

A councillor's role in community planning

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The problems - What we've all recognised from community planning experience

- Failure to influence results in frustration
- *Building trust is a long term project –longer than most community planning exercises*
- Not involving councillors or LA staff early leads to barriers later
- councillors can be critical supporters and opponents
- Councillors are accountable once every 4 years, they need to make staff accountable more regularly

Pathways of Influence, Carnegie Trust 2008

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...but this is part of a larger problem

- Residents do not feel listened to
- Bigger and bigger organisations, globalisation and powerlessness
- Remote communication – lack of feedback
- Media reinforcement of disempowerment
- ..real danger of a spiral of alienation

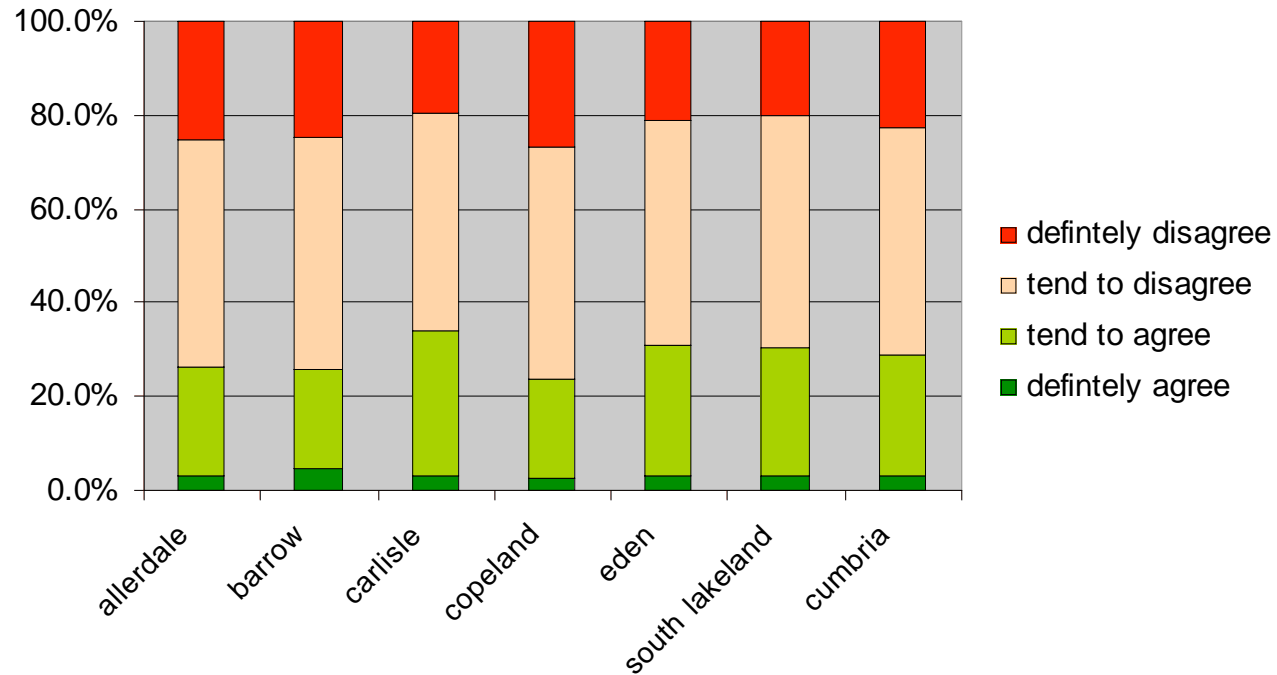
- ... can councillors be the magic bullet..?

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The problem - Where are we in Cumbria?

Q. Do you agree you can influence decisions affecting your local area?



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making best use of councillors

4 community skills

1. source of intelligence
2. advocate
3. influencer and place shaper
4. service shaper; and
5. political leader

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1. Councillors as sources of local intelligence

- access to good quality intelligence from the community and from public services
- can play a critical role in meshing these
- skills to source additional local information
- understand the complex business of local government and services provided by the council and others

2. Councillors as community advocates

- challenge to public services
- advocate for people from different backgrounds
- support for local projects and initiatives
- educate people about the value of local participation
- explain political decisions and structures
- skills to engage people in a variety of ways - conflict broker

3. Councillors - influencers & shapers

- understand how to tackle problems through *direct action*, often small persistent issues unaddressed because they are insignificant to council(s)
- local *figurehead*/role-model people can turn to
- can manage delegated locality budgets
- Can build real opportunities to influence decisions about services and spending

4. Councillors as service shapers

- confidence and ability to hold service providers to account
- work in partnership with a agencies and interests
- understand local problems and use this knowledge locally and strategically in local action planning
- setting and monitoring service standards

But how does this role fit with staff and community roles?

Often councillors are seen as on the side lines in community planning because their roles are not understood. A possible framework suggests how they can draw together different elements of the process to:

1. empower and engage communities
2. encourage more locally responsive management
3. make more decisions locally with community involvement

Tripod of governance?

embedded community engagement systems with partners



Locality place shaping



*Responsive management;
to local needs and concerns*



*decisions taken locally -
councillors and others*

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Principle 1 empowered communities and accessible services

Supporting community learning, involving and working together enabling communities and neighbourhoods to get together, express their views, engage in dialogue and participate in finding solutions; support communities to access services

- Councillors have a critical role to ensure that community empowerment is delivered in their areas
- If we get it right we increase the perception of influence, sense of belonging and ethos of mutual respect

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eg Cumbrian processes for engagement

Mature arrangements:

- 6 local committees c£36m revenue budget by 2010/11
- Participatory budgeting
- 62 neighbourhood forums & 400+ public events
- 900+ community grants
- Participate in 20 locality partnerships; parish planning clusters, 5 gov/nce pilots



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Principle 2 More Responsive Management

delivering more responsive and better targeted services through a combination of voice and choice, partnership working and service localisation, responding better to public needs and priorities.

- Councillors have a critical role in holding these staff to account
- If we get it right we see improved citizen satisfaction with services, better outcomes, narrowing gaps, better value in services, quality of life

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There is already a lot of community infrastructure to support this staff

- 400+ community events
- Local budgets to get things done
- locality staff support
- Councillors committed to community based working
- outreach projects eg streetsafe & 'together we can'



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Principle 3 Community Governance

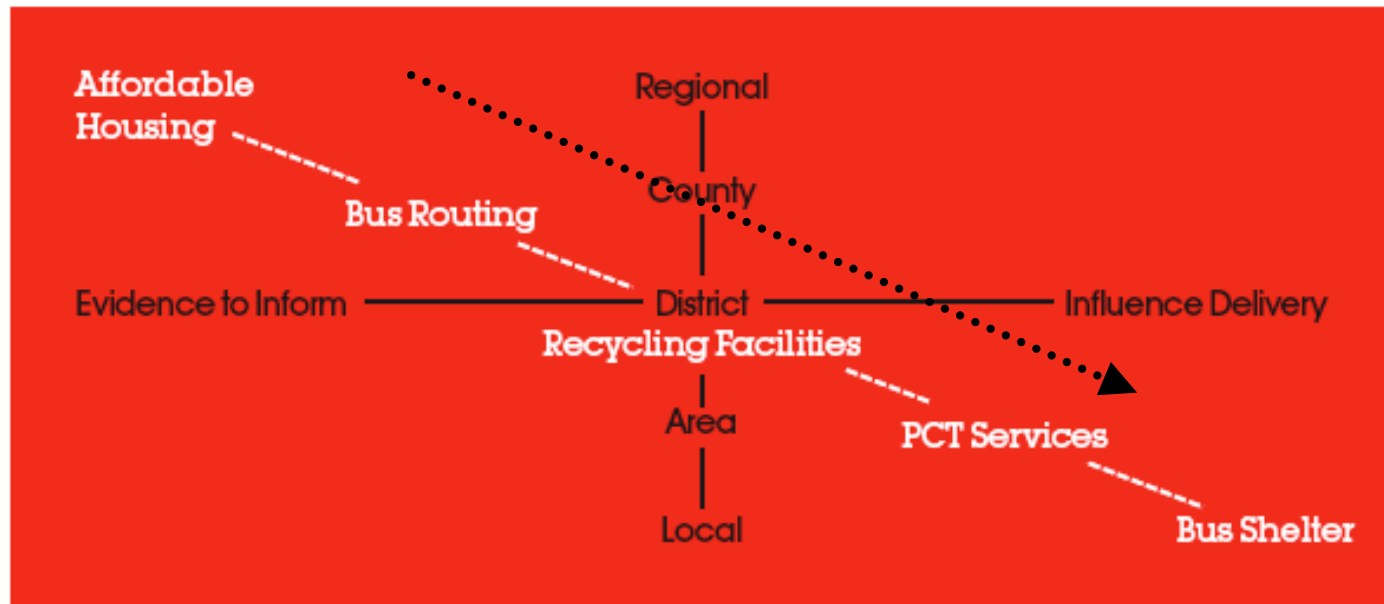
improving the responsiveness and accountability of decision making; more active accessible and empowered democratic representatives (frontline councillors and parish councillors) more direct powers of influence, challenge and scrutiny for communities

- Councillors have a critical role in localising as much decision making as possible and making sure residents know about these decisions.
- This results in improved trust in local government, sense of influence, turnout

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influencing more than the bus shelter



Lancashire pathfinder 2007

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learning points

We've got some great practice to build on

- stronger community engagement networks
- Widespread experience of neighbourhood initiatives
- Increasing commitments to more local working

But

- Councillors are an often an under-utilised asset
- They can help frame the environment for effective plans
- They can also make it easier to access and 'sensitise' council staff
- councillors can make a huge difference to the impact of community plans
- Councils must reinforce these roles and provide support frameworks

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