing indicators and targets to measure whether they have achieved this objective. At this stage it appears they will include outputs such as 'number of residents who feel their views are listened to and make a difference' and outcomes such as 'agencies make use of, and act on, information coming out of consultation and involvement activities.'

One participant mentioned that a useful starting point has been a document produced by the Community Development Foundation for the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit – “Testing Indicators of Community Involvement”<sup>16</sup> which looks at a number of potential measures and analyses their implementation.

### **5.3. Measuring the impact of engagement is a very difficult task**

It should be noted that although interviewees are able to identify many possible indicators of success, very few are actively measuring success or evaluating projects. Indeed, one of the most commonly raised issues throughout the research is the difficulty of measuring the impact of engagement.

Organisations are struggling to find relevant measures of the success of their engagement exercises, and some are beginning to question whether or not a meaningful set of measures exists. They are concerned that the things that can be measured (e.g. voter turnout) do not necessarily reflect the things that are important to the public.

*“In all these meetings we talk about the need for better evaluation and it’s sort of left at that. No one has actually developed something... can it be done or can’t it?”*  
- *Workshop participant*

These difficulties mainly exist because many of the measures are felt to be intangible and hard to put numbers to. Many feel that more straightforward measures, such as the number of engagement exercises held or the number of participants taking part, are not particularly helpful, particularly if engagement is seen as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Consequently, some feel that the idea of ‘performance indicators’ rather than targets might be more appropriate terminology.

Currently the outcome measure most commonly used is customer satisfaction indicators from the council’s corporate surveys, which few feel is adequate. In particular, it is very difficult to *attribute* change in these types of measure to specific engagement measures, as many other factors intervene.

There is a call for guidance on how to monitor and measure the success of projects, with some feeling that the introduction of simple targets such as increasing participation through existing routes such as school governors, magistrates, play groups and so on may be a good place to start. However, participants qualify this by emphasising that different levels of engagement are appropriate at different times and for different communities, and that

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<sup>16</sup> Jayne Humm, Kate Jones and Gabriel Chanan (Aug 2005) “Testing Indicators of Community Involvement”,

consequently measures only promoting ‘higher-level’ engagement (e.g. devolution of budgets), which they feel there can be a temptation to produce, may not always be helpful.

Linked to this point is the importance of gauging the appropriate amount of leeway to give to councils to set their own measures of success. Some suggest that an assessment where the council can decide on their own evidence of engagement activities may be more appropriate than one which is more prescriptive from central government – whilst others are concerned that taking a more variable approach could be the excuse some organisations need for maintaining the status quo.

Other agencies seeking to define the success of engagement and involvement activities include the Audit Commission<sup>17</sup> who suggests the following performance indicators for involvement:

Percentage of adults surveyed who feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area

Percentage of residents who feel that the council takes notice of its residents' views

The percentage of residents surveyed satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live

The percentage of residents surveyed who consider their neighbourhood is getting worse

Access to services

Extent and influence of the voluntary and community sector in the locality

Percentage of people surveyed who feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together

The extent of informal volunteering

Percentage of electoral canvass forms [Form As] returned

The percentage turnout for local elections

However, these are largely driven by the availability of data and Civic Pioneers recognise their limitations – particularly the extent to which they can be linked to engagement activity and whether they really are the types of factors that they are seeking to influence in any case.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/>

Unprompted, none of the civic pioneers talked about value for money with respect to engagement. None have attempted a full cost-benefit analysis of engagement exercises and many feel this would be impossible – not only because of the difficulty in measuring outcomes, as discussed above, but also because of the lack of data on costs. However, again, they say they would welcome any guidance on how to approach such an analysis and feel it would be a valuable tool to convince sceptics within the council of the value of engagement.<sup>18</sup>

Some work has been done in the field of planning<sup>19</sup> to demonstrate the benefits of engagement to developers. This suggests that early engagement can save resources in terms of getting things right first time and not making ‘expensive mistakes’. Once this work has been further developed there may be lessons that can be transferred to local authorities generally trying to engage with their citizens.

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<sup>18</sup> Involve is currently researching the financial costs and benefits of participative projects. For more information on *The True Costs of Public Participation* project visit <http://www.involving.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=main.viewSection&intSectionID=390>

<sup>19</sup> Forthcoming report by Ipsos MORI on behalf of English Partnerships on the benefits for developers of involving communities in the planning process. To be published Summer 2006

## 6. Ingredients for Engagement

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Between Stage 1 and 2 the Ipsos MORI team drew up a number of possible factors that we thought may form parts of a successful model for engagement.

Leadership	Organisational Culture
Local Structures	Community Led
Single Issues	Target Driven
Money	Geography

We talked through these with interviewees and asked for their views on each, including whether the factors were relevant, important, etc. We also asked for any missing factors. As a result of information gathered in Stage 2, we revised and added ingredients for the workshop. Consequently, the final list of nine ingredients which we wish to present is:

- Leadership/ championship
- Organisational culture and structure
- Local involvement structures
- Agency-partnership working
- Money/ resources
- Community-led/ driven
- Single issues
- Targets/ performance indicators
- Stability

We have also dedicated a section to **Local Area Characteristics** as it emerged from the research that demographical factors or ‘area characteristics’ can have an impact on community engagement. While local authorities may not always be able to influence, change or shape these factors, Civic Pioneers felt they were important to consider when developing an approach to community engagement.

In a literature review we found no evidence of similar attempts to pinpoint key factors influencing engagement. However, interestingly, the factors identified in the National Evaluation of LSPs: Formative Evaluation and Action Research



Programme 2002-2005<sup>20</sup> that have an impact on LSPs performance appear to be similar to many of the 'ingredients' we found can impact on successful community engagement. These include:

Governance issues (from leadership to representation and accountability)

How LSPs are organised as institutions

How they work with partners and institutions above and below them (e.g. regional and community)

Length of time they have had to establish themselves

Different kinds of authority area

Gap between accepted principle and reality

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1163002>

## 7. Leadership/ Champions

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During fieldwork, **leadership** was defined for participants as:

***Nothing else matters because of this person's passion for community engagement***

During the case studies and workshop a number of participants thought this ingredient should be broadened out to 'champions' of community engagement. They felt this to be more appropriate because it conveys the sense of a strong supporter of engagement at any level in any organisation, whereas the term 'leader' was felt to refer specifically to either the Leader of the Council or the Chief Executive – both are important for engagement.

*"Perhaps a more useful label would be champion, because that takes you away from the one person at the top leading"*

*- Workshop participant*

Indeed there are five stakeholder groups that are often mentioned when talking about leadership and champions:

Chief Executive/ Senior Management within local authorities

Leader of the Council/ Mayor

Advocates within directorates/ services

Elected members

Community leaders

In the literature on engagement and participation, the role of leadership is discussed in detail. The Improvement Network<sup>21</sup> identifies a set of principles for leadership and governance in relation to developing a citizen-focused approach:

Political and managerial leadership demonstrates a strong commitment to customer focus and community engagement

Leaders are open and transparent and they respond positively to internal and external challenge

The organisations or service has a clear vision and sense of direction developed through democratic debate

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<sup>21</sup> The Improvement Network aims to help people improve public services. Further information about its work can be found at: <http://www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk>

Leaders are willing to act on the results of customer focus or community engagement activity

All of these principles were echoed by participants in the case studies and workshop. The motivation for leaders to support engagement is also considered in the literature. Critics of engagement feel that there is a risk that leaders turn to engagement when they have difficult decisions to make. In these cases engagement can be used as an excuse for weak leadership – if the decision is difficult and the outcome will not be popular then public consultation can be used as a scapegoat. However, most of the Civic Pioneers do not raise this problem. One area that mentioned having experience of leaders using engagement to justify difficult decisions in the past is now working hard to overcome the legacy of distrust this has left behind.

## **7.1. Local situation**

The areas have different levels of buy-in from the different leadership groups, which according to the literature, it not unusual. In particular, community leaders tend to be overwhelmingly positive, whereas elected members may feel threatened and be concerned that encouraging engagement will diminish, rather than strengthen their power base.

*“One member in particular thinks community engagement is voting her into office every year.”*  
*- Workshop participant*

Some interviewees suggested there is conflict and competition within their areas about who the leader is. Chiefly this is between the local authority and the community and voluntary sector. This means that there can be tensions and difficulty in getting clear and agreed leadership.

Political leadership can have a clear impact on engagement. In some areas changes in political leadership have led to a renewed emphasis on engagement, and also ensuring engagement is part of the manifesto can help parties to be elected and then ensure actions are taken forward. Although, changes in leadership can also have a negative impact on engagement:

*“Councillors are led by leaders and leaders have their own agendas. The lifespan of the council is only two years with rotating elections so policies can change rapidly depending on who holds the political seat of power, and that can interfere with the processes of the councils. You think you’re going down one line, something changes and the next party won’t agree with that so you have to go in a different attack altogether.”*  
*- Civic Pioneer*

Some interviewees comment that although leaders are seen to be talking about engagement some are more committed than others. They suggest that some may be paying ‘lip-service’ to the notion rather than doing anything that will result in positive change. The participants in the discussion groups also mention that if leaders were really committed to engagement they would be more visible in the local area.

### High Peak

The new Chief Executive and most elected members are perceived to be supportive of engagement, which has had a knock on effect on the enthusiasm others have shown. Specific examples of the impact of strong leadership include:

Having ‘Community Leaders’ (people trained as go-betweens to ensure local communities are aware of how to get involved)

Having one person within the PCT act as an internal champion for the old people’s congress

## 7.2. Importance for engagement

Overwhelmingly Civic Pioneers view strong and positive leadership as a key factor in determining the success of community engagement. Essentially, they are viewed as *facilitators* of engagement, although several case study interviewees and workshop participants warn that leaders cannot *guarantee* success, and in some cases can act as barriers if they have not bought into the idea.

*“There is no question; if the Chief Executive is not interested then it won’t happen”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Many believe the role of leaders or champions is most important when the idea of engagement is relatively new to an organisation or when a change in policy is being implemented (e.g. towards greater community engagement). If a senior level leader, either an elected member or officer, can provide the enthusiasm or drive for engagement, participants believe this can positively impact both internally and externally. In particular, it can help to promote engagement internally, encourage others to take it seriously and ensure it is embedded within the organisation. It can also help to promote the council’s attitude to engagement externally: a senior figure can act as a figurehead and make a strategic commitment which sends out the ‘right’ signals.

*“You have to have someone up there, your council leaders in particular, actually making it clear to people that we are into engagement, and we are encouraging engagement.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

In terms of who the leader should be, or which organisation should take the lead, many Civic Pioneers think it should be the local authority, albeit by working with other statutory and community/voluntary sector partners.

*“If the council doesn’t take the lead then engagement won’t happen.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

However, overwhelmingly Civic Pioneers feel that community engagement is most likely to be successful if different leaders or *Engagement Champions* (who have all bought in to the agenda) are present at different levels throughout the organisation: from the top levels right through to the people ‘on the ground’. Many case study interviewees and workshop participants feel that if ‘front line’ staff (including councillors and officers) are not championing community engagement to their colleagues and are not incorporating community engagement principles into their everyday duties, then it will not be successful.

*“We need people at every level with a ‘customer-service’ attitude”*

*- Workshop participant*

### **Portsmouth**

In Portsmouth the creation of a senior strategic management tier post to head the Community Involvement, Empowerment and Development team is seen as a valuable way to create a figurehead for engagement. The head of the team is in frequent dialogue with the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council (who are also very supportive of citizen engagement).

Briefly, the roles that champions at different levels can have include:

**National leaders** (e.g. MPs) – displays central government’s increasing emphasis and support for community engagement through enabling legislation and reforms, as well as performance measures and targets

**Leader of the Council** – shows local political support by creating the vision for engagement and setting the standard for others to follow

**Chief Executive** – supports the Leader of the Council and ensures that the authority is equipped to be able to deliver the vision

**Elected members<sup>22</sup>/ council officers/ service providers** – responsible for ensuring community engagement is working on the ground and for reporting back to senior officers and/or members. These can include council officers in dedicated posts such as the Community Involvement Post in Southwark. More ‘champions’ than ‘leaders’

**Community and Voluntary Sector** – can add pressure for action, but is unreasonable to expect them to ‘represent’ communities, as can sometimes act as gate-keepers to the ‘real’ communities

The main concerns participants have with leaders are that they are usually only influential for a limited period of time and their impact is inextricably linked to personality. As such, there is the potential that community engagement may be sidelined by their replacement. Similarly, leaders can be influenced by government targets when determining their priorities. This can lead to the danger of engagement being sidelined when engagement is no longer ‘fashionable’.

*The trouble with **leadership** is you can't rely on it. When the administration in my area was elected on the mandate of creating community councils it happened... and as you would expect it happened and other things happened too as people were giving it their full attention. In-between times when community engagement is not at the forefront of the organisation's leadership priorities we still get on and work."*

*- Civic Pioneer*

In order to prevent both these things occurring, Civic Pioneers and other workshop participants felt it was crucial for a commitment to engagement to be enshrined in strategic documents so it is still given consideration as leaders come and go. This point is linked to the notion of embedding community engagement into an organisation’s culture, which will be explored further in the next section.

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<sup>22</sup> Civic Pioneers and the engaged public add the caveat that if elected members are going to be truly effective champions of engagement, they need to represent their community’s views, rather than following party political lines.

*“A charismatic leader develops the organisation and it is the organisation that delivers”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

*“It’s all very well being that kind of leader [charismatic] but you need all the things underneath to be in place as well. So that’s great if you can lead and drive, but you need the support of all the other things that feed into that.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Lastly, regardless of who the leader is, it was also acknowledged that they must have certain attributes in order to be successful. Civic Pioneers mentioned many characteristics that also appear in the literature on leadership, for example:

*authentic, trustworthy, integrity, no double agenda*

Crucially, it was felt that leaders must believe in engagement and have the skills to encourage and persuade people within their organisation to adopt engagement as part of their role. This ensures that staff are not tempted to pay ‘lip-service’ to the idea without buying-in to the possible benefits. Secondly, the leader must be willing to listen and to engage with practitioners about what is and is not possible. Finally, they must have knowledge and the ‘dout’ to implement successful engagement, as having a vision without doing anything to achieve it can potentially be harmful.

## 8. Organisational Culture and Structure

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During fieldwork, **organisational culture** was defined for participants as:

***There is an historical legacy of engagement practices that means new initiatives are more likely to be successful***

The Improvement Network's<sup>23</sup> principles for community engagement include a number in relation to organisations and people:

Staff commitment to customer focus and community engagement is rewarded

Frontline staff have a voice

The organisation or service workforce is reflective of the communities it serves

However, in the literature on community engagement there has been less emphasis on the importance of organisational culture as a whole. Involve<sup>24</sup> discuss the role of organisational culture in terms of accountability structures and extent of hierarchical decision-making, but do not necessarily focus on the 'softer' side of culture – in particular, whether or not the organisation views engagement as a positive thing that is integral to what it does. In contrast, a discussion of attitudes towards engagement is common amongst Civic Pioneers. In particular, it is considered important that relevant players are supportive and open to change, particularly of the many possible outcomes of engagement.

*“You need organisational culture and a willingness to engage with the communities, to work in partnership with them and not go off and work in silence and say ‘well I’m the council I know best, I’ll put this in place and I’ll just take it to you for consultation to appease you really, but you’re not engaged in the process at all.’ ”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.improvementnetwork.gov.uk>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.involving.org>



## 8.1. Local situation

Overall, the Civic Pioneers we spoke to feel their organisations have a strong organisational commitment to community engagement.

*“Part of being a Civic Pioneer is about trying to install a culture of engagement.”*

*- Workshop participant*

They have thought about how they should be structured in order to weave in engagement, and a number have restructured recently in order to better integrate it into their organisation. Generally, local authorities are structured in one of two ways:

A separate department or unit focusing on co-ordinating and delivering community engagement activities across the council

Community engagement is part of officers’ core role in each directorate/ department

Representatives from all types of authority feel their way is working well, and have different views about how other councils are organised.

The areas which have a specific team for engagement feel it is indicative of their organisation’s commitment to engagement, principally because they have their own budget ring-fenced for activities. This allows them to get on with ‘doing’ engagement and spend less time justifying the value of their work to senior management. Other advantages cited by those in a separate unit are that activities are better co-ordinated and silos are broken down. They feel that if community engagement is situated within individual departments, then they will do it all differently and may fragment activities rather than join them up.

Conversely, those from councils where community engagement is part of each directorate or department feel this is a better way of embedding it into the organisation. This is because individual directorates will have expert knowledge of their service users that people in a generalist department won’t have. They also believe that if there is a separate unit, the other directorates may feel that they do not have to consider it part of their job – likewise, if everyone considered engagement part of their job there would not be a need for a separate unit. They also dispute the claim that a separate unit is necessarily indicative of corporate support for engagement. They concede there will be a strong commitment within that unit, but this may not permeate to the rest of the organisation.

*“It shouldn’t all focus on whoever happens to be in your community engagement team. Engagement is actually part of everyone’s role and job description which they all have a duty to undertake.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

A couple of the case study areas have set up training schemes which are designed to encourage and build on a culture of engagement. The idea is to give people who are involved in engagement activities (both within and beyond the council itself) a shared understanding of the concepts and ideas behind engagement in order for them to communicate effectively to each other and the public.

### Portsmouth

Portsmouth has created the 'Consulting People Toolkit' which is designed as a desk-top guide to best practice in consultation and involvement. It is a step by step guide and covers planning (including choosing what level of engagement is appropriate), designing, implementing and what happens next. This has been distributed widely across the organisation.

However, whilst the Civic Pioneers are fairly confident that they are well positioned to effectively engage, this is not always filtering down to the public. Many discussion group participants felt that they were not aware of the mechanisms available to engage that would be relevant to them. However, all areas recognised that they could do more to communicate the mechanisms and tools that are in place for engagement to the relevant communities.

*"The number of times people say, 'oh I didn't know you did that' and you think, well we put it in the paper, we've put posters everywhere and we've talked, and yet people still say, 'I didn't know that was going on.'"*

*- Civic Pioneer*

The community activists we spoke to also said they were also unsure of the impact of their engagement. As discussed earlier, little work has been done to evaluate the impact of community engagement, but it is an interesting addition to the debate that community activists are keen to know.

Lastly, although a positive organisational culture was given great importance (as the next subsection will show), some workshop participants cautioned that it can be hard to pin down what the culture is like for a whole council, as it can vary from department to department. This was felt to be the case regardless of whether there was a separate unit or otherwise.

### Southwark

The statutory sector appears to be very committed to community engagement. At a strategic level it has created a forum for multi-agency working to avoid working in silos (the Community Engagement Officers Workers Group), and on the ground it is putting huge efforts into building up the capacity of the community using community development and outreach workers. This is because they view the best type of society as one where citizens are involved. To illustrate, one interviewee stated:

*"A civil society is achieved with active citizens"*

## 8.2. Importance for engagement

A culture that supports and recognises the value of engagement is considered by Civic Pioneers to be just as important for success as champions and leaders.

*“Unless the organisation is going to put the backing into the rest of it, it’s not going to happen.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

However, they also feel that in some situations passionate champions or leaders can drive engagement without the underlying culture, and that at some point every authority will have started from scratch. Therefore, the lack of an ‘engagement friendly’ organisational culture should not be seen as an insurmountable issue, although other ingredients such as resources or targets may also be necessary for engagement to be successful.

*“It might not be historical, but you need to imbed a culture. It probably needs some stick like CPA or one of these other things, like a money incentive or targets to do.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

### Harlow

Some interviewees in Harlow noted that the area has got a history of engaging for the ‘wrong’ reasons. In particular, information gathered through engagement exercises (such as surveys) has been seen to be (mis)used when making difficult decisions. However, although this history has led citizens to have little trust in the council they are now working hard to overcome this image by communicating their successes.

Once an organisation has made a commitment to engage, participants feel it helps to embed the approach throughout the organisation, so that engagement can become second nature. Where this has happened staff feel they spend less time justifying themselves, because there is more time to spend actually engaging people and learning from that experience.

*“An organisational culture helps to breed success.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Another area where organisational culture can be particularly important is in instilling trust in engagement exercises. One Civic Pioneer noted that sometimes there is a temptation only to engage for riskier or harder decisions. This can impact on levels of trust within the community, because engagement is only seen

to be used to justify decisions with a negative impact on them. Where people feel they have not been able to properly contribute, or that their contribution has been taken out of context, it is likely to be harder to engage again in the future. Linked to this, is that it is necessary for the community to trust that something will be done as a result of their time and efforts spent taking part in engagement exercises, as discussed earlier.

*“In my view you need to build the trust and confidence between the organisation and the people it’s there to serve. I would agree if there’s a historical legacy of engagement practices then the residents would say, ‘yeah the council’s fantastic, they never fail to engage with us on whatever level about whatever issue and they always deliver and they always feedback, and it’s fantastic.’ ”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

## 9. Local Involvement Structures

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***There are official structures/mechanisms in place that facilitate community engagement (e.g. area committees). These structures are appropriate for the local area and are representative of the wider community.***

One of the three essential ingredients of the ‘Together We Can’ way of working is partnership with public bodies who are willing and able to work as partners with local people. The comments about local mechanisms suggest that the Civic Pioneers are open to this approach and that they are making it happen. However, their mixed experiences in being able to attract and retain participants beyond the ‘usual suspects’ suggests that this should be approached with some caution.

Entire books have been dedicated to identifying which engagement tools are appropriate in different situations (e.g. when a citizen’s jury is ideal, or when a panel could be the best involvement tool). Therefore, although we mention the key structures used in the Case Study areas in the section above (Approaches to Engagement) and discuss the generic value of having structures in place, this document does not attempt to give practical advice on individual mechanisms.<sup>25</sup>

### 9.1. Local situation

Each of the Civic Pioneers has local involvement structures in place for engaging with the public. These structures receive varying levels of support from those interviewed (Civic Pioneers and engaged public), largely dependent on the extent to which participants feel that the mechanisms are broadly representative of the relevant communities.

Structures are thought to work best when they are directly linked to decision-making. Some believe this is best done through devolution of budgets, although others feel that, as long as the impact of engaging through the mechanism can be shown, the final decision may be best left with elected officials (who can be held accountable, unlike the public). Ultimately, what is important is clarity about what the structure can and cannot influence as this is how they will be judged. This clearly depends on how open the local authority is to allowing the public to influence their activities.

*If we had people at a higher level [at community meetings] I think we could do big things... currently it's people on the ground who come. They know the issues but can't make decisions on the spot.*

*- Civic Pioneer*

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<sup>25</sup> A good starting point is Involve’s ‘Guide to the Guides’, which can be found at: [www.involving.org](http://www.involving.org)

The importance of tailoring mechanisms/tools/structures to purpose (issue and audience) is emphasised. Although Civic Pioneers feel there is a lot to be learnt from other organisations, ultimately one-size does not fit all and clarity about what the structure has been designed to achieve will help to ensure it is fit for purpose. Ensuring that structures are inclusive, and encourage participation from a wide variety of people is also vital according to many Civic Pioneers. They believe that structures should be widely publicised in order for people to know how to get involved.

Once structures are in place it is equally important to ensure structures are reviewed regularly to ensure they are still appropriate.

### **Newcastle**

There has been a concerted effort across the city to ensure that local involvement structures are the right ones for the City. Following a review by external consultants, Area Committees have been phased out and Ward Committees introduced, which were felt to be more responsive to local needs.

Some believe that the best structures are those that evolve organically, rather than being imposed. However, in some areas participants are unsure whether there is the capacity for communities to build structures themselves, in which case the important thing is to allow structures to be flexible and to change to meet participant's needs.

### **Portsmouth**

The funding for community boards in Portsmouth is coming to an end. The people involved, both citizens and support staff, are looking for new ways to utilise this existing capability rather than simply disbanding them. They feel this is important because lots of time and effort has been spent enabling the people involved to work well as a team at making decisions regarding funding.

Where possible, most believe it is important to utilise existing structures, rather than create new ones.

*Potentially there are structures in place to extend and build upon and instead of making these smaller [when the funding streams come to an end] we should build upon them and make them better.*

*- Civic Pioneer*

This leads some Civic Pioneers to discuss the role of Parish Councils in rural areas. Parish Councillors, who are able to come together and represent the views of their local communities, are valued – particularly as they can be an efficient

way of incorporating the views of many different areas. However, there is some concern that Parish Councillors are not necessarily representative, particularly as some may be more engaged than others, and that consequently it could be a mistake to rely too heavily on them.

*A village that has an active parish council with good contacts will get better resources than one that doesn't – so developing parish councils is really important.*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Finally, participants talk at length about the importance of structures working at appropriate levels of geography. For instance, there is discussion about whether wards are too small or too large a population with which to engage. Some believe that mechanisms will be most effective when designed for the neighbourhood level, recognising the local sense of identity and working with it. However, for reasons of efficiency and achieving economies of scale, others believe that although engaging at neighbourhood level is the ideal it is not necessarily cost-effective and that larger areas should therefore be considered. Linked to the point about stability, some believe that as wards have been established as an appropriate area for electing representatives, they should also be considered appropriate for engagement.

*The key thing in this area has been working with existing district based structures... close enough to the community to be able to listen, engage and know what's going on, and big enough to make a difference*

*- Civic Pioneer*

## **9.2. Importance for engagement**

Some areas place more emphasis on the importance of local involvement structures than others. However, significant work is being done to make sure that local involvement structures are as effective as possible and they are clearly valued by those who are involved with them. In some areas, local engagement structures are seen as crucial as they are the vehicle through which most engagement is undertaken. Some make the point that if someone wants to become engaged it is much easier if the structures are already in place.

However, even if the local involvement structures for engagement are in place, there is no guarantee that they will be successful. In particular, if the leadership or organisations are not willing to listen to what is being said, then the structures will be ineffectual and participants are likely to realise this. Equally, structures require support in the form of both money and resources, and if the backing is not there then it is likely that the mechanisms will struggle. Also, underlying area characteristics may have an impact.

*“It could be that nobody cares, nobody wants to get engaged... you can open a well stocked shop and not get any customers”*

*- Workshop participant*

Well established involvement structures (such as community boards) are viewed with mixed feelings by some of the Civic Pioneers. They are seen as useful because the people within them have more skills (as a result of training given to them via the engagement mechanisms, and more informal learning through being involved) than the public as a whole and therefore are better able to make a useful contribution to decision-making on the behalf of the public.

However, by their nature they tend to be frequented by ‘the usual suspects’ and some question whether these people are representing the public or just themselves, and consequently whether such mechanisms are as valuable as they appear. Ideally, interviewees believe that local involvement structures should be designed by citizens in order to ensure they meet their needs.

*“Local structures are important but I think we need to think wider than the physical and the traditional. The trouble is when you get a community or a neighbourhood forum, that in its own right becomes the panacea for everything, and that’s another tick box exercise. It means you don’t have to do anything else because you’ve got the community forum.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Interviewees also note that they have observed power struggles between different engagement mechanisms which can make engagement difficult. It is possible for different mechanisms to all see themselves as the ‘true’ voice of the public. The importance of careful co-ordination and clearly set boundaries is highlighted in order for the mechanisms to work together.

### **Southwark**

The boundaries of Southwark’s Community Councils are aligned with ward boundaries (for more information on Community Councils see Section 4.4 above). These were configured in consultation with local residents and reflect how they view their area as far as possible. This helps citizens relate better to the Community Councils and their activities.

Finally, there is some discussion about how sustainable involvement structures are. Some believe that in many cases structures will never become self-sustaining. However, there is quite a strong commitment to ensuring that structures remain consistent over time so that people can become aware of where to go if they have an issue rather than the system constantly changing.



## 10. Agency Partnership Working

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*There are strong links between the local authority, statutory organisations, and the voluntary/community sector. Communication may be formal, or informal.*

Over recent years there has been a concerted drive for statutory bodies to work in partnership with each other. For example, **Local Strategic Partnerships** (LSPs) aim to deliver local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies by bringing together local authorities and other public sector agencies (e.g. primary care trusts, local education authorities, police authorities), as well as the private and community/voluntary sector.

The preparation of **community strategies** requires local authorities and a wide range of organisations across the public, private and voluntary/ community sectors to join forces to agree on the key priorities for area improvements and deliver them in partnership. Additionally, the emerging **local area agreements** (LAAs) are intended to help local authorities join up public services more effectively, “thus allowing greater flexibility for local solutions to local circumstances.”<sup>26</sup>

There are many more examples of centrally-set targets and performance indicators requiring different local agencies to work together to achieve a common goal (e.g. Safer, Stronger Communities). This has implications for many different areas of activity, but in particular it can impact on how local authorities choose to engage with citizens.

Links between local authority, statutory organisations and the VCS should include co-ordination of efforts, joint planning of activities, shared resources and outcomes.

### 10.1. Local situation

Different areas are at different stages with respect to developing a joined-up approach. However, they note that the public rarely differentiates between the roles of different providers and that consequently it is important to ensure all organisations are working together as far as possible. However, they recognise it can take time to develop strong working relationships. Some areas are exploring technological methods for ensuring information about what exercises are being conducted can be easily shared around the area.

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<sup>26</sup> Frequently asked questions about LAAs: <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1163655>

## **Wolverhampton**

In Wolverhampton a computerised database of all consultation/engagement activities across the city is currently being developed. This will be used by consultation and engagement practitioners from public agencies across the city to ensure, amongst other things, that learning from past experiences is shared and opportunities for partnership working in the future can be more easily identified. This is also a tool for use by the public.

A challenge can be getting the vertical structure right: making sure county, district and borough councils work together effectively, along with working with other organisations such as the PCT, police and fire service, which can all have overlapping objectives but different organisational boundaries. Co-terminosity and its impact on engagement is discussed further in the Local Area Characteristics section, but is particularly salient when considering how local agencies can work together in partnership.

Many interviewees also discuss the value of community organisations as intermediaries. Formal and informal networks of these organisations are seen to enable organisations to access the views of audiences that would otherwise be considered hard to reach. While there are recognised problems with this approach – not least the concern that organisations are acting as gate keepers – it is still seen as providing valuable information that they would not otherwise have access to.

## **10.2. Importance for engagement**

Wherever the engagement is about strategies or priority setting, rather than focussing on particular issues, many believe that there will be an overlap with the interests of other organisations, at which point, partnership working can be very important. Sometimes, partnership working is not seen as appropriate – for example if a department wishes to engage on a specific issue that does not overlap with the priorities of other partner agencies – but the consensus is that consultation does not happen in isolation so even the results of specialised efforts will almost always have wider implications.

Participants believe that structures such as the LSP or teams within the local authority to head engagement initiatives enable a more joined-up approach. This is seen as valuable for a number of reasons, including the opportunities to share learning, minimise unnecessary replication of work and consequently address consultation fatigue. Therefore, successful partnership working, as well as making the most out of limited resources can potentially impact on the citizen's view of engagement in the area.

### **High Peak and Derbyshire Dales**

In High Peak and Derbyshire Dales the main mechanism for co-ordinating engagement between the different agencies is through the LSP. This is seen to work very well and is a good way to ensure that all the partners are aware of each other's engagement activities. This has led to increased partnership working which has allowed the council to maximise the value of engagement exercises and to minimise costs by avoiding replication.

Although most believe that partnership working can be a good way to maximise value for money from resources, there is a cautionary note. All of the partners have to be committed to the idea and willing to contribute, otherwise mechanisms set up to aid the partnership can become talking-shops with little or no action as a consequence. In this scenario, partnership working becomes a drain on resources, because people are spending time at meetings which achieve little. Therefore, partnership working will be most effective where people can see demonstrable gains from working together and consequently embrace the challenge.

# 11. Money/Resources

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## *There is a dedicated source of funding available for community engagement*

Ensuring appropriate resources are available for engagement is a clear requirement, widely recognised. Many civic pioneers pointed out that money is important, but so are resources (including staff time and access to appropriate facilities).

### 11.1. Local situation

The different areas have varying levels of funding and resource for community engagement. Regeneration areas are most likely to have the relevant funds whereas other areas have to be more innovative and are more likely to use funding from other budgets.

Although corporate research (e.g. customer satisfaction questionnaires) generally has a dedicated budget, not all the case study areas have significant amounts of money ring-fenced for engagement. One area gave lack of funds as a key motivation for increased partnership working, which they felt had been very positive for their area.

#### **High Peak and Derbyshire Dales**

The area has received little funding earmarked for engagement (e.g. regeneration monies). This has encouraged them to take a joined-up approach to achieve 'economies of scale' and the best value from the budget they do have. Some feel that this shared motivation to save valuable resources is the key reason why partnership working has been embraced in the region.

Two possible structures for engagement resources are discussed in the organisational culture section above. In some areas there is a dedicated team with a dedicated budget which they believe helps facilitate change because they are able to innovate and experiment in ways that would be impossible without control over funds (for example, they can try new methods rather than have to rely on tried and tested techniques that are easier to justify if answerable to budget holders).

In other areas, money for engagement is found from within directorates, and where this happens some believe that this can encourage better discipline with money, and more innovation (e.g. greater motivation to learn from others, work in partnership etc.). Also they warn of the temptation to set up a new engagement structure for each new issue, and feel that having limited resources encourages people to think more strategically about what mechanisms already exist and how they can best be utilised for new purposes. Limited resources can also motivate increased partnership working and increase focus on prioritising

which issues to engage on, which some believe can reduce consultation fatigue and increase the significance of engagement.

Civic pioneers also use this opportunity to discuss different **sources of money** and their relative importance. There is some concern that many of the regeneration funds used for engagement are ring-fenced for particular localities (e.g. NDC and SRB funds). In some areas having funds for some localities but not others is identified as a potential problem for achieving equal engagement across the entire area, and a few mention that it can be a barrier to sharing learning and knowledge across the area..

More generally there is some concern that ring-fencing money for community engagement can potentially risk positioning engagement as an add-on rather than an integral part of improving service delivery. However, others disagree, suggesting that if money is not ring-fenced explicitly for engagement (perhaps even with corresponding performance indicators – see targets section) it can be sidelined due to budget pressures for core services such as education, crime and social care. One participant gave the example of the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund which they believed had mostly been spent on community safety in their area to the expense of the community engagement element, and felt that if a stronger link had been made with performance indicators this would not necessarily have been the case.

## **11.2. Importance for engagement**

Some Civic Pioneers believe that money is absolutely vital for engagement to occur. In particular they suggest that without visible money ‘it’s all just talk’. They also feel that money and resources can be used to build commitment.

*“I think it leads to better short-term results, and if you have short-term results people think they’re actually getting something out of it, and they’ve made a difference.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

However, others are more cautious in their support and, while recognising that funding must come from somewhere, do not feel that money is the be-all and end-all. One interviewee surmised that money is a facilitator but should not be a motivator. There is greater agreement on the importance of resources – with no one believing that good engagement is possible without them.

*“I think just setting the budget won’t make good community engagement. You could spend a load of money doing rubbish. But you’ve got to have the money, else you can’t do anything with it.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

*“If you decide in the budget making process, ‘well we’ll put aside a hundred grand and we will spend it and that will be our concession to community engagement. But having said that there needs to be some money.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

A good example of the two perspectives is that some feel their LSP lacks teeth because it does not have its own budget, whereas others see the contributions being made by the partners as a positive step that ensures the organisations are ‘bought-in’ to working together.

One of the key themes is the importance of taking a **long-term view**. In particular, many workshop participants talk about the importance of investment. Investment encompasses a number of activities, the key ones being investment in learning internally (of staff and elected members), and also externally (capacity building). Both are seen as important but expensive, and consequently having money and resource is seen as vital to successfully embed engagement.

### **Wolverhampton**

In Wolverhampton, a group of young people were given control over the decisions surrounding a local playground. In particular, the young people were involved in choosing the staff for the playground. In order to make this important decision they were given training in interviewing and were helped to develop a set of criteria by which to judge the applicants. This was a resource intensive procedure but was seen to be invaluable by the young people involved.

Also, in the case studies, participants felt that if money can be guaranteed for **follow-through and to implement** the changes identified, engagement can potentially be more successful and can lead to a virtuous circle where people are increasingly keen to become involved. With follow-through it is important to ensure that people know what happened as a result of their contribution and clearly requires money and resources. Implementation can be about feeding the results of engagement into wider decision-making and ensuring that they are taken into consideration. There is some support for devolving budgets down to engagement mechanisms: again this requires the council to have the resources and money to be able to do this in the first place.

As with concern about ring-fenced funding mentioned above, there is also concern about time-limited funds. Many are seen to be too short-term and consequently not allowing enough time for engagement to become embedded. The issue, partly driven by the perceived ‘drying-up’ of regeneration funding, leaving local authorities with a number of mechanisms for which they are unable to pick up the costs when central funding comes to an end.

However, others are less negative and suggest that encouraging communities to raise their own funds can be valuable in itself. When this occurs they feel that it can increase social capital and feelings of empowerment.

## 12. Community-Led/Driven

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During fieldwork, **community-led engagement** was defined for participants as:

### **There are high levels of social capital/ community activism already**

Many participants noted that there are two ways the community can drive engagement. One way is through official mechanisms, e.g. by influencing agendas at area committees. Another way they can drive engagement is from the outside of official structures by forming their own group or taking issues straight to a leader/ champion.

*“Where I work we have terrible trouble with the concept of what is something that is community led... we have arguments about whether that means the council’s got to have a hands off approach and just wait for the community to spontaneously lead itself somewhere.”*

*- Workshop participant*

‘Together We Can’<sup>27</sup> cites active citizens and strengthened communities as the cornerstones of developing a society where the public have a genuine input into civil life. The amount of community-led engagement should increase as more citizens acquire the skills and confidence to work with councils to improve their communities. Civic Pioneers generally feel that activities which have been instigated, or driven, by the people are generally considered to be the ideal and ‘true’ form of community engagement. However, they suggest from their experience that this will be a long process.

*“Local people know what the problems are on their estate, and if you target that then everyone feels the benefit.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

### **12.1. Local situation**

The extent of community-led engagement varies across and between areas. Most Civic Pioneers are aware of ‘pockets’ of particularly engaged citizens. In some places this is the ‘aging, white, middle class’ contingent who understand the processes to get engaged and have the confidence in themselves to go about it. In other areas the most engaged communities are those from deprived areas that

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<sup>27</sup> Download the ‘Together We Can’ action plan from <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/activecommunities82.htm>

have received training as part of regeneration funding. Naturally, areas that have a history of communities contacting public bodies are more likely to feel their citizens are more driven to get involved (e.g. trade unions, tenant associations). In many cases Civic Pioneers are aware of who their most 'driven' communities are. This information is useful in ensuring that groups are heard, not just those who are most proactive in engaging with the council.

### Wolverhampton

Some interviewees note that some areas of Wolverhampton are more pro-active than others. In particular, those which have received regeneration funding may have higher levels of knowledge about how to interact with the council effectively and consequently are more likely to come forward. While this is encouraged there are also outreach mechanisms in place to ensure that those who do not come forward are also able to have their say.

Even areas with driven communities can find it hard to maintain. Areas with a transient population admit they can find it a challenge to hold onto residents who have built up the necessary skills. However, they also find that that issues the public are concerned about are generally constant (e.g. crime, youth facilities, road safety) and so they tailor their approach to accommodate this. As such, they feel that not having driven residents is a challenge, rather than a barrier to successful community engagement.

Lastly, participants feel that community-led engagement works best when the community feels particularly passionate about an issue (see the next section on Single Issues). Furthermore, many Civic Pioneers comment that they see most enthusiasm in forums where the public are able to influence the agenda rather than if is led by the council.

*"If you looked through an agenda, where was the real opportunity for me as a member of the public to go along, make a contribution, feel as though I was being heard or have any sort of engagement?"*

*- Active citizen*

### Newcastle

The City is home to a strong community network with a plethora of groups and organisations (particularly tenants and residents associations). However, lots of regeneration funding and area-based initiatives have meant that geographical areas are more strongly connected than communities of interest and identity.

## 12.2. Importance for engagement

Community-led engagement is seen as a factor that is 'nice to have' in the pursuit for successful community engagement. This 'bottom-up' approach is considered to best reflect community concerns and be the 'purest' form of engagement by



many Civic Pioneers. Interviewees and workshop participants feel that it is indicative of people who care about their local area and are willing to get involved and share ownership of the issue. Many Civic Pioneers believe that their most successful engagement efforts have come from community-led projects and there is a greater sense of community ownership when they initiate the idea. When this happens authorities see their role is to act as a *supporter* and *co-ordinator* of action so that the community is able to make their impact.

Another key advantage, as suggested above, is it also means that authorities do not have to do as much groundwork in encouraging communities to get involved.

### **Portsmouth**

In Portsmouth there are a number of community empowerment mechanisms/exercises where decision-making responsibility is shared with the community (e.g. through devolved budgets). A good example is a community centre that was designed, built and is now being run by a group of people from the local community.

However, Civic Pioneers and workshop participants also expressed some concerns about community-led initiatives. Firstly, they feel often the people that come forward to engage are not representative of the wider community. These ‘community activists’ purport to represent the community but several case study interviewees and workshop participants suggest that the engaged public may not be wholly altruistic. They may be following their own agendas and acting as gate-keepers by preventing the views of others from being heard.

*“There is an association with a certain type of person who attends it. They’re not representative of the whole estate. So the other sections of the community will not join them.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

A couple of Civic Pioneers gave examples where people whose attempts to become elected members have failed and have used community engagement structures as a ‘soap-box’ platform when they were not elected. Therefore, if community-led engagement is going to be taken seriously by councils, some interviewees feel that they should consider how representative community-led approaches are and whether they are dealing with a minority of loud voices or ‘NIMBY-ists’<sup>28</sup>.

*“The people who ran them didn’t have a real community development approach to them and it did mean that whoever shouted the loudest.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

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<sup>28</sup> Not-In-My-Back-Yard: a term for people who object to activities in their immediate locality although they would not mind the same thing happening elsewhere

*“It’s got to be working together as opposed to the council just going ‘OK yes, we’ll do that for you because of six people who continually go to their residents’ group.’ ”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Secondly, interviewees feel that in many areas citizens have low expectations of what can be achieved by ‘people power’ and a lack of confidence in themselves to be able to instigate positive change. Some interviewees fear that if community-led engagement is allowed to dominate, these invisible communities will not bring their issues to the table, and consequently will find themselves becoming increasingly marginalised. They note that this kind of capacity building is not easy and can be very resource intensive. Linked to this is a fear mentioned by one interviewee that the community does not have the ability to discuss rationally, and make decisions on the way local areas should be run.

*“This ... philosophy applies that everyone will deliberate and come to some considered opinion about things and I think that’s perhaps the more unrealistic bit.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Thirdly, many of the interviewees appear to be sceptical about its value because of the varying levels of capacity within communities and the consequent bias that is introduced. However, an interesting counter-point to this debate is the frequently cited design of Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre (Brazil), which purposefully biases spending towards the areas which mobilise the greatest levels of public participation.

Therefore, overall it appears that Civic Pioneers feel community-led engagement can be a positive, important ingredient for success as long as the right tools and approaches are employed to ensure all voices are heard. Although there is some support for community-led engagement, many feel that currently it is not realistic to assume that community led engagement will be enough. In particular, lack of social capital and lack of pro-active approaches from communities suggests there is a long way to go before communities will lead engagement. However, discussion group participants feel that they are already influencing what councils are doing in some ways, even if that influence is not as visible as it could be.

## 13. Single Issues

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During fieldwork, **singles issues** were defined for participants as:

***A single issue will motivate/polarise opinion to such an extent that engagement increases***

A number of Civic Pioneers question whether single issues leading to community action such as petitions, protest marches etc. should be considered to be engagement. In particular, some argue that the precise reason for such action, which by its nature comes from outside the system, is due to a perceived lack of engagement opportunities within the system.

However, in the future the government envisage<sup>29</sup> that there will be mechanisms in place for citizens to put their main concerns, or ‘single issues’ on the agenda so they are considered along with the council’s issues.

Therefore ‘single issues’ have been included as an ingredient for successful community engagement to test the value of having an issue which people will rally around and whether it encourages the public into other mechanisms for engagement.

### 13.1. Local situation

All Civic Pioneers can identify salient single issues in their areas that ‘fire-up’ residents, usually in a negative or reactive sense. These are generally a result of particular local circumstances and have a clear impact on attendance of public meetings when they are put on the agenda. Examples vary from lack of affordable housing to proposed closures of local services and problems with parking. One interviewee notes people rarely actively complain about what they do not have but will always fight not to have something taken away.

#### **Newcastle**

For a number of discussion group participants, their engagement started by becoming involved in a single issue, e.g. development plans, lack of youth facilities etc. From being involved in a very specific issue they then became aware of, and interested in, other things going on in the local area. This resulted in them being encouraged to set up residents’ groups and invited onto partnership boards. Therefore, as a result in being initially involved in a single issue they have moved into a more advanced, and possibly sustainable, form of engagement.

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<sup>29</sup> *Empowerment and the Deal for Devolution*’ speech by David Miliband on 18 January 2006 to the New Local Government Network at their 2006 Annual Conference

## 13.2. Importance for engagement

Overall case study interviewees and workshop participants had mixed opinions about the importance of single issues. Most think they are not relevant or are only ‘nice to have’, although a handful do feel they are necessary for success.

The main reason single issues are considered important is that they help ‘new blood’ to get involved. In other words, they can act as a catalyst and motivate people who would not usually engage to come forward. This helps to ensure the same voices are not always being heard.

*“There’s a core of people for whom this deliberative, active citizen will perhaps deal with a holistic view of everything that goes on in their neighbourhood, and then there’ll be a much larger number of people I would imagine, that will get involved in single issues, for instance, there’s no good schools in my area.”*

*- Workshop participant*

As mentioned above, most of the single issues that are raised by communities are reacting to something that has happened, or has been proposed, that they disagree with. One workshop participant described this kind of ‘doorstep politics’ as natural human behaviour. The reason that single issues are able to draw new people in is because the subject matter is relevant and concrete, rather than an abstract concept that appears to be far removed from their day-to-day lives.

*[Single issues] can be a trigger to bring people to the table who wouldn’t previously have got engaged.”*

*- Workshop participant*

*“Yeah it is reactive. It’s not always negative. It can be something that’s just a big issue but it might affect their quality of life and they will never come out and say their bit. But I think it’s important if you can build on those connections once they’re made.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

However, there are also a number of practitioners who feel single issues can be a barrier to successful involvement. Some of these reasons are similar to those given for community-led engagement not always being wholly positive. For example, often the people who raise the single issues are not representative of the wider community, and so giving weight to the issues they raise can give undue credence to vocal minorities who are only concerned with their own agenda.

Some are also sceptical that single issues can act as a catalyst for broader engagement. They feel it is a challenge to convert strong negative feelings about one topic into a willingness to engage on other issues.

*“It doesn’t motivate people for community engagement after the single issue has passed.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

However, the counter-argument to that is that, if handled effectively, a person with an issue can be channelled through existing mechanisms, and if they do this they can then start to see what else is being discussed. For some this is enough of a prompt to encourage them to become more involved. However, others will only ever engage on their terms and are unlikely to be willing to get more involved over the long-term.

Some Civic Pioneers are also concerned that they have little control over what becomes an ‘issue’. In some cases communities may become roused over something that local public bodies cannot do anything about, for example the condition of some roads or public transport. It can be frustrating for communities when they have been encouraged to get engaged but then nothing can happen as a result. In these circumstances, local authorities should make it clear what can and cannot be changed so that the public do not form high expectations which result in disappointment and disillusionment.

Some Civic Pioneers are also worried that issues emerging from the community may result in their own priorities being sidelined or eat into resources allocated for other matters. While it could be argued that for communities to be truly engaged their issues should take precedence, many interviewees feel that the public does not have the strategic overview across the whole council to be able to dictate what priorities should be. This links to their final concern that it is difficult for communities to contextualise issues, and be aware of the wider impact of decisions made to address a particular issue (e.g. budget trade-offs). Also, there is some concern that although there can be community support for an issue there may also be people in the community with opposing views who do not come forward.

## 14. Targets/Performance Indicators

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### *Relevant individuals/ departments have engagement targets which impact on the success of empowerment*

There are increasing numbers of targets relating to consultation, involvement, engagement and participation. As mentioned above in 'Definitions of Success', new CPA scores are likely to include some type of measurement.

#### 14.1. Local situation

Attitudes towards targets vary both between and within the areas. Where people have struggled to embed engagement or to encourage others to consider it part of their role there seems to be more enthusiasm for targets as a means to help formalise engagement. In the workshop, participants discussed that targets are a part of most professions and that consequently the important issue was not whether to have targets but rather how to set them so that they motivate people appropriately.

*"It's not necessarily a bad thing to have targets. Sometimes I think as long as it's not just a tick that it's measurable, and that the tick is proven success and that you have actually done it."*

*- Civic Pioneer*

*"I haven't got a lot of time for these in respect that if you and I were to go on a training course, and you wanted to go and I'd been sent, you'll get something out of it. I on the other hand will get nothing out of it because someone told me I needed to go."*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Some mention that in their area, changes in legislation have led to increased awareness of the importance of consultation but that this has not necessarily impacted on views towards engagement. In other areas, low CPA scores have provided the motivation for senior staff to find ways to improve local authority performance, and engagement has been identified as an integral part of this.

#### **Harlow**

Following a 'poor' CPA rating, it is perceived that meeting targets to improve overall council ratings has become a key driver for better engagement practices. This is viewed positively by many practitioners as being a catalyst to motivate the council. Furthermore, the council is already using targets to ensure some engagement mechanisms are meeting their objectives (e.g. the Youth Council).

*“CPA has pushed things quite quickly. If you want to get a good rating you’ve got to look at things differently and see where you didn’t get it right before and what you could do to improve from now on.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

## 14.2. Importance for engagement

Targets are seen by most as necessary but not sufficient for engagement. They are also viewed by many as a negative driver i.e. the stick rather than the carrot with few talking about the benefits of meeting targets per se.

Civic Pioneers feel that unless careful thought is given to the design of targets and unless there are people within authorities to drive engagement, targets can be manipulated with little real change occurring; particularly if additional money and resource is not made available to achieve engagement goals and to measure performance against the targets. Therefore they are not seen to be sufficient for engagement to be successful.

Discussions about the role of targets centres around two key themes:

the value of targets per se

the practicalities of setting targets for engagement

Almost all participants in the depth interviews and workshops agree that **targets in general** have a role in embedding ideas within an organisation, and are a particularly powerful way to ensure senior management buy-in.

*“I think I’ve come into this organisation at the right time because the forward drive has to be because of the CPA, and therefore I’ve got the backing to improve services. I don’t think my predecessors had that backing.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Although many express concerns about target overload, they feel that in organisations which are already heavily target orientated, the most straightforward way to make people take something seriously can be to set targets around it. In particular, having targets is seen to help justify resources spent in a particular area.

*“It’s there as a lever to get the resources to deliver the goods, and it focuses the chief execs mind.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Several participants of the depths and workshops suggest that targets are particularly important where there is no legacy of engagement and the organisation has traditionally not seen engagement as particularly valuable. This is because setting a target brings the issue to the attention of senior management who will then put their weight behind it. They can also impact on the culture of an organisation more generally.

*I think certainly from my point of view the CPA has really focussed the mind of the leadership and community engagement is a key line of enquiry and certainly they are sitting up and paying attention.*

*- Workshop participant*

A concern about targets is the perceived conflict between local and national priorities. In particular, one of the cornerstones of community engagement is allowing the community to set the agenda. However, if targets are set nationally this may not reflect local issues and in some cases may directly contradict what local communities are asking for. This tension can provide significant problems for local authorities. The fact that targets are set nationally can give them weight and many feel they should be used as minimum requirements. However, there is some concern that if targets are not realistic, or require too great a step-change in one go, then they are destined to fail and will not be taken seriously. The importance of having flexible targets that can be interpreted in ways appropriate to the locality was particularly emphasised in the workshop.

### **Wolverhampton**

The City-wide Involvement Network has recently been working to develop performance indicators relating to engagement which will help ensure that all partners monitor the same information.

Finally, another general point made about targets in the workshop is the importance of clarity about what the targets are trying to achieve. This is both from the perspective of the policy-makers when deciding what are appropriate targets, but also communicating this to the people who will be expected to deliver – so that they understand what the targets are trying to achieve. This is also relevant in ensuring that the target does not become more important than the delivery.

In summary, in a culture programmed to respond to targets, trying to raise the importance of engagement without targets could be difficult or impossible. However, whenever targets are set there are a number of issues including the tension between local and national priorities and communication of the purpose of the targets which will effect how much impact the targets have.

Workshop participants also emphasise that while targets can be important in ensuring action occurs, the evaluating bodies need to recognise that there are



many factors that impact on ability to meet targets that are outside of a council's control and that this must be taken into consideration when evaluating success.

Focussing specifically on **setting targets for engagement**, a number of important issues are raised. These are discussed in the section above about measuring success. The main points raised are that it can be difficult to establish appropriate targets that will measure the success of engagement. There is a call for simple targets which can be used as proxies (such as number of school governors) but it is recognised that these will not necessarily show the full picture: particularly as they all feel that successful engagement will look different in different areas, dependent on local area characteristics.

A concern raised by Civic Pioneers about giving the wrong incentives to local authorities through badly set targets is echoed by the public, who are aware of Government targets and are often sceptical about their value. In the groups general public participants expressed the concern that often engagement can be used to 'rubber-stamp' a decision without being given proper consideration. This links back to the issues discussed in the 'Definition of Success' section above.

At various points throughout discussion about these ingredients the issue of timing is raised. With respect to engagement targets, workshop participants note that often they feel the time given to meet targets is too short or that the measures used are too blunt to identify the incremental changes that occur. This can cause a problem because they feel that many managers are more motivated by 'quick wins' and that if engagement is not seen to fit into this category then other targets may be prioritised.

## 15. Stability

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This ingredient was first introduced to participants at the workshop and was added to the list of ingredients as stability/ instability appears to have an influence over the success of engagement. **Stability** refers to three different facets:

Personnel

Structures

Political control

Its definition for the pre-task was:

***Political control of council is fairly constant and therefore allows time for new policies to become established. The structure of the council directorates and other statutory bodies remains consistent and boundaries stay the same. Staff turnover is low so officers have the opportunity to develop their roles and learn about the community.***

### 15.1. Local situation

This ingredient was created because many of the Civic Pioneers spoke about the issues arising when an area undergoes changes in structures or political control. Although areas that have recently undergone change largely identify it as a positive thing (because it has resulted in the local authority becoming more engagement focussed) they also discuss the challenges that occur as a result, in particular the need to spend time re-establishing links. There is particular concern about potential changes to boundaries of statutory agencies that are being discussed, and the impact this will have on the links that exist between agencies.

There are other changes, such as changes of staff which may not be under the authority's control but which can impact on relationships. In particular, knowledge is not always captured before they leave, and the relationships they have formed can be difficult to transfer.

*“People can come and go and not everything gets written down or reported.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

## 15.2. Importance for engagement

From both the community and an agency-partnership working perspective, it is important there is continuity in the council and partners' workforces as everybody knows who to ask when they have an issue. Furthermore, relationships can be built and trust developed – which is very important for residents if they are going to be active citizens, and for staff if they are going to be productive in their jobs. It is felt by some workshop participants (although they concede, it is not proven) that if residents trust staff, this may eventually transfer trust to the organisation. However, others were doubtful about whether some residents will ever have trust in the council, and so in these situations relationships with individual staff are key. As the section on organisational culture showed, trust is essential for engagement to permeate the organisation.

Instability (or change of personnel) can also be viewed positively in order to instigate a culture of engagement principles if the previous administration or senior officers were not bought into the engagement agenda.

*“[Crucial to engagement] is a willingness to change from people who have been here along time and used to the old system. They need to come along with us and say ‘Ok yeah, we accept the change and will support it.’ ”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

However, many of the workshop participants feel that in reality changes in administration and staff turnover are not easily controllable by councils, and so it is more important to deal effectively with the situation in hand than try and change it. Most feel that if there is a positive organisational culture of engagement, and it is embedded into strategic documents and corporate plans, then a high turnover of staff will not have a particularly negative impact. Furthermore, some say that changes are a good thing as they can bring new ideas and energies and can “*freshen things up*”.

## 16. Local Area Characteristics

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This ingredient was not originally presented to case study participants, but during the course of the discussions it emerged they feel strongly that the success of engagement is dependent on a myriad of factors, some of which are under the council's control, others of which are not. Below we discuss some of the most important **local area characteristics** that can impact on how engagement should ideally be approached and on the role of the different ingredients.

**Affluent/ deprived:** The level of deprivation can impact particularly on the likelihood of community led engagement. Affluent areas traditionally have greater capacity and are more able to engage with the council through existing mechanisms, if they are motivated enough to express their opinions. More deprived areas may require a more tailored outreach approach in order to encourage engagement, either because of lack of the skills and knowledge to engage, or to overcome scepticism that nobody will want to listen. In the most deprived areas there is some evidence that capacity is being built as a result of the targeted funding and therefore these areas will face different challenges again.

The affluence of an area can also impact on the amount of funds available for engagement, for example, one case study area noted that because they are a relatively affluent area and consequently do not receive large amounts of funding it has led to increased agency partnership working as a way of making money go further.

**Transient/ stable populations:** Clearly, a highly transient population is potentially harder to engage than a stable one. In particular, an area with transient population may have less capacity and therefore be less likely to have successful community driven engagement. Also, it is important to note that newer populations may have different needs to existing population and if they are less likely to engage through existing mechanisms this could prove problematic. This is a reason one Civic Pioneer gives for not only using Parish Councillors as representatives of communities – because they act as gate keepers and generally are more representative of more established communities than 'newcomers'.

**Presence of BME and 'harder to reach' groups:** All areas are likely to have harder to reach groups – from young people to farmers to certain BME communities. All Civic Pioneers emphasise the importance of knowing who your hard to reach or seldom heard groups are and then tailoring approaches to engagement appropriately. In particular, this will impact on the community led and local structures ingredients. It can also impact on agency partnership working if one organisation has networks which others can utilise.

### High Peak and Derbyshire Dales

High Peak and Derbyshire Dales have recognised that while the proportion of BME communities is relatively low, they have a large hard to reach group which is the farmer population. Consequently they have designed outreach activities to meet the needs of farmers. For example, instead of expecting the farmers to make time during the week to come to the council offices, a representative is available at the farmer's market so that farmers can 'drop in' while going about their daily business.

**Variety of languages spoken:** In some areas, a particular aspect of hard to reach audiences can be that their first language is not English. Again this influences the type of engagement that can be effective – in particular some councils have noted that translating paper documents is not always the answer as there can be high levels of illiteracy among target audiences. Therefore, outreach with translators, and utilising the voluntary and community sector can be vital to engage with these audiences.

### Southwark

There are a wide range of languages spoken across the Borough. The Community Involvement Development Unit tries to ensure people from all backgrounds have the opportunity to become involved in civic life. There are two key ways they try to do this. Firstly, they use outreach workers who are fluent in community languages to go out into communities and speak to people about how they can engage. The outreach workers take a developmental approach by meeting communities on their own territory and working with them face-to-face to build up trust and gain an understanding of their needs. Secondly, Southwark Council hosts a variety of forums of interests, including a multi-faith forum which comprise of people whose first language is not always English.

**Rural/ urban:** Civic Pioneers recognise that significantly different challenges face urban and rural areas. In particular, resources in a rural area are generally dispersed over a larger geographical area which can require significant co-ordination in order for local involvement structures to work well together. For example, it might be necessary to have a forum which representatives of parish councils can all attend in order to cover the interests of a large number of areas in one meeting.

**Physical boundaries (e.g. river, 'A' road) and transport links:** Linked to the point about urban and rural, sometimes physical boundaries can impact on the success of mechanisms. In particular, they can influence the travel time and availability of public transport that can impact on decisions to get involved.

**Level of identification with local authority or area boundaries:** Psychological boundaries i.e. what people identify as their area, can impact on how structures should be arranged as people are more likely to engage if they think 'their' area's interests will be served. Civic

Pioneers note that it is important to be aware of and work with these boundaries as far as possible, even though they may not be immediately apparent.

### Southwark

Southwark Borough Council has defined the boundaries for their area committees according to parameters that residents identify with. This is as opposed to pre-determined boundaries, such as ward or police beats. It is felt this increases attendance at meetings as residents identify with the area in question rather than somewhere which they do not feel is relevant to them.

**Co-terminosity of service providers:** In areas where services are not coterminous agency partnership working is potentially more challenging.

**High/ low proportions of local authority tenants:** This is particularly highlighted as an issue because in areas with high proportions of local authority tenants they are likely to want to engage with the council on some issues (most obviously housing) over and above other issues. Some Civic Pioneers have decided to use this to their advantage and use housing as a way to open up communication, at which point the community can be engaged on wider issues.

### Portsmouth

Portsmouth City Council has invested in a tenant resource centre. This centre provides a focal point for service provision and engagement with Council tenants. To maximise its effectiveness this is combined with outreach programmes because the council recognises that not everyone will be willing to 'come to them'.

**Supportiveness of local media towards the council and/ or engagement:** Where the media is positive and helps to publicise engagement this can clearly encourage participation and vice versa. This relationship will depend on the organisational culture of the council and may also depend on the leader.

## 16.1. Importance for engagement

Local authorities do not have any control over many of the above factors. Therefore local area characteristics are unlikely to be the stimulus for engagement, or the way to maintain it. Nevertheless, local area characteristics may have an impact on the ingredients discussed above and on the design of the effective local involvement structures in particular so it is important to acknowledge and understand their presence.

Local area characteristics may also have a bearing on the scale, or level, community engagement should take place at. The most important factor is seen

to be ensuring attempts to engage are made at a level that makes sense to citizens. Although it may be easier and save resources to combine two wards into a forum (economies of scale), this might reduce the potential for issues covered to be salient to people in the catchment area and as a consequence turn-out may be reduced. As such, local area characteristics may also have a bearing on the scale of engagement taking place. In some places it may be appropriate to engage at a neighbourhood level, while in others ward level or perhaps even local authority level maybe best. Naturally this will also depend on the issue residents are being asked to engage about.

Also, it is important to consider the different communities within an area and ensure they are all represented. Not everyone will embrace the same mechanisms and it is important to be flexible about how engagement is approached. Linked to this, the needs of particular groups should be considered (such as transport, accessibility etc) and if possible they should be met.

# 17. Interactions between Ingredients

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In general the Civic Pioneers think that the ingredients listed in the previous chapter all have a role in achieving successful engagement. However, their impact is not straightforward, not least because many of the ingredients interact with each other to influence success overall. First we discuss the overall importance of the ingredients, then how they interact.

## 17.1. A hierarchy of ingredients?

Before and during the workshop we asked participants to discuss the relative importance of the ingredients. Although they felt this was in many ways an impossible task, because of the high level of interaction and the fact that so much depends on local context, there was remarkable consistency in the ingredients identified as the most important.

*If you've got a really good leadership then you're lucky and you perhaps don't need to worry about that one [leadership/champion]... I find it very difficult to say to an area that number one, you must always get that right, and that right, and that right 'cos the area will be very different in different extents... it would depend on the context of the area which one of these factors [was most important]*

- Workshop participant

One of the key elements of local area characteristics is how long the area has been talking about and conducting engagement exercises. Participants believe this can make a large difference to which ingredients are most relevant and how the different ingredients interact.

*"We all have quite very different rankings, it's actually quite useful as a tool just to identify that places are, at this point in time, concerned with different issues... I'll say, right what we really need now is more community led but that might change next year."*

- Workshop participant

*"There are various relationships [between the ingredients]... how it plays out over the long term and short term; getting things started, making sure they continue...and things like that."*

- Workshop participant

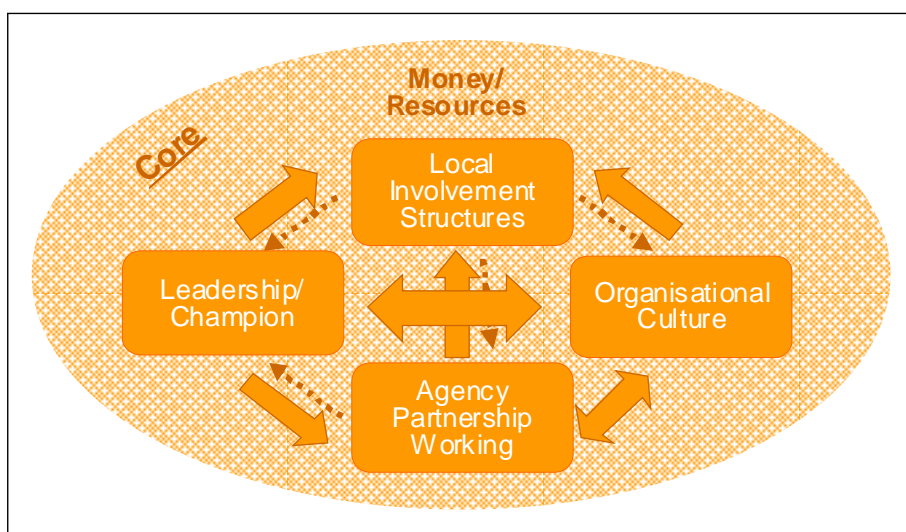


Four of the ingredients discussed appeared to be more central to Civic Pioneer’s thinking than the others (perhaps because they are the ingredients over which local authorities have most control). These were **leadership/champions**, **organisational culture**, **local involvement structures** and **agency partnership working**. Additionally, many participants placed money and resources as the main background factor that underlies success. Participants felt that beyond differentiating between core and secondary ingredients it is not possible to rank them.



## 17.2. How do core ingredients interact?

Civic Pioneers identify interactions between each of the four core ingredients and with money and resources. These are discussed in this section before going on to look at how secondary factors relate to these core elements.



First, we will look at money as the background factor. Then we will look at the six possible inter-relationships between the four core ingredients.

## **Money and Resources**

The majority of Civic Pioneers believe that money and resources underlie the success of other ingredients. In particular, money can act as a motivator for all the key players involved and resources are the key enabler for local involvement structures and partnership working. It is also worth noting that, in many cases the interaction will be two-way, so leaders and culture can choose to make more money available, successful agency partnership working can maximise the potential resources available and local involvement structures can become a resource on which the local authority can draw.

*“Significant **resources** attract **partnership working** because they all want a piece of the pie.”*

*- Workshop participant*

## **Leadership/Champion and Organisational Culture**

For many, the most important interaction with leadership is organisational culture. This indeed seems to be the most significant relationship overall. Particularly when a local authority is relatively new to the idea of engagement, the presence of a strong leader or champion advocating engagement can have a significant influence on culture.

*“Leadership is essential to start off with but then moving to organisational culture, so maybe it’s a short term-long term debate.”*

*- Workshop participant*

If the champion or leader is practical about implementation as well as having strong leadership skills and an interest in encouraging community engagement then Civic Pioneers feel that the culture of the organisation will come to reflect this.

*“I would say that the council should be **leaders** in that to ensure that they create an **environment** where people feel confident to engage with each other, no matter what their differences are.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

Also, some of the workshop participants felt that the interaction could go the other way, and that where a leader is in an organisation that is committed to engagement that leader can become convinced of the value of engagement.

Finally, the two are thought to work together – where both the culture and leadership of an organisation value engagement this message will be carried outside of the organisation and as a result will raise the profile of engagement in the area.

*“I would couple **leadership** of an organisation with **culture**... they are dependant and interact with each other.”*

*- Workshop participant*

*“I think you need a culture, an **organisational culture** that is willing to work with its residents and the residents to work with the organisation. You need things in place to enable that, so you need the **structure** and you need some **money** – you don’t need to have a lot of money – but you do need to have singing from the top, across the organisation, that you will involve your residents.”*

*- Civic Pioneer*

## Leadership/Champion and Local Involvement Structures

Leaders need to be seen to be enthusiastic about the local involvement structures and willing to listen to what they have to say, particularly if people are going to be encouraged to channel their thoughts through local involvement structures rather than by taking ideas straight to a leader. Also, the presence of senior figures in local involvement structures can impact on their efficiency as it means that commitments to act can be made immediately.

Local involvement structures can also influence the leadership. Although this interaction was not mentioned so frequently, it is possible that if structures are working well then engagement is likely to be more successful and some Civic Pioneers speculate that if engagement is seen by the leadership to be successful then they are more likely to encourage it in the future.

## Leadership/Champion and Agency Partnership Working

Similar to the relationship between leadership and organisational culture, leaders have the potential to encourage agency partnership working and to convince others of its value. It is also possible that if the partner agencies work together with champions within the local authority that a leader can be more easily convinced of the value of engagement. However, both these points were only briefly discussed in the workshop.

## Organisational Culture and Agency Partnership Working

Civic Pioneers feel that organisational culture can directly impact on the success of partnership working. In particular, if organisations are open to working with

other agencies and are keen to make it work then it is likely to be more successful than where a culture is traditionally more siloed and unwilling to work across divisions.

Equally, if people from different agencies work together this can impact on the culture in both organisations. Consequently, if one organisation is less orientated towards community engagement, but sees it working well for the other organisation, it may become embedded more quickly than would otherwise be the case.

## **Organisational Culture and Local Involvement Structures**

As with leadership, organisational culture can be vital to the success of local involvement structures. In particular, the organisation has to be open to hearing what people who interface through the structures have to say. If this happens then it increases the likelihood that the structure will be successful.

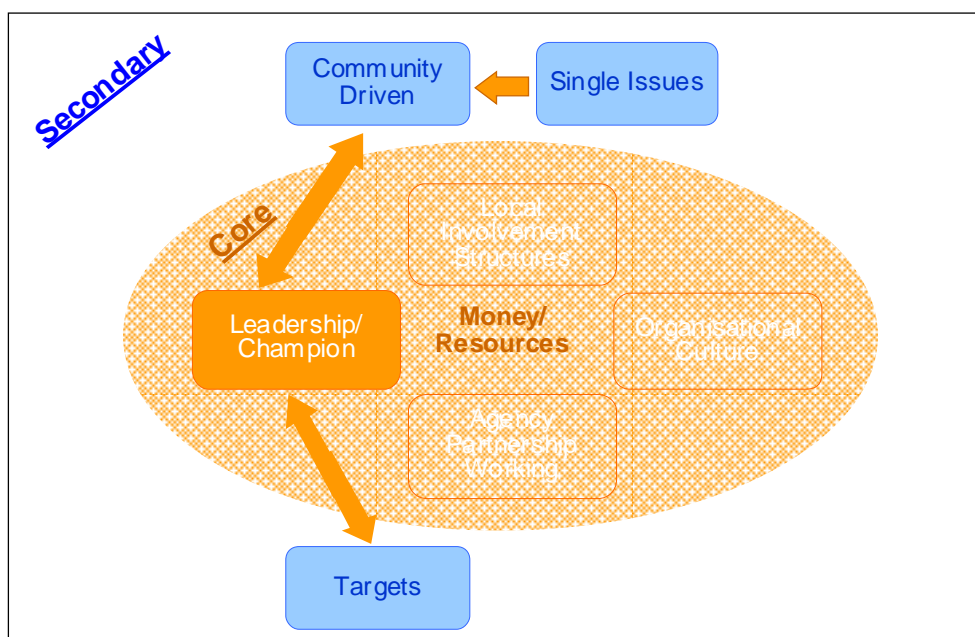
Also, although it is not a major influencer, it is possible that local involvement structures can influence the organisational culture. In particular, if the structures are seen to be sources of good, successful, or popular decisions then this may provide the evidence needed to encourage others to adopt a more open approach to engagement.

## **Agency Partnership Working and Local Involvement Structures**

The public do not necessarily differentiate between the different organisations responsible for delivering a service. Consequently, the most successful local involvement structures are those that make the divisions effectively disappear, ensuring that whatever is discussed has a good chance of reaching the appropriate ear. Also, if organisations are working in partnership they can learn from each other's experiences and consequently develop the best structures to meet the community needs.

There is not as much discussion between Civic Pioneers about interaction in the opposite direction. However, it seems possible that if there are good local involvement structures in place then other agencies may choose to take advantage of this and get involved with them rather than choosing to set up their own structures – consequently leading to increased partnership working.

### 17.3. Leadership/Champion



The first core ingredient is **leadership/champion**. As well as the individual’s personality and opinion about engagement, there are some external factors that can interact with how likely leadership is to lead to successful engagement:

**Targets** – One of the most commonly mentioned influences on the impact of leadership is targets, particularly with respect to leaders who are within the executive part of the council. Many participants felt that targets catch and maintain the leader’s interest in the area they focus on – in this case engagement – and that in an arena so full of targets these can have a large influence on whether or not community engagement is prioritised.

*“Targets are quite important for leaders because they basically prioritise and focus...how [resources] will be spent on which areas.”*

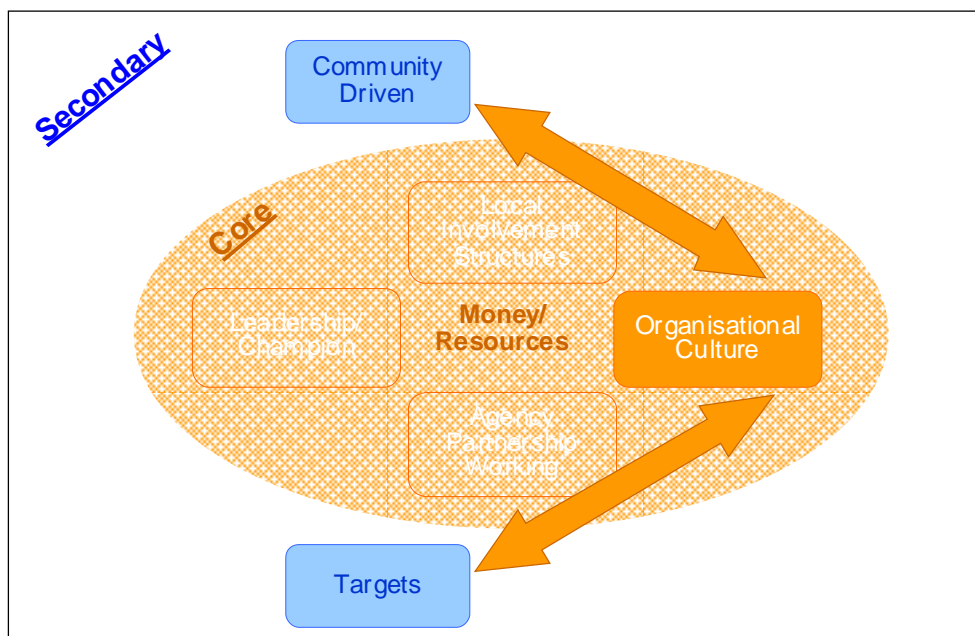
*- Workshop participant*

Also, leaders to some extent are able to choose which targets they will pursue most vigorously so they can consequently influence how successful the targets are by choosing to make them a priority or not.

**Community-Led/Driven** – Many of the leaders discussed are community representatives and therefore the views of the community are likely to impact on the attitude of leaders. Often the community can choose to bring their opinions straight to leaders and consequently they have a role in conveying the views expressed to them. Often it will be **single issues** that encourage people to engage with leaders. Equally, a good leader will appear approachable and willing

to respond to the community – if this happens then Civic Pioneers believe there is potential for engagement to be increasingly community driven in the future.

## 17.4. Organisational Culture



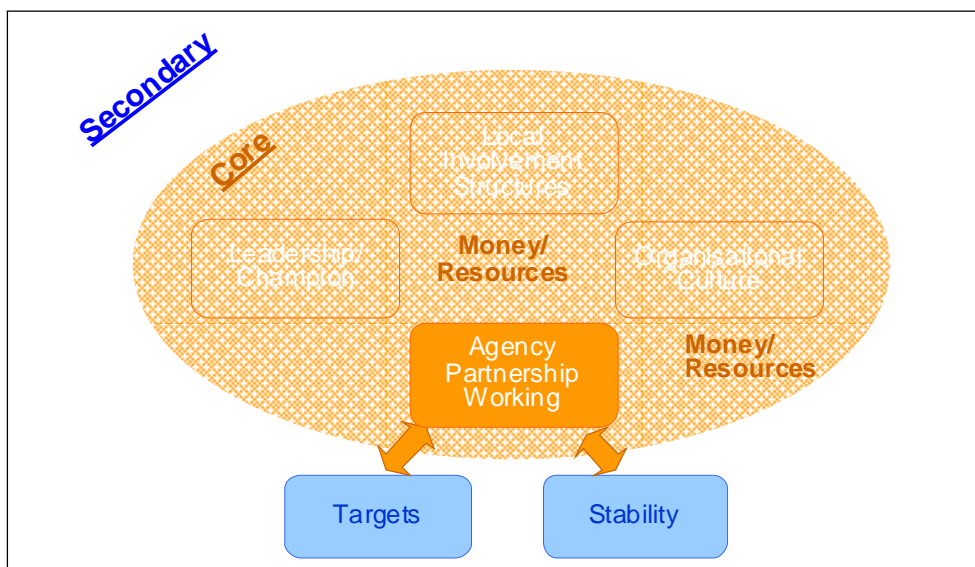
When participants discuss ingredients that interact with **organisational culture** there are two key impacts these can have: changing the culture to have a greater focus on engagement, and maintaining the culture to ensure that engagement becomes integral to what everyone does. The main ingredients that interact with organisational culture are as follows:

**Targets** – Many participants feel that targets (as long as there is money to support them) are key influencers of organisational culture. Where there are funds available for engagement, people are more likely to build it into their work, particularly if there are also targets set in this area. Some also feel that targets and money can emphasise the importance of engagement. Being able to show that engagement has positive impacts could help further in instilling a culture of engagement – once people have seen it being effective they will be more interested in trying it themselves. Also, to some extent, organisational culture interacts with the success of targets – because if the culture encourages the organisation to only pay lip-service to targets then they will be unlikely to establish successful engagement.

**Community-Led/Driven** – As with the leaders, the elected members will have a direct influence over organisational culture (for good or bad) and theoretically their views will reflect those of the public. Also, some Civic Pioneers believe that the public can directly influence the culture of a council, so that over time it will slowly develop to meet the needs and demands of the communities it serves.

Equally, if the organisational culture is receptive to a community driven agenda then this will encourage more people to engage leading to a virtuous circle of engagement whereby the more the community drives the agenda, the more representative it becomes, the more receptive the local authority will become and so on.

## 17.5. Agency Partnership Working

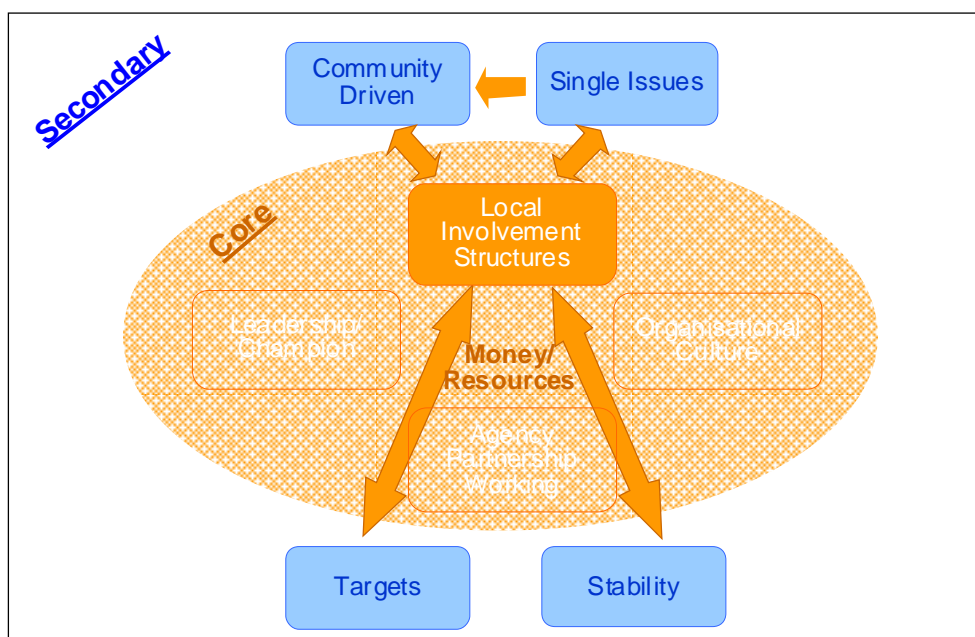


Thirdly, comes **agency partnership working**. Again this is seen to be something potentially within the control of the council that can have a positive impact on engagement – particularly on the community perceptions of engagement. The main ingredients that can influence organisational culture are as follows:

**Targets** – Although targets are not generally written to encourage joined-up working as an end in itself, they can encourage agencies to recognise overlap in remits and to respond together rather than as individuals. This can add the motivation to work in partnership if the culture is not traditionally open to such an approach. The reverse of this is also true - that successful agency partnership working can make the achievement of targets possible and consequently can make targets a success.

**Stability** – In order to maintain successful relationships between organisations, some participants talk about the importance of stability of personnel and structures. It can take some time for new structures to ‘bed-in’ and there is some concern that results can be expected too quickly. In the longer term, if structures and personnel remain stable this can make partnership easier, as each organisation comes to understand how its partners work.

## 17.6. Local Involvement Structures



Finally, **local involvement structures** can have a great impact on the success of engagement. More ingredients interact with the success of local involvement structures than the others discussed above, perhaps because for many they are the main interface between the local authorities and their communities.

**Community-Led/Driven** - The community itself can shape how local involvement structures work and how successful they are. In particular, they can vote with their feet and not participate through structures that they perceive to be ineffectual. Depending on their design, local involvement structures can encourage or discourage community driven engagement – in particular, some will let a steering group formed of the general public set the agenda whereas in other areas the council will set the agenda and make the relevant people available.

**Single issues** – Often harnessing single issues in local involvement structures can be a successful way to bring in new people and to encourage participation. In particular, if the structures are sensitive to salient local issues and can adapt to meet the demands of local communities they are likely to be more successful. Single issues can either ‘belong’ to the public (e.g. concern about the impact of four wheel drive cars going off-road), in which case they are likely to impact on local involvement structures through being community driven, or they may ‘belong’ to the council (e.g. decision to close down a local school) in which case they will directly interact with the relevant structures. How well the single issues are resolved will be directly dependent on the success of local involvement structures in ensuring an appropriate solution is reached.

**Stability** - Some workshop participants feel that the success of local involvement structures can be dependent on strong relationships being developed between



engagement staff and communities. Stability of staff and structures make it clearer for the public what the entry points are and consequently mean they will potentially be more successful. Equally, if local involvement structures work well then they will be maintained and consequently will result in increased stability.

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