Public Value and Participation:
A Literature Review for the
Scottish Government

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PUBLIC VALUE AND PARTICIPATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

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It should be noted that since this research was commissioned a new Scottish government has been formed, which means that the report reflects commitments and strategic objectives conceived under the previous administration. The policies, strategies, objectives and commitments referred to in this report should not therefore be treated as current Government policy.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is aimed at public sector managers, policymakers and other stakeholders interested in increasing the democratic legitimacy of government and bringing public services closer to the citizens they serve. It provides a brief account of the theory of public value and outlines how public participation can contribute to the process of 'authorising' and legitimising what public managers do, establishing priorities and decision making, and measuring the performance of public organisations.

Public value theory has emerged in a context where consulting, engaging, involving or giving 'voice' to the public and to users of public services has become a near-ubiquitous term in policymaking over recent years. Against this background, the aim of this report is to explain how public value offers a new framework for thinking about public services and the role of public managers. Public participation is a tool for allowing public managers to identify the objectives that the public genuinely value and to engage in an ongoing process of listening, debating and responding to their interests – what is called *refining public preferences*. Public value is neutral about what method of participation is used: rather it focuses on placing responsiveness to the public's refined preferences at the heart of what public organisations do.

This report is based on an analysis of published articles and government reports identified using a list of key terms to search IDOX and other relevant databases, official websites and search engines. Participatory activities ranging from providing information to more deliberative forms of engagement were included in the search, although online engagement (about which there is a substantive literature) was deliberately excluded to limit the size of the review. The findings show that the evidence base is strong on how to 'do' participation and that there is a wealth of information available to anybody seeking information on what methods to use. However, the literature is rather short on how organisations can systematically assess the outputs of participation. The main issues identified by the review are summarised below:

Defining participation and putting public value into practice

- The term public participation can broadly be defined as all activities by which members of the public (whether defined as citizens, users or consumers) contribute to shaping the decisions taken by public organisations.
- The purpose and methods of fostering public participation can be classified according to a scale or spectrum, with consultation at one end and more deliberative techniques on the other. Public value promotes deliberative government but is not prescriptive about which method to use.
- A lot of participatory activity is occurring in Scotland, both at government level and within local public services. Mapping of these activities suggests that in spite of the numerous new initiatives introduced since 2000, more traditional forms of engagement, such as conducting written consultations, continue to be the preferred approach. These are being used in conjunction with newer research methods such as focus groups and opinion polling.

Drivers and enablers of participation

- Evidence of a public appetite for participating in the design and delivery of public services is mixed, although the literature does indicate that there is some support for more radical forms of engagement, such as lay involvement on the governing boards of public services.
- However, demand for greater participation depends on a number of factors: whether it is a local or national issue at stake; how much input is required from the public; and proof that participation will 'make a difference'.
- The reform of public services and the structures that govern them, which often go hand in hand, are key factors in the drive to increase the number of opportunities for the public to participate in decision making, although this has not been the sole, or even the principal goal of many reforms. There is, however, debate about the extent to which tensions may arise between the introduction of greater participatory processes in policymaking and the role of elected officials.
- Enablers of public participation include the capacity and resources of the public, social capital and the attitudes of political, managerial and civil society leaders to participation.

Costs and benefits

- Public participation can produce demonstrable benefits to both an organisation and to citizens by ensuring that the different perspectives of those involved are heard and understood. At its best, this process generates trust and fosters greater organisational transparency and accountability.
- Successful public participation relies as much on those in power believing that this process is a valuable part of public service management, as it does on the willingness of members of the public to engage.
- Evaluating the costs and barriers to successful participatory activities involves weighing up many different factors and understanding the trade-offs between them. The fundamental barriers to effective participation are: a lack of clarity of purpose; inconsistent use of terminology; the risk of participation overload; the difficulties of getting organisational backing; and the issues surrounding accountability.

Engaging 'hard to reach' groups

- Re-interpreting traditional methods of engagement (such as holding meetings in places and times convenient to participants) is a simple way of accommodating the view-point and needs of those who are hardest to reach in society.
- Many more innovative methods have also been developed to seek their views. Whilst much has been made of the emergence of new technologies which allow for greater ease of communication between organisations and members of the public (particularly the potential of the internet to allow people to make themselves heard), some of the most innovative and effective ways of reaching the hard to reach have been demonstrated by organisations building engagement processes into how they operate.
- Initiatives, no matter how innovative, must be appropriate to their context and strive to target all socio-economic groups in society.
- This can be done through full consideration of all issues relating to equality, the use of appropriate resources and support, and transparency about the participatory processes.

Lessons for public managers

- Assess the tradeoffs of putting participatory processes in place and evaluate the best method to use.
- Identify at which stage in the policy-making process the public should be engaged and what purpose this will serve.
- Follow the principles for good practice by: having a clear and realistic role and remit; ensuring that adequate resources are available; supporting the project with appropriate management and evaluation; building on past experience and linking the project with other policies and initiatives; building in long term sustainability.

Conclusion

- Much of the literature has focused on the relative merits of different forms of engagement, offering an account of where these methods sit on the participation 'scale' and how best to 'do' participation. There are numerous case studies, often dealing with local initiatives, which show what participation can achieve.
- However, many of the far-reaching benefits claimed for the process of public participation – such as increasing public satisfaction with services, restoring trust in public institutions and politicians, reducing the 'democratic deficit' – are unlikely to be realised unless more fundamental issues are addressed. The question of how to develop accurate and meaningful measurement is one, particularly given the need for evidence to demonstrate the link between public participation, actions and outcomes. Other factors include; ensuring that the aims of consultation are communicated clearly and consistently both to participants and internally; building in sustainability; and ensuring that new processes are integrated into existing governance structures so that deliberative and representative forms of governance are not in conflict.
- Politicians and public managers must therefore recognise that deliberative governance is not simply a matter of 'bolting on' public participation to existing models. Public value demands a reconsideration of planning processes, the relationships between politicians and public managers and the creation of internal cultures that encourage all public servants to see the world from a citizens' perspective.
- There is no single route map to effective public participation that achieves the twin goals of revitalising democracy and developing better, more efficient and more responsive public services. Establishing where responsibility for decision making lies between elected politicians and participatory processes is crucial.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1   This paper is aimed at public sector managers, policymakers and other stakeholders interested in increasing the democratic legitimacy of government and bringing public services closer to the citizens they serve. It provides a brief account of the theory of public value and outlines how public participation can contribute to the process of authorising and legitimising what public managers do, establishing priorities and decision making, and measuring the performance of public organisations.

Why should public managers be interested in what the public value?

1.2   Why should public managers be interested in what the public value? What practical help can this theory offer? First, elected officials and administrators are now faced with the challenge of static and declining levels of satisfaction with public services following years of investment and target-setting that has purportedly led to objective improvements in these same services. At the same time, rising incomes and changing consumer habits have been accompanied by high, and rising, expectations of what public services can provide. According to Ipsos-MORI, the number of people who felt that public services fell short of their expectations grew from 40 to 50 per cent between 1998 and 2004.[1] The UK government has responded by pursuing numerous policies aimed at tailoring services to the needs and demands of citizens (Cabinet Office, 2007a). This sits within wider concerns that in spite of growing prosperity British people are not more satisfied with their lives, and that the policy goals of successive governments – economic stability and employment, amongst others – are not necessarily making people 'happier' (Cabinet Office, 2007c).

1.3   Second, a significant decline in voter turnout over the past three decades has meant that questions are now routinely being asked about the traditional role of government and public services, and about public trust in politicians, public institutions and expert opinion (Mahendran and Cook, 2007)[2]. In 2004, for instance, only 52 per cent of people surveyed in Scotland trusted the Scottish Executive to work in Scotland's best long-term interests, although this was greater than recorded levels of trust in the UK government to meet the same objective (Mahendran and Cook, 2007). Alternative ways of engaging citizens in the democratic process and involving citizens in the design and delivery of public services are now seen as an important component in meeting rising expectations and re-establishing trust between the public and public managers.

A brief introduction to public value theory

1.4   An essential element of the public value approach is its emphasis on the important role public managers can play in maintaining an organisation's legitimacy in the eyes of the public. What makes public value distinctive as a theory of public management is that it presents a way of addressing the gap between 'objective' (or at least measured) improvement in services and static or rising levels of dissatisfaction with public services captured in customer satisfaction data. It is rooted in a model of *deliberative governance,* which uses

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[1] 'Thinking generally about what you expect of public services like local councils, schools, would you say they greatly exceed or slightly exceed your expectations, are about what you expect, fall slightly short or fall a long way short of your expectations?' Base: 2004 (1,502 respondents), 1998 (5,064).

[2] At 51.7 per cent for the constituency vote and 52.4 per cent on the regional vote turnout in the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections was 2.3 per cent higher than 2003, but 6.4 per cent lower than 1999 (Herbert et al, 2007)

public participation to *refine public preferences*[3] and identify objectives that the public genuinely value. The key aim is to achieve a higher level of *responsiveness,* derived from direct engagement with the public and a new approach to the fixing of targets.   In this sense, public value is both a management theory and a practical toolkit to restore trust in public managers, politicians and the public realm. Public value is therefore rooted in democratic theory and revolves around processes of deliberation and ongoing dialogue between institutions and the public they serve.

1.5   This is not merely a question of marketing or communications, or an exercise in 'giving the public what they want', but a process for involving the public in decision making on the basis that citizens have the capacity to engage and understand the dilemmas faced by both politicians and public managers. Ultimately it is politicians (and increasingly public managers) who are responsible for decision making and accountable for allocating public funds, yet public value is rooted in the belief that if the rationale for decisions is explained after a process of public deliberation then those decisions will themselves be better and lead to better outcomes[4]. Public value conceives of what public managers do as part of an ongoing deliberative process, but it is not prescriptive about *how* public managers engage with the public or what methods they use. Whilst public participation is a vital tool in enabling managers to establish what the public value, the crucial point is to ensure that the public is at the heart of what all public organisations do. Engaging staff and creating an organisational culture conducive to generating public value, strong leadership and appropriate methods of performance measurement are equally important.

The development of public value in Scotland and the UK

1.6   The practical application of public value remains work in progress. Public value theory has emerged in a context where consulting, engaging, involving or giving 'voice' to the public and to users of public services has become a near-ubiquitous term in policymaking over recent years. The influence of these ideas is visible in the processes that have been used to inform the development of legislation. For instance, the Department of Health in England consulted 42,000 people for its White Paper *Your Healthcare, Your Say*. The launch of the 'National Conversation' on devolution by the Scottish Government in August 2007 is another example of a deliberative process being used to engage the public in debating a highly political issue.

1.7   Statutory responsibilities for engagement, such as the Local Government in Scotland Act (2003), have also extended a duty to engage with citizens to improve service delivery. Local authorities, chief constables and police boards, NHS boards, enterprise agencies, the fire service and transport agencies are all now under an explicit obligation to take public participation more seriously. At local level there are numerous informal or ad hoc processes ranging from open meetings to citizens' juries, panels and workshops that either inform a specific initiative or project that an organisation is running, or respond to grassroots demand for citizens' voice on a particular issue.

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[3] In simple terms, this means not merely reacting to what the public demands (or the media's interpretation of it) but informing public opinion and outlining the constraints faced by public managers (taking the opposite view, where necessary) before responding.
[4] For further information about the theory of public value see Horner, L, Lehki, R and Blaug, R (2006) *Deliberative Democracy and the Role of Public Managers*.

1.8   Fostering greater participation has also become a desirable public policy outcome in the push to overcome the 'democratic deficit' that has developed between public managers and the public they serve, as described in section 1.3. This argument has found expression in the debate about the future of local government in Scotland. Both the McIntosh (1999) and Kerley (2000) reviews of local councils called for greater engagement with those who are 'poorly organised and resourced as part of a sustained process of public debate, review, and questioning of the local authority and its policies'(McAteer and Orr, 2006).

1.9   The public service reform agenda has also pushed for public services to become more accountable to the citizen, 'user' or 'consumer' rather than the 'producer interests' of the professionals who run them with a view to stimulating improvements in those services, improving outcomes and re-establishing trust in public institutions. Cornwall and Gaventa suggest this drive to incorporate the opinions and experience of citizens indicates that government agencies are now involving the public in decisions that were once presented as technical, and which should be acknowledged as value-laden and political (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001). The rhetoric behind many recent reforms has focused on improving the quality of services by empowering users and making them more accountable to the public, although there are undoubtedly other issues at stake; decreasing levels of public funding, the threat of external competition and an interest in countering the power of professionals principal among them.

1.10   Examples of enhanced voice for service users include community safety forums that work with under-represented groups, and workshops with local communities and user/interest group campaigns, such as the 'Putting Breast Cancer on the Map' campaign[5]. This argument is built on evidence that, perhaps unsurprisingly, people value a service the more they have contact with it. For instance, the Audit Commission found that while 80 per cent of local secondary school users were very or fairly satisfied with their service, only 30 per cent of the general population shared this view. Recent research in the UK has also found that 'faith' in 'closer' relationships (family, friends, work colleagues), rose between 1996 and 2001, while 'faith' in larger institutions (government, media, businesses), has gone down (Horner and Lekhi, 2007). The 'new localism' movement calling for devolution of power from central to local government reinforces this trend (Gains and Stoker 2007).

1.11   Yet questions remain. What, precisely, do these new processes involve? How do they differ from the traditional processes of democratic governance and decision making? What impact do these processes really have? What effects do they have on those involved and on services? Is the sum of such approaches genuine democratic revival or simply a series of 'tick box' exercises for public managers?

Signposting resources for public participation

1.12   There is a vast literature defining this process of participation in various contexts, detailing the instruments available and the costs and benefits of carrying out wider citizen engagement. This report is based on an analysis of published articles and government reports identified using a list of key terms to search IDOX and other relevant databases, official websites and search engines. The methods or techniques for participation are now well established and much of the publicly available information covers similar territory. For those interested in engaging the public, there are now numerous 'how to' guides available,

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[5] See: http://www.wen.org.uk/health/PBCOM/breast.htm

including a *Participation Handbook* (Scottish Parliament, 2004), *Consultation Good Practice Guidance* (Scottish Executive, 2004) and *Good Practice Guidance: Consultation with Equalities Groups* (Reid-Howie Associates, 2002), COSLA's *Focusing on citizens: A guide to approaches and methods* (COSLA, 1998)*, as well as guides by the Scottish Centre for Regeneration[6] (2003) and the Cabinet Office[7]. An up to date list of the best-known and used guides can be found in appendix five of *Making a Difference: A guide to evaluating public participation in central government* (Warburton, 2007). Involve (an independent organisation which promotes public participation) has recently launched an interactive website providing practical information for those interested in involving members of the public, including details of methods and case studies: http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Involve/Home Councils such as South Lanarkshire[8] and Aberdeenshire[9] have also produced their own publications based on their experience. Whilst we know a lot about how to 'do' participation, our understanding of how to address some of the challenges these processes can raise is less well developed (Involve, 2006).

1.13   The aim of this short report is to give an overview of public value theory and outline how public managers can apply this in practice by using participatory approaches. This paper does not attempt to give a comprehensive assessment of all of the ways in which citizens are engaging in politics and policymaking in Scotland nor does it re-examine the many different methods of public participation in depth. Recent work commissioned by the Scottish Government has amply covered this territory: see Nicholson (2005 a and b) and Mahendran and Cook (2007). Rather, the aim of this report is to generate ideas for the Scottish Government about the effectiveness of different forms of public participation and to act as a resource for those undertaking participatory activities by signposting them to further information. It will also offer some principles for public engagement and ideas for refining the possible tools and techniques available.

1.14   The following sections provide an overview of the key drivers and enablers of participation, before going on to examine the benefits of participation, both for the organisation involved, and for citizens. Moreover, we explore where some initiatives have fallen short and identify where participatory instruments require further development if more deliberative forms of democracy are to be made a reality. Practical examples are given throughout, demonstrating how public service organisations in Scotland have successfully engaged with the public.

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[6] See:
http://www.ce.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/scrcs_006693.hcsp#TopOfPage
[7] See: http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/docs/Viewfinder.pdf
See also the Communities Scotland Scottish Centre for Regeneration website for a comprehensive list of resources on engaging communities:
http://www.ce.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/scrcs_006637.hcsp
[8] See: http://www.cosla.gov.uk/index.asp?pageId=100011013-11301321
[9] See: http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/communityplanning/plan/together.asp

CHAPTER TWO DEFINING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

What is Public Participation?

2.1   Defining what we mean by public participation is an important first step. The field is littered with jargon and citizens can sometimes be 'turned off' or feel alienated by the belief that specialist knowledge is a pre-requisite for involvement. Phrases such as Best Value, Closing the Opportunity Gap, and 'citizen and consumer focused public service provision' are unlikely to trip off the tongues of those who are unfamiliar with the public service reform debate. Yet all of these initiatives depend for their success on engagement with the public. Moreover, a lack of clarity about what the participation process involves can cause confusion and potentially engender scepticism amongst participants. What could be more off-putting than a public 'consultation' over a policy or decision whose outcome has already been decided? The UK government's consultation on the future of nuclear power, for instance, did little to contribute to an open and transparent decision making process or to foster trust in political leaders. Indeed, legal action was taken to require the government to consult again, although participants and commentators remained highly dissatisfied with the process.[10] Whilst extreme, this underlines the importance of honesty about what the outcomes of participation are likely to be and the need for clarity of language.

2.2   From whichever angle one approaches the subject, participation involves the ideas of 'enabling', 'enhancing' and having an active part in a larger process of deliberation. Put simply, this means that people have the chance to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, be it how they pay their taxes, apply for a driving licence, get a doctor's appointment or think about Britain's energy policy, beyond their visit to the ballot box once every four years.

2.3   These principles are well understood. However, the selection of examples in Box 2.1 illustrate that there are subtle differences in the way that organisations talk about participation. By indicating that participation goes beyond 'gathering evidence and opinions', 'improving service delivery' and 'consultation', it is suggested that the different terms for participation also denote different levels of engagement with the public. In practice, this means that the desired outcome and the public's expectations of the process vary. What this really boils down to is two simple questions: how much weight is attributed to the opinions or preferences of members of the public engaged in the process, and therefore how much effort, time, energy and thought can people be expected to make?

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[10]   Julian   Rush,   'Spinning   a   nuclear   consultation?'   Channel   4,   19   September   2007
http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/society/environment/spinning+a+nuclear+consultation/821457
John Vidal, 'New nuclear row as green groups pull out' The Guardian, 7 September 2007
http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2007/sep/07/nuclearindustry.nuclearpower
John Sauven, 'We've never been so consulted', The Guardian – Comment is Free, 27 September 2007,
http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/john_sauven/2007/09/weve_never_been_so_consulted.html

Box 2.1 Definitions of participation

> *"Participation is…an active relationship and dialogue between people and the state. It is not only gathering evidence and opinions but is an educative, discursive and inclusive process that has value in itself in building fuller citizenship. It is seen as a means of strengthening representative democracy rather than being in opposition to it."* (Scottish Parliament, 2004)
>
> *"Participative processes go beyond consultation – they enable communities to be directly involved in the decisions that matter to them rather than simply being canvassed for their opinion. It implies a shared responsibility for resolving problems."* (Morris, 2006)
>
> *"Public participation is not just about improving service delivery; it is also about enhancing the democratic legitimacy of local government and the development of community leadership."* (Audit Commission, 2003)
>
> *"Participation is everything that enables people to influence the decisions and get involved in the actions that affect their lives… It includes but goes beyond public policy decisions by including initiatives from outside that arena, such as community-led initiatives. It includes action as well as political influence. It also encompasses the need for governance systems and organisational structures to change to allow for effective participation."* (Involve, 2005)
>
> *"The right of participation in decision-making in social, economic, cultural and political life should be included in the nexus of basic human rights… Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents."* (Lister, 1998)

2.4   This concept has traditionally been modelled on a ladder or scale, which is illustrated in the Public Participation Spectrum in Box 2.2 on the following page. For the purpose of clarity in this literature review we will be using the term 'public participation' to denote all activities by which members of the public (whether defined as citizens, users or consumers) contribute to shaping the decisions taken by organisations, from consultation (second from left in Box 2.2) to empowerment at the other end of the spectrum. The last section of the table offers examples of the appropriate techniques that can be used to achieve each goal. Annex one contains a more detailed list of methodologies.

2.5   An alternative to categorising the different 'types' of participation is to pose the following questions:
- Why do organisations want the public to participate?
- Is it:
    - To communicate information?
    - To gauge public opinion or gather the views of a particular 'micro-public'?
    - To provide guidance on a particular decision? or
    - To ask members of the public to take decisions themselves?

Box 2.2 The Public Participation Spectrum

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal:	**Public Participation Goal:**	**Public Participation Goal:**	**Public Participation Goal:**	**Public Participation Goal:**
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public:	**Promise to the public:**	**Promise to the public:**	**Promise to the public:**	**Promise to the public:**
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example Techniques to Consider:	**Example Techniques to Consider:**	**Example Techniques to Consider:**	**Example Techniques to Consider:**	**Example Techniques to Consider:**
• Fact sheets • Websites	• Public Meetings • Focus Groups • Surveys • Citizens' panels • Deliberative polling • Planning for real • User panels	• Deliberative polling • Citizens' juries • Deliberative mapping • Democs • Open space technology	• Consensus Building/Dialogue • Citizen Advisory Committees • Consensus conference • Participatory decision-making • Future search conference	• Ballots • Delegated decisions • Participatory appraisal • Participatory budgeting • Participatory strategic planning

Source: The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (International Association for Public Participation, 2007)

2.6   Yet another way of thinking about the process is to envisage what participation looks like from inside and outside an organisation. For instance, as a public manager with experience and expertise in a particular field, you may have a specific view about what is important to you if the organisation is to be run efficiently and effectively. But viewed from 'outside', the public may have a very different set of priorities. Public value suggests that public managers develop an 'outside-in' frame of reference, where their ability to run the

organisation depends on a much keener appreciation of those things that the public genuinely value. This means that a balance must be struck between an organisation's *internal* priorities and public concern with particular issues. Sometimes public opinion may be ill-informed (witness the controversy about the MMR vaccination) but the role of the public manager is to respond sympathetically to these concerns, offer an account that tries to change the public mind and listens carefully to the views of citizens as the process unfolds.

Public value and participation in practice

2.7   Whilst public value offers a new framework for thinking about how citizens engage with the state, governments, public institutions, organisations and citizens are already taking part in numerous participatory activities. A simple way of distinguishing between the many participatory methods used in practice is offered by Curtain (2003), who identifies four broad types of practical initiative: 'traditional,' 'customer-oriented feedback,' 'participative innovations' and 'deliberative methods'. The survey of participatory methods employed by 216 English local authorities cited in Box 2.3 reveals a significant level of activity and a set of well-tried techniques, although it should be noted that this survey covers only those methods used by elected officials and policy makers.

Box 2.3 Participatory Methods used by Local Authorities in England

Form of Public Participation	Used in 2001 (%)	Form of Public Participation	Used in 2001 (%)
Service Satisfaction Surveys	92	Other Opinion Polls	56
Complaints/Suggestion Schemes	86	Question and Answer Sessions	51
Consultation Documents	84	Co-option/Committee Work	48
Focus Groups	81	Issue Forums	44
Public Meetings	78	Shared Interest Forums	38
Service User Forums	73	Visioning Exercises	38
Citizens' Panels	71	User Management of Services	18
Area/Neighbourhood Forums	64	Referendums	10
Community Plans/Needs Analysis	58	Citizens' Juries	6
		No of local authorities	216

Source: (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002)

2.8   A survey by Nicholson (2005a) of the civic participation activities across the then Scottish Executive also revealed that over 191 different policy initiatives were supported by civic participation activities in 2004, of which the most common form was written consultation (39 per cent of all activity reported). Whilst newer research techniques, such as the use of focus groups and opinion polls were also being used, Nicholson noted that earlier experimentation with different forms of participatory activities appeared to have given way to more conventional activities, such as holding seminars and meetings.

2.9   The Scottish Government is by no means the only organisation to adopt participatory approaches: a wide range of instruments are in use across the Scottish public sector. These were mapped by a research company in 2000, which found that the most commonly used

techniques for engaging the public were: developing links with community groups; holding open or public meetings; adopting new research methods (such as focus groups and surveys); communicating information via exhibitions and local newsletters. Written consultations, collecting user comments and complaints, and running workshops were also regularly used. A full list of techniques can be found in annex two. Whilst this does not represent the considerable number of initiatives to encourage greater public participation that have been put in place since this survey was published in 2000, it nonetheless illustrates the range and scale of the activities that public institutions were engaged in at this time, and offers an useful point of comparison with Nicholson's more recent work. Although the categories used are different, it is interesting to note that there are similarities between this mapping exercise and Nicholson's findings from central government that written consultations, seminars and meetings with target sector groups, and focus groups were some of the most commonly used participatory methods.

2.10   However, there are now numerous examples of experimentation with less conventional approaches to participation in localities across Scotland. Some areas are setting up local authority-wide citizens' assemblies, run by and for community representatives, meeting regularly with 100 to 125 delegates. The introduction of Community Planning (described in chapter three), designed 'as a framework for making public services responsive to, and organised around, the needs of communities' has encouraged the development of different approaches to engaging with the public. Aberdeen City Voice initiative is one well-known example, described in Box 2.4 on page 16.

2.11   Combining these various 'top-down' methods developed by governments, departments and public institutions with participatory activity emanating from the 'bottom-up' (meaning those that are led by community or campaign groups), suggests that participatory models are more developed than is commonly supposed. This conclusion is supported by an Economic and Social Research Council research funded programme on civic participation, which found that while voter turnout may be low, people participate in numerous other forms of civic participation (broadly conceived), such as signing petitions, contacting MPs and joining protests (Pattie, Seyd and Whitely, 2003). Their analysis of civic engagement was based on questions asking respondents whether they had undertaken any of a series of different forms of action 'aimed at influencing rules, laws or policies' in the past year.

Box 2.4 Aberdeen City Voice

Aberdeen City Alliance (involving partners from the private, public and third sector) established a citizens' panel called Aberdeen City Voice in January 2003. 1,300 individuals from a cross section of Aberdeen's population were selected to form the panel and were sent four questionnaires during the course of the year asking questions about public service delivery in a range of areas – including health provision, social work services, housing, crime and democracy. The same questionnaires were also made available online, creating 'The Virtual Voice' to test the value of online consultation methods against those of the more representative panel.

Benefits: a high response rate of between 50 and 75 per cent; participants responded positively to being consulted; it helped to develop partnership working with all community planning partners.

Costs: the process was time consuming; there were lower response rates amongst younger age groups; participants queried whether agencies would listen (to which City Voice responded by developing a regular newsletter outlining how organisations would respond and by developing an 'audit trail' to monitor organisations' responses).

The project was generally viewed as a success and has been continued. Further information can be found at:
http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/ACCI/web/site/Consultations/cst_ConsultationsHome.asp

Summary
- The term public participation can broadly be defined as all activities by which members of the public (whether defined as citizens, users or consumers) contribute to shaping the decisions taken by public organisations.
- The purpose and methods of fostering public participation can be classified according to a scale or spectrum, with consultation at one end, and more deliberative techniques at the other. Public value promotes deliberative government but is not prescriptive about which methods to use to achieve this.
- A lot of participatory activity is occurring in Scotland, both at government level and within local public services. Mapping of these activities suggests that in spite of the numerous new initiatives introduced since 2000, more traditional forms of engagement, like inviting the public to take part in written consultations, continue to be the preferred approach and that these are being used in conjunction with newer research methods such as focus groups and opinion polling.

Having defined what we mean by public participation, the following section explores in greater depth what the drivers for this increased interest in public participation are.

CHAPTER THREE WHAT ARE THE DRIVERS AND ENABLERS OF PARTICIPATION?

Drivers

3.1   Characterised by a diversity of theory and practice, public participation can be carried out using a number of different methods, as outlined in the previous chapter and in annex one. It is up to the organisation (and potentially citizens) to select the most appropriate approach for the desired result. Before doing so, a consideration of what it is that drives participation and the processes that enable participation to occur is necessary in order to determine what the process is likely to look like and what outcomes can be anticipated. The main drivers for public participation identified below are: public demand; political and managerial rationales; social capital; campaigning goals and community-led initiatives.

Public demand or lack thereof

3.2   Rising demand from the public might seem an obvious starting point for any debate about public participation, yet conversely, many initiatives originate from concern about the apparent lack of public enthusiasm for using existing democratic structures. Research that directly addresses the issue of demand for participation in public services is limited, but that which exists suggests that the demand for participation is low. For example, when an Audit Commission survey of the general UK population in 2003 asked whether respondents would like to get involved in helping their council plan and deliver its services, only 17 per cent of respondents said they would, while 60 per cent said they would not. For the NHS, the figures were 22 per cent and 51 per cent respectively (Audit Commission and Ipsos-MORI, 2003).

3.3   However, findings from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust's (JRRT) *State of the Nation* poll provide evidence of a latent demand amongst the public for a more active voice in policy making (JRRT, 2004). When asked how much power different groups should have over government policies, 56 per cent stated that ordinary citizens should have a 'great deal' (60 per cent in Scotland), a higher percentage than for parliament (45 per cent total), the media or large companies. However, this was not matched by people's perceptions of how much influence they currently had over the decisions taken by the government. Just under half (49 per cent) thought that ordinary people had 'a little' power over government policies, 27 per cent 'a fair amount' and six per cent 'a great deal.' Mahendran and Cook also report that a 2005 Scottish Social Attitudes Survey found that, whilst rating better than the UK government, 60 per cent of respondents felt that the Scottish Executive was 'not very good' or 'not good at all' at listening to people's views (Mahendran and Cook, 2007). Whilst a demand for voice is different from a demand for more deliberative involvement in government, such evidence cannot be ignored.

3.4   Evidence that there is public appetite for more radical forms of participatory decision making is supplied by the response to a question in the JRRT's study about whether ordinary people should be selected at random from the electoral register and invited to serve on the boards of foundation hospitals and local police authorities. Sixty six per cent of all respondents and 74 per cent of respondents in Scotland thought this was a good idea (compared to 33 per cent who thought it was a bad idea) and 56 per cent of the total (49 per cent in Scotland) said they would accept such an invitation (compared to 43 per cent who said they would decline) (JRRT, 2004). Furthermore, when asked whether ordinary people should be selected at random from the electoral register and invited to serve on boards such as those

that decide on the safety of drugs or health and safety at work, 61 per cent thought this was a good idea (compared to 38 per cent who thought is was a bad idea) and 50 per cent said they would accept such an invitation (compared to 49 per cent who said they would decline). Whilst it questionable whether these levels of enthusiasm would be matched by a willingness to volunteer should the opportunity arise, this information does suggest that more radical ideas for governing public services are at least worthy of consideration.

3.5   In terms of electoral participation, a poll of non-voters at the 2005 general election (Power Inquiry, 2006) revealed that apathy was much less significant a factor in respondents' decision not to vote (19 per cent) than a lack of trust in politicians (54 per cent of all respondents, 72 per cent of 18-24 year olds). Moreover, when offered alternative means of participating in decision making processes, 72 per cent of non-voters said they were likely or very likely to get involved in a referendum, while 70 per cent said they were likely or very likely to get involved in a meeting where they could set local council budgets with councillors.

3.6   This evidence suggests that, within limitations, there is public interest in participating in the design and delivery of public services and that care should be taken not to assume that there is systemic apathy amongst the public to the possibilities afforded by political engagement. However, it is important to understand that the public will only engage in the process if they believe that they can make a difference and if they have confidence that their views will be treated with respect by public managers. It is to these issues that we now turn.

Political and managerial rationales

3.7   The two main rationales for greater public participation can be characterised as consumer participation to drive improvements in the quality of services (managerial) and citizen or civic participation as a valuable activity in its own right (political) (McAteer and Orr, 2006). In an institutional context, this can be summarised in the following way:

> *'In the past, there has been a tendency to respond to the gap that exists between citizens and state institutions in one of two ways. On the one hand, attention has been made to strengthen the processes of participation – that is the ways in which poor people exercise voice through new forms of inclusion, consultation and/or mobilisation designed to inform and to influence larger institutions and policies. On the other hand, growing attention has been paid to how to strengthen the accountability and responsiveness of these institutions and policies through changes in institutional design and a focus on the enabling structures for good governance'* (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001).

3.8   In Scotland, the debate on public service reform has been focused largely on user-focused public services rather than on contestability and choice between providers from different sectors, as in England (McCormick et al, 2007). Devolution and the first Scottish National Party administration means that, in practice, it is likely that the English and Scottish models will continue to diverge. In June 2006, the then Scottish Executive published *Transforming Public Services: The next phase of reform*. The report set out five fundamental

principles around which reform should be organised, a number of which are relevant to public participation: user focus and personalisation, and strengthening accountability.[11]

3.9   Greater levels of public participation in policymaking, promoted by COSLA and the then Scottish Executive, preceded the development of Community Planning, a process aimed at improving local services by making local partners in the private, voluntary and public sector work together more effectively, ensuring that they identify the needs and views of their local communities, and that they agree and carry out their strategic vision for the area. The introduction of the Local Government in Scotland Act (2003) gave Community Planning a legislative base and established the power to advance well-being and Best Value.[12] The Act extends the statutory duty to engage with citizens to improve service delivery from local authorities to chief constables and police boards, NHS boards, enterprise agencies, the fire service and transport agencies. It created a new discretionary power (the power to advance well being) enabling local authorities to do anything they consider likely to promote or improve the well-being of their area and/or persons in it.[13] The Best Value guidance also states that authorities demonstrating Best Value must display responsiveness to the needs of communities, citizens, customers, employees and other stakeholders, so that plans, priorities and actions are informed by an understanding of those needs; an ongoing dialogue with other public sector partners and the local business, voluntary and community sectors; and consultation arrangements which are open, fair and inclusive.[14] Reforms to specific services, such as the Scottish Housing Act 2001, also require local authorities to strengthen citizen participation in service delivery (McAteer and Orr, 2006).

3.10   Reforms to local government and public services, such as the introduction of Community Planning, Best Value and the Power to Advance Well Being, have therefore been a driver of participation in Scotland, involving a combination of both managerial and political rationales. It has been argued that these two rationales for participation are not mutually exclusive, since consultation without attention to power and politics leads to 'voice without influence', and the reform of political institutions without attention to inclusion and consultation will only reinforce the status quo (Horner and Lekhi, 2006). Some have gone further, to argue that at the heart of the new consensus of strong state and strong civil society are the need to develop both *participatory democracy* and *responsive government* as 'mutually reinforcing and supportive' (Commonwealth Foundation, 1999). However, this underestimates the tensions that may arise when the decisions taken by public managers or elected officials with a political mandate to carry out particular policies conflict with the stated interests of the public or groups of the public (Mahendran and Cook, 2007).

3.11   Moreover, McAteer and Orr (2006) have suggested that the promotion of participatory processes by central government policies has contributed to eroding many of the traditional structures for local political engagement (McAteer and Orr, 2006). The centralised drive for engaging communities and promoting participation in regeneration and social inclusion programmes is one example, although Community Planning was introduced to

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[11] Note that *Transforming public Services: The Next Phase of Reform* was published under the former Labour/Liberal Democratic coalition in Scottish Government. This has now been replaced by three principles around which reform should be organised, as espoused by the current Scottish National Party administration. These are Better Value for the Public Pound; Outcome-Focused Public Services; and Efficient and Streamlined Public Services.
[12] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/04/19168/35271
[13] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/04/19276/36157
[14] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/04/19166/35250

respond to concerns about the fragmented nature of partnerships and strategic planning and to make sure that accountability was established. There is a need to think about how the participation agenda affects existing governance structures and to consider whether a plethora of centrally mandated initiatives at local authority level serves to undermine the authority of councillors. In chapter four we discuss the difference between participative and representative forms of democracy in more detail.

Community-led initiatives and campaigning goals

3.12   Single or community-led issues can also rally citizens to create new mechanisms for voice or to exploit established formal and informal mechanisms to change a particular policy or address a particular complaint. Community-led initiatives in particular may also help build the capacity and interests of those involved so that they are willing and able to participate in policy initiatives. The report of the Power Inquiry highlighted the emergence and growing strength of the public's involvement in alternative forms of political engagement, from signing petitions, to demonstrating, to organising campaigns (Power Inquiry, 2006). Whilst these developments are not the focus of this report, public pressure from the 'outside', and how public organisations manage this, is an important driver of the development new participatory mechanisms.

3.13   Urban Forum, for instance, is an umbrella body for community groups with interests in urban and regional regeneration policy, which provides a strong voluntary sector voice on relevant policy issues and promotes sustainable regeneration initiatives. They place special emphasis on consultation and on encouraging equal opportunities for more marginalised communities, holding conferences and seminars in every region. Their 'Designing in Diversity' proposal urged government to be more responsive by involving Urban Forum in conducting research to explore and highlight the contributions made to regeneration by those who experience discrimination.

3.14   Done well, public participation not only enriches democracy by helping strengthen accountability, it also encourages and empowers citizens to work with the state and each other to meet current challenges. Debate and dialogue with service users can reveal new information about how policy created in town halls and Whitehall is working out on the ground. That kind of intelligence is vital if the intentions behind policy are to become a reality.

Enablers of Participation

3.15   Three enablers of participation have also been identified. These are socio-economic circumstance, social capital and civic behaviour. The following section explores the way in which these factors bring about the wider use of participatory instruments.

Socio-economic circumstance (resources of the locality)

3.16   Research has consistently shown that those living in poverty and those who are less well educated are less likely to take part in participatory activities involving their local community (Skidmore et al, 2006). Enabling participation therefore involves bridging socio-economic barriers by working with disconnected and disadvantaged communities to raise awareness of available public services and support, up-skill and include members of the public in democratic processes. Chapter five contains further information about engaging the

so-called 'hard to reach', whilst the role of social capital is described in the following section.

Social Capital

3.17   Building on the theory of social scientist Robert Putnam, it has been argued that by getting involved in the governance of services participants build relationships with the institution, with officials and each other, which produces 'social capital'. This is defined as 'the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Putnam, 2000). In essence, this theory argues that knowing that you can rely on others enables you to navigate critical events in your life better. 'Social capital' is a source of social cohesion. In Putnam's words:

> *A society characterized by a generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society, for the same reason that money is more efficient than barter. If we don't have to balance every exchange instantly, we can get a lot more accomplished. Trustworthiness lubricates social life' (Putnam, 2000)*

3.18   In disadvantaged communities, without the economic power to buy their way out of problems (for example, by moving house or purchasing additional services), social capital is particularly valuable. This theory has underpinned many community and social inclusion policies over the past decade. It recognises that coordinating bodies within civil society (volunteer bureaux, racial equality councils, chambers of commerce and faith networks) can act as important institutional conduits for public participation. Where traditional state run institutions are not reaching those in most need of them and are not producing the desired outcomes, offering funding and opportunities to communities and partnerships between local private, public sector and community organisations is aimed at providing a more direct and effective route to improving social outcomes (Woolcock, 2001).

Internal culture and 'civic behaviour'

3.19   What institutional structures are established, and how political, managerial and civic players behave in the context of these structures, makes a difference to the likelihood that citizens will engage. There are potentially three sorts of actors – political players (MPs, MSPs and councillors), managerial players (council and public service officers and professionals) and civil society players (the people runing the intermediate institutions between the individual and the state) – who have a bearing on the extent to which public institutions involve the public in their decision making processes. Furthermore, the quality of the interactions between citizens and front-line council officers (whether in call centres or old-fashioned estate offices) affect people's perceptions of the accessibility and responsiveness of their local authority.

3.20   Newman et al's (2004) qualitative research on participation within deliberative forums (such as user-based forums or community-based organisations that are drawn into consultation processes) provides a useful insight into how different stakeholders view public participation. This study highlights that the perceptions of strategic policy actors concerning the ability and motivation of members of the public to get involved in participatory structures can act as constraints on the development of collaborative governance. In other words, successful public participation relies as much on those in power believing that the process of

public participation is a valuable part of any service, as it does on the willingness of members of the public to engage.

3.21 The motivations for participation, and the enablers that allow public participation to flourish, are inevitably diverse – and it is this diversity that influences both the design of the participation process and the shape of the outcome. Yet a reading of some official documents on participation would seem to suggest that these differing motivations are complementary when, in fact, public participation is as likely to uncover conflicting views between members or groups of the public, public managers and politicians as to produce consensus. Moreover, as the following section illustrates, legal constraints and institutional culture can alter the original or stated purpose of public participation. Sometimes the leadership task of politicians and public managers is to either reconcile the irreconcilable or make a tough choice that leaves some citizens disappointed.

3.22 For instance, a recent survey of Scottish local councils found that while officers and elected members generally believe participation is a 'good thing', overall, they see the process as a means of improving services via consultation as opposed to extending deliberative democracy (McAteer and Orr, 2006). This is not in itself problematic, as long as the stated intention of the participatory process is clear to participants and to those within the organisation. However, McAteer and Orr's research found that different departments within local councils had quite different expectations of what participation was and what it should achieve.

3.23 The 'managerialist' and consumer orientated culture within local government can therefore present an obstacle to widening the scope of engagement activities to address political issues, such as declining voter turnout and trust in public institutions, outlined in the introduction. This is not necessarily the only barrier:

> *'Even if councils engage more fully with the public and create an internal culture to promote and sustain levels of community engagement, their actions are limited by structures that are beyond the immediate control of individuals; such structures may be organisational cultures or… regarding the public's influence over financial decisions, legal requirements to meet statutory duties and obligations'*(Orr and McAteer, 2004).

It is therefore important for organisations to have a consistent understanding of what they aim to get from engaging with the public, and an internal culture that is conducive to allowing this to happen.

Summary

The drivers for greater levels of public participation are:
- Public demand for a greater say in how government decisions are taken. Evidence of a public appetite for participating in the design and delivery of public services is mixed, although some of the literature does indicate that there is support for more radical forms of engagement, such as lay involvement on the governing boards of public services.
- However, demand for greater participation depends on a number of factors; whether it is a local or national issue at stake, how much input is required from the public, and proof that participation will 'make a difference'.

- The reform of public services and the structures that govern them, which often go hand in hand, are key factors in the drive to increase the number of opportunities for the public to participate in decision making, although this has not been the sole, or even the principal goal of many reforms. There is, however, debate about the extent to which tensions may arise between the introduction of greater participatory processes in policymaking and the role of elected officials.
- Enablers of public participation include the capacity and resources of the public, social capital and the attitudes of political, managerial and civil society leaders to participation.

CHAPTER FOUR WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION AND WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?

4.1 Having looked at some of the theoretical merits of a more participatory system of governance we now turn to some of the specific benefits for public service organisations. Opinion Leader Research identifies the following advantages for organisations and citizens (OLR, 2005).

The benefits of participation

Benefits for the organisation:
- The process helps to build respect and generates trust between groups and individuals;
- It can lead to better quality decisions as citizens have a good sense of their needs and offer a source of valuable information, which public managers might otherwise overlook;
- The organisation is held to account by the public, thereby strengthening its legitimacy and encouraging greater transparency and openness;
- It enables different groups to share the issues they face and come to a better understanding of the different perspectives involved;
- Media value – it can generate interest and raise the profile of the organisation, as well as potentially generating more support.

Benefits for the citizen:
- Education – participation can be a learning experience;
- Fostering a sense of respect, value and responsibility;
- Understanding the tradeoffs that policy makers need to make and therefore developing realistic expectations of what can and cannot be achieved (or 'refining public preferences');
- Citizenship and ownership – being a good citizen can enhance a sense of belonging and ownership over a service or organisation.

4.2 Collectively, the benefits of public participation are considered to be the creation of more effective and *responsive* public services following a *deliberative* exercise that leads to *refined public preferences*. Participation therefore fits with the idea of modern government as more than just 'delivering' a service (Cabinet Office, 2007a). In other words, consumers, citizens and communities all have a role to play in creating effective public services, alongside public bodies themselves.

Assessing the impact of participation

4.3 While these goals are admirable, we might reasonably ask whether public participation has delivered its promise. In Scotland, the then Executive commissioned a number of studies to evaluate the effectiveness of public participation. However, the political agenda has changed significantly since most of these were carried out, with the signing of the Concordat between COSLA and the Scottish Government and the introduction of Single Outcome Agreements in November 2007, in addition to the Government's move to Best Value audits since 2003 (see section 3.9 for further details).

4.4 The Concordat established a new relationship between the Government and local authorities and represented their agreement on a package of measures. Central to this is the creation of a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) between each Council and the Scottish Government, based on 15 key national outcomes agreed in the Concordat. These reflect established corporate and community plan commitments across Scotland's Councils and Community Planning Partnerships. Equally important, progress on the agreed outcomes for Scotland as a whole is contingent on progress being made at local level. This new arrangement should therefore contribute to creating better links between local needs, circumstances and priorities and national outcomes. Moreover, Single Outcome Agreements and a reduction in ring fenced resources over time means that there will be more flexibility in how local authorities allocate resources. In effect, this agreement has served to enhance the role of locally elected councillors in governance in Scotland. These changes are therefore likely to have a significant impact on the relationship between central and local government, and how local needs and views are accounted for, although it is clearly too early to assess their impact. This should be borne in mind when considering the evidence on the effectiveness of participation, which is discussed in the following sections.

4.5 The literature on measuring participation has focused predominantly on quantitative issues by looking at who participates and how often they are involved. Mapping of the Scottish Executive's civic participation activities in 2004 indicated that almost 200 policy initiatives had incorporated some form of participation, with the most common form of activity being written consultation (Nicholson, 2005a). Despite this level of activity, a Scottish survey of public attitudes to civic participation showed low awareness of mechanisms used by the Scottish Executive for consultation (Hope and King, 2005). The findings can be summarised as follows:

- Few people felt well informed about the work done by political representatives: knowledge of local councillors' work was highest and that of MEPs was lowest.
- The majority of respondents had no contact with any elected representative in the previous year. However, one in eight had contacted a councillor, more than had contacted any other representative.
- A majority of those questioned thought that the government should consult on issues that were part of its manifesto but two thirds also agreed that there is no point in participating because the decisions had already been made.
- The two main barriers to participation were low awareness of opportunities to take part in consultation and scepticism about the value of consultation. The only significant factor that would encourage participation was more information.
- Almost 50 per cent of respondents had not heard of any of a number of official mechanisms for disseminating information and consulting on issues. However, the websites of the Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament were well known.

(Hope, and King, 2005)

This suggests that, in spite of a much-reported lack of trust in politicians, traditional mechanisms for public engagement (such as contacting a councillor or MSP) in the decision making process are best known to the public.

4.6 Since public participation is seen as both a means to achieving particular goals, and also as an end in itself, it has been suggested that success should be measured in terms of the propensity to effect change, as well as the empowering impact on individuals and

communities and the quality of the decision making process (Morrissey, 2000). There are some discouraging findings with regard to effecting change and empowering communities. Taylor (2003) cites evidence which shows increased levels of participation when small-scale projects are implemented, but much less evidence of involvement at the agenda-setting stage. Nicholson (2005a) also reports that only 45 per cent of civic participation that took place in 2004 was thought to have 'highly influenced' or 'very highly influenced' the policy initiative in question..

4.7   Tracking the effectiveness of different forms of participation is problematic, given the lack of systematic evidence (Bound et al. 2005, Nicholson, 2005a). Demonstrating that an increasing number of people are involved in participatory activities does not necessarily mean that all will be given equal access to the decision making process, for instance. Furthermore, since the process of participation is one of continuing deliberation and discussion, perceptions will be different at different stages in the process. Much will also depend on the motivations of the managers who have initiated the process. Some may still be inclined to hang on to power and be rather suspicious about allowing those without expertise to influence decisions. Are they really committed to a more deliberative model or are they just ticking a box demanded by a higher authority? Citizens will be able to identify whether they are engaged in a genuine exercise or not and their views about the effectiveness of participation will be shaped accordingly.

4.8   The mix of people that are involved in participatory activities is also a key indicator of its success. Research suggests that community activists, often referred to as 'the usual suspects', tend to get involved in area-based initiatives (Goodlad et al. 2004) and that those belonging to the hardest to reach groups in society continue to be excluded. In other words, without careful handling a participatory exercise may simply empower the well educated and articulate those who already have a voice (Mackinnon et al 2006). Of course these problems can be avoided and every effort should be made to encourage participation from all sections of the community (how this can be done is outlined in chapter five). Moreover, bad practice can lead to disengagement and is likely to put participants off taking part in the future:

> *'...negative attitudes to community involvement lead to poor engagement*
> *practices, causing increased hostility, decreased trust and poor experience*
> *and outcomes not only for communities, but also for officials and politicians,*
> *thus further reinforcing negative attitudes and behaviour' (Morris, 2006).*

It is therefore important to address obstacles to effective participation, which include lack of clarity of purpose, inconsistency, participation overload, organisational culture and power relations.

Barriers to participation

Clarity of purpose

4.9   Clarity of purpose is essential to effective participation. It is important to ensure that the agenda can then be implemented satisfactorily and that everyone understands the process to which they are contributing (Involve, 2005). This often fails to occur because:

- There is a lack of awareness about the standards that should be followed when involving individuals or communities. There is a balance to be struck between

excessively rigid national guidelines and allowing so much flexibility that 'anything goes' (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2004).

- Not enough attention is currently paid to the performance of bodies other than local authorities in relation to participation and there is a lack of systematic evidence about the effectiveness of different forms of participation (Bound et al 2005).

4.10   If participation takes place after budgets have been set this evidently has implications for the range of proposals that can be considered and the likelihood that participation can affect change. This is only problematic if the limitations of the exercise have not been made clear to participants. A recent report recording citizen perspectives of public services found that decision-making activity was often seen as an exercise in telling the public what had already been decided, or 'rubber-stamping' consultation on decisions that had not yet been made public. In the words of one participant:

> *It's [currently] just a pseudo-accountability. They will come and ask people what they think and then they just go and do what they were going to do anyway' [Edinburgh, 25-34 year old man]* (McCormick et al, 2007).

4.11   In spite of this cynicism there are indications that the public remain willing to take part in future government consultations. A study of public attitudes to participation in Scotland found that half of those who stated there was no point in participating still considered it likely that they would participate in future Scottish Executive consultations (Hope and King, 2005).

Inconsistency within institutions relating to terminology, approach and commitment

4.12   Inconsistencies within organisations about the terminology used to describe participation, a failure to join up different initiatives and a lack of high level commitment are all significant barriers to effective participation.

- **Terminology** - Variations in terminology and a lack of common language can be confusing for members of the public and other stakeholders, making it difficult to understand what is involved in participatory processes. This is part of a wider question about whose views it is that are being sought and which groups or organisations are asking or being asked to participate; citizens, consumers, service 'users', stakeholders, communities and the public are commonly referred to, but little attempt is made to explore the considerable differences (and overlaps) between these definitions. Defining communities, for instance, is a notoriously complex task, as they can comprise geographical locales, communities based on nationality, religion, ethnicity or class, or those defined by particular interests. Testimony from senior civil servants in Whitehall and community activists attests to the fact that 'community participation' is understood and applied differently by different statutory bodies, and by different officers within those statutory bodies (Morris, 2006).

- **Joined-up approach -** While adopting one single approach to public participation is unlikely to be effective (Brennan and Douglas, 1999)[15] the sheer diversity of existing initiatives can cause problems, both for community members and for statutory bodies.

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[15] The authors argue that imposing a formal requirement to consult in a particular way is unlikely to generate a process that is responsive to local people.

A fragmented approach to community consultation and engagement was found amongst the majority of Scottish councils surveyed by McAteer and Orr (2006). Whilst there continues to be a lack of co-ordination between the initiatives run by individual departments or services, there is danger of repetition, under-utilisation of resources and of over-burdening or confusing participants.

- **High Level Commitment** – the Panel on Community Participation across the UK Government, established to explore the varied understandings of community participation by national government, found that there was a picture of inconsistency within departments and across national government; a failure to embed a 'participation culture' within non-compliant councils and unelected statutory agencies; and a patchy, short-termist approach to resourcing participation (Morris, 2006). This supports the argument made in section 3.17-18 that without commitment and leadership from senior politicians and managers, it is unlikely that the outcomes of participation will have much impact.

Participation overload

4.13   The increasing popularity of public participation has also led to claims of 'consultation fatigue' or the impression that the public is being consulted at every turn without any visible impact upon the decisions that organisations or government make (Morris 2006). Members of the public are understandably reluctant to get involved in participatory research or decision making where there is evidence that this has previously failed or caused delays (Morris, 2006). Box 4.1 provides an example of the effects of repeatedly asking participants to participate in research that does not lead to visible change.

Box 4.1: Examples of participation overload

Participants in Butt and O'Neil's 2004 survey of Black and Minority Ethnic Older People's views on Research Findings revealed participants' frustration that new research aimed at understanding their views often repeated questions that had been put to them 15 years previously by another generation of researchers. Interviewees' sense of frustration was aggravated by the fact that there was little evidence that the original research had brought about a great deal of change.

4.14   A balance needs to be struck between involving the public sufficiently to ensure that government actions reflect their preferences and are seen to be legitimate, and overburdening the public with questions and forms of involvement that are properly the concern of elected representatives and officials (Keaney, 2007). This returns us to the question of how much impact participation has:

> *'Researchers, and the managers who commission work, know that not enough is being done with the answers that people have given us. If the outcome of being asked about our views and experiences was that things got better, would anyone really complain about being consulted?'* (Allen, 2005).

4.15   One way of avoiding consultation fatigue is to establish partnership working with groups of users, community groups or selected members of the public on a longer-term basis so that their views are collected regularly rather than only through one-off consultations,

which involve time and effort on the part of participants. It is also possible to centralise consultation in an organisation, thereby reducing the number of consultations without reducing the number of issues covered. This also means that questions on various issues can be asked in one go. Taking the precautions like this to avoid participation overload is vital to ensuring participatory success, although getting an organisation's internal backing for public participation is equally important.

Professional and Organisational Culture

4.16   The internal culture of an organisation, particularly those based on a hierarchical model, may act as a significant barrier to participation of any kind. Too often the case for participation has to be made in the context of an institutional assumption that participation is unnecessary. Understanding of, and support for, engagement at managerial level is therefore instrumental. The least effective examples of participation are those involving the press or PR departments, suggesting that public participation is simply a communications or marketing exercise (Involve, 2006).

4.17   Within many public services professional culture is based on the assumption that professional opinion takes precedence over amateur, local or lay opinion informed by experience. Difficulties arise when the balance between the manager and the public's role becomes unclear raising issues about who, ultimately, is accountable.

Power relations and accountability

4.18   A common problem with many participatory techniques is, as we have already noted, that they are open to 'capture' by narrow interest groups. This is linked to the wider issue of whether participatory structures are legitimate, transparent and accountable. Unless these conditions are met then lay people involved in representative forms of participation can be vulnerable to the charge that they are unrepresentative and lack legitimacy.

4.19   Challenges to community advocates' legitimacy most often arise where those advocates question the views of elected or appointed officials. This can be seen to be a 'participation catch 22'; the fact that a community member is actively engaged in decision making brands them as 'un-representative' precisely because, unlike their peers, they are involved and are therefore seen as atypical or dismissed as the 'usual suspects'.

4.20   Unequal power relations reinforce the problems described above. Service users who do want to get involved in decision making face real difficulties where 'the system' is not open to dialogue or challenge. They are simply less powerful (particularly in terms of resources and information) than the public managers they are seeking to influence, and may therefore find it difficult to engage (Mackinnon et al, 2006). Participative processes can only work effectively if public managers are alert to this power imbalance and make an effort to build the capacity of those communities whom they wish to involve. This is not an easy process but, as we have seen, the dividends are large.

Balancing accountability and promoting participation

> *'I suppose what we haven't really resolved yet is how far public involvement*
> *goes. How far does the public say 'that's your business, it's not for me to*

decide'. In fact, when you push people into priority setting, there comes a point where they say 'that's your judgement, that's what you're paid to decide'. Director of Public Health speaking about decision making in the UK, quoted in Newman et al (2004)

4.21 This quote highlights the importance of getting the balance of responsibility for decision making right between elected representatives and public managers, whose job it is to take decisions on the public's behalf and the public that they serve, who have a better understanding of their own needs and preferences and are likely to be more familiar with how services work on the ground. Whilst it is public institutions, and ultimately ministers, who will be held to account for how public money is spent, if the public is to have a greater and more sustained influence over decision making, there are difficult questions to be answered about how if and how the public should share responsibility for the decisions made and, more controversially, for any resultant failures.

4.22 To some extent this is a question that can never be successfully resolved; there will inevitably be a penumbra of uncertainty about where deliberative democracy should end and representative democracy take over. Of course, there are some clear cases: budget decisions, big strategic choices and the handling of policy dilemmas must be the responsibility of politicians and public managers. We might say that the only solution is to 'learn by doing', to be clear about the objectives, transparent in process and open about the extent to which citizens can influence outcomes. Sometimes mistakes will be made and sometimes a participative process may fail, but the risk is worth taking if only because the status quo is widely recognised as unsatisfactory.

Summary

- Public participation can produce demonstrable benefits to both an organisation and to citizens by ensuring that the different perspectives of those involved are heard and understood. At its best, this process generates trust and fosters greater organisational transparency and accountability.
- It is difficult to accurately assess the effectiveness of participatory activities, particularly if it is acknowledged that much of its value lies in the process itself.
- Successful public participation relies as much on those in power believing that this process is a valuable part of public service management, as it does on the willingness of members of the public to engage.
- Evaluating the costs and barriers to successful participatory activities involves weighing up many different factors and understanding the trade-offs between them. The fundamental barriers to effective participation are: a lack of clarity of purpose; inconsistent use of terminology; the risk of participation overload; the difficulties of getting organisational backing; and the issues surrounding accountability.

CHAPTER FIVE ENGAGING 'HARD TO REACH' GROUPS

5.1   In this section we examine what more can be done to extend the reach of participation to embrace the whole population. Excluded groups, including those on low incomes, members of black and ethnic minority groups, disabled people, young people, homeless people, and members of faith communities, tend to be under-represented in participatory activities (Mackinnon et al, 2006). Other groups that are regularly overlooked include rural communities and people in full time employment, who are often unable to attend meetings (Morris 2006).

5.2   The following principles provide a useful rule of thumb for public managers to follow as they try and apply a deliberative governance model to the most disadvantaged:

- Equality issues should be considered from the very beginning of any process;
- The inclusion or exclusion of groups should not be based on the number of individuals involved;
- Lack of resources can alienate people from participatory processes, necessitating the provision of support and / or incentives to ensure that the most disadvantaged are able to participate;
- Building on long-term relationships between public or third sector organisations and disadvantaged groups can make it easier to organise and run participatory processes;
- Provide accessible information in an inclusive language, where appropriate;
- While public participation should be open and transparent, there are good reasons why confidentiality on certain issues might be required, and this should be respected.

(Reid-Howie Associates, 2002)

5.3   There are numerous practical guidelines which give more detailed recommendations for how to go about engaging all members of the community in participatory activities. These include: Involve (2005) *People and Participation: How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making*, London: Involve, Reid-Howie Associates (2002) *Good Practice Guidance: Consultation with Equalities Groups*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive and, for those working with young people, Tam Hendry's (2007) *Working with Hard to Reach Young People – A Practical Guide*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government. The following section looks at the issue of innovation in engaging the hard to reach, with examples being put into practice in the UK.

Innovative practices

5.4   New participatory processes are constantly being developed and applied to public spaces, where the majority of citizens spend much of their everyday lives. Innovation can involve thinking up new methods for reaching people, making adaptations to the way existing services operate, as well as the use of new technologies. All of these factors contribute to a move away from the traditional 'meeting culture', which generally suits those who already have voice (Bound et al. 2005).

5.5   West Lothian Social Inclusion Project is one organisation that has devoted extra resources to enabling effective engagement work with the most excluded parents and young people, who were less likely to participate in traditional forms of community engagement. The work, combining service delivery and personal development, was able to encourage groups to express their views and priorities (Mackinnon et al, 2006). The use of techniques

such as Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs)[16] for poverty or wellbeing assessments is another way of taking the consultation process to citizens in their own spaces. Boxes 5.1 and 5.2 provide some further examples of participatory processes designed to enable young people to represent themselves and get involved in issues that matter to them, and to improve the delivery of health care.

Box 5.1   Scottish Youth Parliament's Roars not Whispers

SCOTTISH YOUTH PARLIAMENT'S ROARS NOT WHISPERS

Working in partnership, Oxfam in Scotland and the Scottish Youth Parliament combined forces to set up a new initiative to develop a youth led education programme focusing on political, economic and social justice issues. The initiative, entitled 'Roars not Whispers', focuses on the spread of peer-to-peer knowledge and activity to help facilitate and encourage civic participation in 16–25 year olds nationwide in Scotland, with the aim of raising awareness of national and international problems. The project aims to work with young people from every local authority area in Scotland, to give them the confidence and the skills to make a difference about the things that matter to them.

5.6   For a more comprehensive list of organisations working to include hard to reach groups, and specifically young people, in participatory activities in Scotland, see Annex B of the Scottish Executive's *Engaging Children and Young People in Community Planning: Community Planning Advice Note* (2006).

Box 5.2   Healthy Living Centres

HEALTHY LIVING CENTRES

An evaluation (Platt et al, 2005) of six Scottish healthy living centres' revealed their innovative approaches to improving the health of disadvantaged groups and reducing health inequalities: Staff worked with service users to overcome challenging behaviour and provided free food as an incentive for people to come along to a venue (Platt et al, 2005). Childcare facilities were provided to ensure parents could attend projects. However, some Healthy Living Centres (HLCs) were also open in voicing doubts about their success in reaching the people most in need.

5.7   The approach taken by some health living centres exemplifies how innovative approaches to engaging the 'hard to reach' often involve experimentation with how services are delivered or simply adopting a more 'user-focused' approach. Another example of this kind of innovation within existing structures comes from East Renfrewshire. Here Dialogue Youth is represented on the Children and Young People's Health Improvement group, which is linked directly to the health theme of the Community Plan, the Joint Health Improvement

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[16] See Annex One for details of this method.

Plan and the Children's Services Plan. Using the overarching aim of these plans as a starting point, workers from the Local Health Board, Social Work, Youth Services Team and Community Schools formed a Dialogue Youth Health network to actively encourage and support youth involvement in a variety of settings. The network commissioned a Health Needs Assessment that was carried out in all secondary schools using the local Dialogue Youth website. The Dialogue Youth Health network also commissioned external consultants to carry out a Patient Focus Public Involvement workshop which 70 young people participated in. This forum provided a place where young people had the opportunity to prioritise their health needs and highlight other issues in relation to access to health services, information and advice (Scottish Executive, 2006). This is another example of where hard to reach groups are being actively involved in activities that have not previously sought to actively involve them.

5.8   Initiatives, no matter how innovative, must be appropriate to their context and target the right mix of groups in society. Perhaps the most important point is that changes have to be directed towards a clear purpose: it cannot be an end in itself. What is needed more than anything else is an evaluation of these instruments. We need to know *what* works, *where* it works, *how* it works and *why* it works. There is no substitute for a proper review process combined with a continuing willingness to experiment. Engaging those groups which are normally the hardest to reach is as much part of this process as engaging anyone else.

Summary

- Re-interpreting traditional methods of engagement (such as holding meetings in places and times convenient to participants) is a simple way of accommodating the view-point and needs of those who are hardest to reach in society.
- Many more innovative methods have also been developed to seek their views. Whilst much has been made of the emergence of new technologies which allow for greater ease of communication between organisations and members of the public (particularly the potential of the internet to allow people to make themselves heard), some of the most innovative and effective ways of reaching the hard to reach have been demonstrated by organisations building engagement processes into how they operate.
- Initiatives, no matter how innovative, must be appropriate to their context and strive to target all socio-economic groups in society.
- This can be done through full consideration of all issues relating to equality, the use of appropriate resources and support and transparency about the participatory processes.

CHAPTER SIX LESSONS FOR PUBLIC MANAGERS

6.1   We have seen that public managers should make use of the participatory tools at their disposal to ensure that they are delivering public value. The central features of the model are *deliberative* processes that *refine* public preferences to produce useful insights that lead to more *responsive* public services. Having mapped the contours of the vast literature on participation, this section draws out some practical suggestions for public managers and organisations. This involves not only thinking about how to 'do' participation well, but to evaluate the tradeoffs of engaging the public before embarking on any new initiatives.

Deciding when to involve the public

6.2   Done properly, public participation, in all its forms, involves an investment in resources (time, effort, commitment and money) to generate the benefits outlined in chapter three. When budgets are limited, the question of whether public participation diverts scarce resources from the important business of service delivery is a pressing one. In a local government context, there are often low levels of resources available for research and information-gathering, although this is not necessarily the only avenue for funding participation activities available (Brennan and Douglas, 1999). It is also important to appreciate that assessing the costs and benefits of public participation involves more than simply working out the monetary costs and spending more or cutting expenditure, but evaluating how well public resources are being spent and incorporating the value of numerous intangible outcomes, such as increased responsiveness, accountability and trust in public institutions. Moreover, it is not only the organisations' coffers that have to be counted. It is important to recognise that the time, effort and goodwill of the public are not exhaustive, and if public participation activities are to yield results, these need to be planned and managed wisely. All these factors must be taken into account when deciding whether to involve the public in decision making. Ultimately, this is at the discretion of decision makers, the following steps should help this process.

Evaluation of the 'degree' of participation required

6.3   Perhaps surprisingly, a recurrent difficulty with public participation is ensuring that organisations or decision makers have a clear understanding of why this is necessary and when to do it. Effective public participation does not simply occur because the government calls for more of it. To ensure the best possible outcomes of a participatory process, it is necessary to be clear from the start about the extent to which results from participatory procedures will influence the decision or issue at stake (if at all) so as to avoid public frustration and consultation fatigue. This involves determining at which stage of the decision making process the public is to be involved and what role participants will be expected to play, be it to 'discover' or identify the key issues, to 'inform' or educate members of the public about a particular issue, or to gain support or 'legitimate' a particular decision (see Table 6.1). This process is important because there are distinctly different functions that public participation can perform in each case (Horner and Lekhi, 2007). Curtain (2003) sets out a helpful table which summarises this work:

Table 6.1 Public participation in policy development

Policy Development Stage	Reasons to Seek Public Participation
Define the problem or issue	**Discovery** role – citizen input can help to define the issue.
Identify criteria for decision	**Discovery** role – citizen input used to identify evaluation criteria or underlying principles of a sound policy.
Generate alternative options	**Discovery** role – citizen input to identify alternative options; and/or **Informative** role – citizens participate by absorbing relevant information and discussing issue and/or proposing alternatives; **Legitimate** – citizen involvement in consideration of options can be important basis for wider public acceptance of the outcome.
Evaluate alternatives	**Informative** role -- discuss/debate proposed alternatives; and/or **Measure** – assess the range of public opinion on a set of options; and/or **Legitimate** – citizen involvement in consideration of the options can be an important basis for wider public acceptance of the outcome.
Recommend an option	**Informative** role – discuss/debate proposed alternatives; and/or **Persuasion role** – seek to convince public to accept recommended option or approach; **Legitimate** – citizen involvement in consideration of options can be important basis for wider public acceptance of the outcome.

Source: Adapted from Curtain (2003)

Selecting a method

6.4   The following criteria were developed by Involve, and offer a useful way of evaluating different participatory approaches and when best to use them (Involve, 2005):

- Suitable number of participants;
- Roles of participants;
- Budget;
- Length of process;
- Types of outcomes;
- Where on the spectrum of participation the method works best.

6.5   Annex one contains a fuller list of possible methodologies and the advantages and disadvantages of each. These factors can be compared and contrasted in order to weigh up the relative merits of each approach and determine when the participation process will start to produce diminishing returns. Involve's 2005 report on People and Participation goes into greater detail about the many different participatory methods and their respective costing ranges. Given the marked variation in costs depending on resources, suppliers and area, to name but a few significant factors, it is more useful to outline the tradeoffs between each method and to focus on the process of arriving at the costs, as well as the value of each kind of approach, rather than the absolute costs themselves.

Principles for better participation

6.6   Having established when or at what stage to involve the public in decision making, Mackinnon et al (2006) suggest the following principles for good practice with communities,

which have been adapted to apply to engaging with the wider public (MacKinnon et al, 2006):

- *Have a clear and realistic role and remit* – projects need to work within established definitions and have a realistic remit based on the time and resources available, as well as an understanding of the history of community/users the project is working with.
- *Adequate and appropriate resources* to meet the project remit – secure, adequate and long-term funding is required, as well as appropriate premises, staff with the appropriate skills, and committed and properly supported volunteers/activists, where necessary.
- *Adequate and appropriate management and evaluation* to support the project – effective and supportive management by people with the time, skills and experience; clearly defined structural arrangements between projects and key agencies; community involvement in project management and decision making (where necessary); and adequate monitoring and evaluation to inform project planning/development.
- *Recognition of the importance of the wider environment* within which projects are operating – building on past experience of participatory activities and linking projects to new national policy developments; strong cross-departmental links and partnership working at local and district/city wide levels.
- *Building in long-term sustainability* – linking projects into the wider change agenda; projects need to be able to show outcomes; organisational development for agencies to make sure they have the knowledge to support public participation work and build this into their planning; and seeking sustainability should be an integral and ongoing part of project work.

Measuring the impact

6.7   Measuring the outcomes of participation is no easy task. It is challenging to demonstrate a causal relationship between particular public participation initiatives and resultant changes or improvements to services, when participation is often part of a larger programme, such as Best Value. Moreover, the contribution of people's time and effort is not something that lends itself easily to measurement and any measurement has to be done sensitively to avoid jeopardising some of its most useful attributes (Home Office, 2004/05).

6.8   However, disregarding measurement altogether brings its own problems:

- It is difficult to argue for innovation without a means of assessing what works;
- Arguing for additional resources for participation without evidence of how much it costs to achieve the outcomes sought is difficult;
- How can you make the case for valuing the contribution of participants if you have no way of calculating their input?;
- Hard-to-reach, disadvantaged or excluded groups are less likely to be included in participatory processes if you cannot cost outreach and development work properly;
- Improving practice will be challenging if it is impossible to show what has real value (especially to participants) and real impacts (Home Office, 2004/05).

6.9   Another factor, not directly mentioned above but subjected to considerable scrutiny debate in the print media, is the need to justify the cost of the increasing number of participatory activities to the public purse. Implementing effective processes for evaluating the participation process and demonstrating how this has influenced the decisions taken is therefore very important, both to ensure that participants feel that their contribution is being taken seriously, and to ensure that the organisation involved can demonstrate value for money.

Summary

Public managers thinking about using a participatory processes should:
- Assess the tradeoffs of initiating public involvement and evaluate the best method to use.
- Identify at which stage in the policy-making process the public should be engaged and what purpose this will serve.
- Follow the principles for good practice by: having a clear and realistic role and remit; ensuring that adequate resources are available; supporting the project with appropriate management and evaluation; building on past experience and linking the project with other policies and initiatives; building in long term sustainability.
- Evaluate the process effectively.

CHAPTER SEVEN CONCLUSION

7.1   This report is designed to give public managers and policymakers an overview of how participatory processes contribute to the creation of public value. In doing so, it has outlined how public value theory sits within the context of the wider debate about public participation. Most importantly, it has sought to explain the constituent elements of the public value model, identified the conditions that must be met for deliberative governance to work and has explored some of the tensions between conventional models of governance and the wider use of participative instruments.

7.2   Much of the literature has focused on the relative merits of different forms of engagement, offering an account of where these methods sit on the participation 'scale'. We know how to 'do' participation today; the evidence is strong and there is a wealth of practical experience from which we might draw inspiration. Many reports have sought to identify the benefits in store for organisations that effectively manage more deliberative decision making processes. There are numerous case studies, often dealing with local initiatives, which show what can be achieved. However, the literature has rather less to say about how organisations can systematically assess the outputs of participation. Whilst individuals and organisations can and do demonstrate some of the best participative practice, many of the far-reaching benefits claimed for the process of public participation – such as increasing public satisfaction with services, restoring trust in public institutions and politicians, reducing the 'democratic deficit' – are unlikely to be realised unless more fundamental issues are addressed. The question of how to develop accurate and meaningful measurement is one, particularly given the need for evidence to demonstrate the link between public participation, actions and outcomes. Other factors include; ensuring that the aims of consultation are communicated clearly and consistently both to participants and internally; building in sustainability; and ensuring that new processes are integrated into existing governance structures so that deliberative and representative forms of governance are not in conflict.

7.3   The overarching message of this report is that there is no single route map to effective public participation that achieves the twin goals of revitalising democracy and developing better, more efficient and more responsive public services. On the one hand, though there are many difficulties associated with public participation, there is clearly an appetite for greater involvement, particularly with regard to local decisions that affect people's day-to-day lives. Increasingly, public managers should use participatory methods at different stages of the policymaking process – from the initial design stage, through implementation, to evaluation and review.

7.4   However, the critical issue is the extent to which citizens can genuinely be involved in decision making. Many initiatives have expanded the scope of consultation, which in itself is welcome, yet there are fewer initiatives in place in which citizens have played a discernable role in taking decisions. An important distinction must be drawn, of course, between service design and critical delivery issues on the one hand, and operational management on the other. We have already observed that there is uncertainty in this context. There are no simple solutions, and arguably the best approach is for public managers to simply 'learn by doing', adjusting their behaviour accordingly.

7.5   Widening the scope for participation raises three further issues. First, public managers must be clear about the extent to which they are exposing their organisation to risk – either defined in terms of the scope for 'public embarrassment' if unpalatable facts emerge in the

public domain or in terms of the public disengagement that results from ineffective participation. Second, public managers have to be clear that they *will* be challenged. Indeed, a part of the rationale for public participation is that bureaucrats make better decisions if they are required to justify their actions.

7.6   Third, clarity is needed too in the relationship between conventional structures of representative governance and a wider commitment to extending deliberative democracy. Local politicians may be concerned if they believe that their democratic legitimacy or status will be undermined as a result of greater participation. Of course, this has to be viewed through the lens of the continuing evolution of the role of local politicians, particularly the notion that councillors should develop a wider role as community advocates, co-ordinating, supervising and scrutinising the delivery of local services. Confusion about where decision making power lies can be fatal to successful participation. Once again, it is essential to be clear about where responsibility lies – is it exclusively on the shoulders of politicians and public managers or should citizens take some responsibility too?

7.7   Institutional and organisational resistance and inconsistencies in policy mean that it is unlikely that public participation will change without fundamental changes in both the structure and culture of governance institutions. This does not mean that public participation cannot have a significant effect, but we should be realistic about the more radical claims made for what public participation can achieve.

7.8   When thinking about public participation and service improvement, public managers would do well to follow the principles outlined in chapter six. Most importantly, they need to ask themselves *why* are they engaging in public participation, *what* is it that they are asking the public, and *how far* can this process affect change? Is it an exercise in information gathering, communication, testing decisions, or decision making? When planning which methods to use and how to proceed with the process it is important to think through the wider organisational costs and benefits, including intangible outcomes. Finally, it is important to ensure that the process is transparent (specifically on the question of limits), clearly communicated, both within the organisation and to participants, and that outcomes are fed back to the public and to staff. Some of the best participative initiatives are those that engage people in local issues (services) that matter to them. However, it is worth remembering that organisational commitment to public value and changes to internal culture may yield as many benefits as public participation (particularly if you are simply consulting for its own sake).

7.9   Finally, it is important to recognise that tensions may arise between representative forms of democracy and newer participative approaches introduced as part of the service delivery agenda. Whilst the aims of making government more accountable and public services more efficient are not contradictory, it is important to establish clear lines of accountability if participatory processes are to complement the roles of elected officials rather than conflict with them. For more deliberative forms of participation to be embedded, serious thought must be given to how existing democratic structures operate. Without this, there is a danger that public participation is simply grafted on to existing institutions and processes rather than contributing to the development of more responsive public services that the public value.

ANNEXES

ANNEX ONE ADDITIONAL METHODS OF PARTICIPATION

Citizens' Juries - An independent forum for members of the public to examine and discuss an important issue of public policy. The jury receives information from 'witnesses' to inform the development of options about what should be done, although a consensus amongst participants is not usually sought. Generally these take place over a number of days.	**Advantages**: deliberative process allowing participants the time to weigh up information and develop a set of options. Establishes informed public opinion about what policy-makers should do. High profile. **Disadvantages**: this process will not deliver wider democratic engagement and empowerment and is not designed as a decision making tool. **Cost**: Significant differences in the costing usually relate to how long the process is designed to last and the exact nature of the methodology.
Citizens' Panels - larger, demographically representative group of citizens used to assess public preferences and opinions. Participants participate in surveys at intervals over time. May be supplemented by focus groups and other methods of engagement.	**Advantages**: Can target specific groups if large enough; Allows surveys or other research to be done at short notice (once the panel is established); more representative of the population than other forms; ability to track changes in views over time; costs may be lower than a large-scale one-off survey once the panel is established. **Disadvantages**: requires considerable staff support to establish and maintain; reflects your agenda rather than the community's; the database of names and addresses requires constant updating. **Costs**: vary depending on the size of the Panel, the methods in which the members are consulted and the frequency of consultation.
Consensus Building/Dialogue - Incorporates a range of methods designed to help participants identify common ground and mutually beneficial solutions to a problem. Stakeholders define the problem, devise the method and create solutions. Usually conducted through Workshops and similar meetings. Every process is tailor-made to suit the situation and the people involved.	**Advantages**: Deals well with contention and can really help with issues of low trust by giving control of the process over to the participants; Is highly flexible and can be used at all levels. **Disadvantages**: the process relies heavily on good facilitation, can be a slow process, and it won't deliver information representative of society as a whole. **Cost**: The need for independent expert facilitation and possibly numerous meetings mean that the costs can be high.
Consensus Conference - a panel of citizens explores a topic by questioning expert witnesses after information and preparation time have been provided. Citizens choose questions and select the witnesses, and formulate their own conclusions. At the end of the conference, a report and	**Advantages**: good public outreach; open and transparent; the public have greater input than in citizens' juries. **Disadvantages**: The small sample of people it uses means that minorities might be excluded and it doesn't deliver detailed technical recommendations or results that are representative of society as a whole.

recommendations are then circulated to key decision makers and the media.	**Cost**: Expensive because of large facilities required.
Deliberative Mapping citizen and expert participants are divided into groups to consider the issue both separately from one another and at a joint workshop. Both groups can learn from each other without the experts dominating. The emphasis of the process is on understanding the different perspectives each offer to a policy process. The groups decide which criteria they will use to score the options against.	**Advantages / disadvantages**: Good for understanding public preferences but not for reaching a consensus; experts contribute but do not dominate. **Cost**: Requires expert facilitation that contribute to high costs.
Deliberative Polling - A baseline poll is taken, after which participants meet for a few days to discuss the issues. Information is sent to participants and made publicly available. After a process of deliberation, the sample is asked the original questions again. Any changes in opinion are thought to represent the conclusions the public would reach if people had the opportunity to become more informed about the issues.	**Advantages**: combines representative methods with deliberative techniques; increases public awareness of issues; demonstrates the difference between peoples views before and after being informed. **Disadvantages**: It doesn't provide qualitative information and requires the use of TV for wider public awareness **Cost**: tends to be an expensive process.
Democs (Deliberative Meetings of Citizens') – a card game enabling people to absorb information and to generate discussion. During each round of the game people reflect on their cards and choose one or two that they feel are most important and explaining their choice. Once the group has voted on a range of responses or policy positions they attempt to draw a consensus.	**Advantages**: encourages people to form an opinion on a complex topic; encourages people to speak and get involved; enjoyable. **Disadvantages**: it won't deliver lengthy deliberation; can create conflict; it doesn't deliver follow-up to people who have taken part and want more. **Costs**: tends to be low cost.
Electronic processes – ranging from websites to online forums.	**Advantages**: allows participation from a broad/dispersed group of people who can participate at their own convenience; anonymous; large numbers can take part. **Disadvantages**: excludes those without online access; written consultation can be a barrier; unmoderated. **Costs**: Although the cost of venue hire and recruitment is mitigated, the costs of setting up and

	maintaining online participation are often underestimated and should be considered in advance.
Future Search Conference a large group of stakeholders are selected because they have power or information on the topic at hand or are affected by the outcomes. The preferred approach is to involve 64 people, who form eight tables of eight stakeholder groups. Participants are involved in a highly structured process, which ideally lasts two and a half days.	**Advantages**: those with a stake in the issue are involved; can be used to make decisions but has to be on an issue that participants feel strongly about. **Disadvantages**: Requires a participants to contribute a considerable period of time; requires considerable follow up and support. **Cost**: relatively high.
Participatory Appraisal - a family of approaches that enable local people to identify priorities and make decisions about the future, with the organising agency facilitating, listening and learning.	**Advantages**: has the potential to be extremely empowering and reliable as proposals are typically acted upon immediately to effect change prior to the next participatory appraisal session. **Disadvantages**: proper training required for those involved. **Costs**: can be very expensive.
Participatory Strategic Planning - This is a four-stage process. 1. group comes up with a vision for the future of the organisation or community. 2. They work out the contradictions or obstacles that are preventing them reaching their vision. 3. they agree a strategic direction that will help them overcome these barriers and reach the vision. 4. The final stage is about implementation planning. Each stage uses a consensus workshop process and a combination of working individually, in small groups and with the whole group.	**Advantages**: A quick way of enabling a diverse group to reach agreement; an inspiring process; Good for building ownership and commitment within a group and can deliver a clear direction, but perhaps not the finer details. **Disadvantages**: trained and experienced facilitators are required; people need to commit to the process before-hand; requires hard work and commitment on the day; all major stakeholders need to be in the room. **Costs**: dependent on the cost of trained facilitators.
Planning for Real this uses 3D models of a local area to enable participants to suggest the ways they'd like to see their community develop.	**Advantages / disadvantages**: Clearly reflects local priorities but risks being dominated by stronger individuals and won't deliver input to regional or national level decision making. **Costs**: dependent on the size of the group, but does not have to be expensive.
Open Space Technology or events are organised around central theme. Participants are invited to identify	**Advantages / disadvantages**: This is dynamic and harnesses creativity. It can be used to make decisions but remains an extremely flexible process

issues for which they are willing to take responsibility for running a session. Once discussion topics are exhausted the participants sign up for the ones they wish to take part in. This creates a very open environment for discussion and fosters mutual interest.	so cannot be used to direct people to a specific outcome. **Cost**: relatively cheap method allowing an unlimited number of participants to form their own discussions around a central them
User Panels: regular meetings between service users to talk about the quality of a service or related issues. By identifying the concerns and priorities of service users they can generate ideas for improvement or help to identify problems early on.	**Advantages**: It's a good way to work with people who aren't usually heard and is an interesting sounding board for new approaches; Changes can be traced over time; panel members are generally well informed of the issues. **Disadvantages**: It risks being unrepresentative but it is a good way to establish dialogue between service providers and users. **Cost**: does not have to be expensive, but is dependent on in-house skills.
Youth Empowerment Initiatives: whilst there is no one method that is used, the focus of participatory approaches to working with young people tends to be on empowerment.	**Advantages**: allows young people to participate and offers them the support and training to get involved; it can build people's feeling of self worth. **Disadvantages**: high turnover; some risk being tokenistic or patronising towards young people but it can empower individuals and provide information on young people's values and priorities. **Cost**: varying dependent on which method used.

Source: Involve (2005) *People and Participation: How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making*, London: Involve

ANNEX TWO PARTICIPATION TECHNIQUES USED BY SCOTTISH PUBLIC AUTHORITIES 2000

Table 2.4 Use of Public Participation Techniques by Scottish Public Authorities (Percentage use)

Base = 126 respondents	LAs	SIPs*	Health Board	Working for Communities Pathfinders	Local Enterprise Company	Housing Association	All Respondents
High Levels of Use (%)							
Links with community groups	97	85	100	100	85	91	91
Open/public meetings	97	73	100	100	92	91	88
Local newsletters	84	75	80	100	85	100	84
Exhibitions	91	63	100	75	92	73	79
Focus groups	81	63	100	100	85	73	77
Surveys	94	73	87	100	100	95	87
Variable Levels of use (%)							
Users Comments & complaints	97	65	87	50	100	100	85
Written consultation	97	80	93	75	100	59	84
Workshops	94	80	93	100	100	55	83
Pilot initiatives	78	73	53	75	92	55	71
Staff suggestion schemes	63	30	80	25	85	73	57
Depth interviews	63	45	53	50	77	27	51
IT (internet; kiosks)	63	35	67	50	77	14	47
Low Levels of Use (%)							
Mystery shopping	19	8	7	0	46	0	13
Deliberative polling	16	8	7	50	8	5	10
Freephone no. for comments	44	13	40	0	38	14	26
Citizens' Panels	41	10	27	25	31	14	23
Citizens' Juries	16	5	13	0	8	0	8
Other (eg Planning for Real, Open Space, Business Panels, Public Surgeries)	22	23	13	0	15	9	17

Source: Adapted from George Street Research, 2000
*Social Inclusion Partnerships were replaced by the Community Regeneration Fund initiative in 2005

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