



LocalAction

The Handy Guide for communities working with councillors

by Rachel Newton, Caitlin McMullin and Nina Jatana



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Urban Forum exists to support local communities to have greater influence over decisions that affect them, by influencing national policy and local practice, and providing practical help to its members. Urban Forum has a network of members, mainly local voluntary and community groups, and also local councillors and local authority officers.

bassac is a membership body for community organisations, and organises training and events, highlights funding opportunities, and offers tailored support to every member. bassac has roots in the nineteenth century settlement movement, and works with its members to drive social change.

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1 Introduction and summary of top tips from activists

Communities in Britain are characterised by a long history of local activism, leadership and dissent, winning us many of the local institutions, political rights and civil liberties we enjoy today. Community groups and organisations have an important role to play in influencing policies, decisions, and services, particularly those that affect the most marginalised and disadvantaged. Councillors, as representatives of local people, are natural allies in achieving many of our goals.

There is an increasing recognition from government of the importance of the voluntary and community sector. The coalition government has called for a greater role for community groups in meeting the political, social and economic challenges ahead, and a strengthening of 'civil society'. At the same time it proposes a 'new politics,' with politicians being more accountable to the electorate, politics being less dominated by party interests, and more power being given to citizens to have control over the decisions that affect their lives¹.

Given these expectations, it is a good time to take stock and consider what we, the community sector, have to offer as agents of local change in the current context, and how what we do relates to local democracy.

This guide is a contribution to this discussion, looking at real examples of how community groups can work with councillors, setting this in the context of the changing role of both community groups and local councillors in local democracy.

Part One of this guide outlines the changing roles of local activists and councillors in supporting neighbourhoods and contributing to local democracy, and the policies of government contributing to this change.

Part Two tells the stories from community organisers who have worked with councillors to bring about positive change, and highlights the practical lessons we can learn from their experiences. As the case studies show, community groups and councillors can work together in a number of ways:

- **Delivering change: communities 'doing things for themselves'.**
- **As community advocates: campaigning or lobbying together for change in their local area.**
- **Supporting volunteering and active citizenship: getting local people involved in the community.**

Top tips from activists

The community activists we spoke to took a pragmatic approach to working with their local councillors. Some of the lessons learned from them were to:

Be persuasive

- Establish common ground, form agreement on the main objectives.
- Make your case, and show that you have a legitimate voice.
- Work out what the different agendas are, and use this to build support—making sure that the councillor gets what they need out of the collaboration, as long as it doesn't go against what you are trying to achieve.

Establish good communication

- Try to have early contact with local councillors – both early in the life of the initiative and if newly elected, soon after they come into office.
- Reach out to the councillor(s) – realise that they may not seek you out but may still want to be involved.
- Establish what role a councillor can play, what they can offer, and what their level of involvement will be – it could change over time.
- Seek to build up trust, respect and mutual understanding – usually all sides want what's best for the community, but may have different priorities, different ideas on how to get there or use different language to talk about it.

Understand politics and political structures

- Distinguish between local ward councillors, the whole council and executive, and understand how the former can help gain influence with the latter.
- Projects or campaigns can be used strategically, to hold parties to their election pledges.
- If one councillor is not interested, concentrate on another.

Be realistic

- Accept the limitations of your councillor's involvement, including the limits of their time and position.
- Treat building relationships with your councillors as a long-term project.
- Accept that councillors are usually members of parties, and so are likely to want to benefit their party in the work they do.



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part **one**

the context

“The Parties will promote the radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local authorities and community groups.”

First policy statement of the coalition government.²

2 The big picture

The need for political and economic renewal is shaping public policy on engagement between councils and communities.

At a national level, electoral and parliamentary reform has become an increasing priority. There is widespread political consensus on the need to involve citizens more in what happens in their area, and a desire to reconnect politics with communities and social activity. The government's 'Big Society' plans aim to support community groups to take over failing public services, post offices and community resources and transfer more power and assets to communities and neighbourhoods.

In addition, the emergency budget announced in June 2010 proposes major cut backs in public spending for the next five years. The drive to secure economic recovery makes the work that community organisations do even more significant. Government policy emphasises giving a greater role to community organisations and volunteers, not just having a say in decision-making, but also in filling in the gaps left by public services, or even taking over services where public or private service providers are failing. At the same time, community groups are key to campaigning for social justice and defending services that communities need in order to address poverty and overcome exclusion.

Over the last few years, local authorities and other parts of the public sector have begun to consult local people more, and to provide more opportunities for citizens to have their say⁴. A range of new mechanisms and forums have been introduced by councils and other parts of the public sector to do this. The Duty to Involve, introduced in April 2009⁵, gives a legal underpinning to this process, placing a duty on local authorities and other public bodies to inform and involve local people in local decision-making.

As part of the localism agenda, public policy has focused on strengthening the role of ward councillors to play a strong community leadership role. For ward councillors, this means representing people in their ward, acting as advocates on their behalf, and championing their needs.

“Political reform in this country must be about taking power away from elites and giving it to the people.”

Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.³



Many local authorities have increased the involvement of communities at a neighbourhood level, with schemes like participatory budgeting (where residents are involved in making spending decisions), neighbourhood-level planning, neighbourhood contracts, and the development of more neighbourhood councils based on the parish council model.

These initiatives, as well as other forms of direct democracy (such as referendums and petitions), are often talked about as forms of participatory democracy, which aim to strengthen and support our traditional system of political representation of elected local councillors and MPs.

There are still big questions that need to be answered. How meaningful will devolution of power be in the context of recession and the social upheavals that will accompany it? How far is it realistic to expect community groups and volunteers to step into the breach, and provide 'more for less' in place of public and private service providers? Is there sufficient demand and capacity within deprived communities to play a full and meaningful role in this way? We don't yet know the answers to these questions, but what we do know is that new opportunities are emerging for the community sector and local councillors to work together to renew our local political, economic and social life.

3 The community sector – who we are

The community sector is large and diverse.

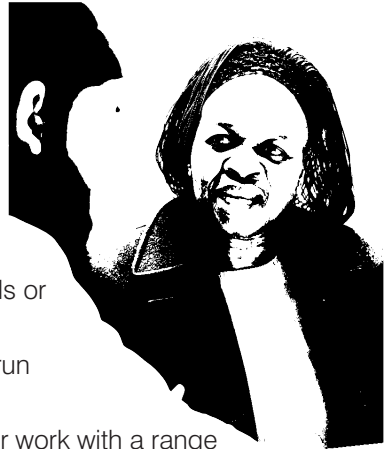
Community groups are active on a local level and the majority are small, modestly funded (if at all) and largely dependent on volunteers. Some community groups are larger and employ professional staff. Community groups have a range of purposes and come in several types.

They:

- May be either informal associations of individuals or registered charities.
- Are not for profit organisations, although some run businesses as 'social enterprises'.
- May work with one particular group of people, or work with a range of local groups.
- Can have a variety of functions – single issue campaigns, self-help groups, tenants' and residents' associations, faith groups.
- May own or manage community buildings, from which they deliver services for the local community.

And:

- Some provide support for smaller community groups.
- Some of the larger community associations who own assets, like buildings or land, and support other groups are known as 'community anchors'⁶.



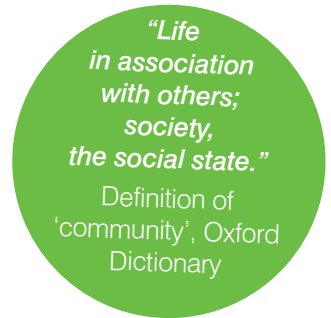
4 What can local community groups do?

Making local democracy work relies on having communities that work. It means strengthening civil society. It means citizens and communities being able to influence decisions, having a proper say over what happens, changing things that need to be changed, and providing services that communities need through voluntary activity.

Community organisations are therefore crucial to supporting local democracy in a number of ways:

- Holding local government and public service providers to account; challenging poor decisions, providing expertise and evidence.
- Helping communities to address their own needs – with new ideas and projects, usually based on voluntary activity.
- Raising awareness of an issue, by bringing it to the attention of policy-makers.
- Meeting needs that the state cannot or will not address.
- Enabling citizens, particularly those who are marginalised, to be better informed, consulted and able to be involved in decision-making that affects them and where they live.
- Providing and promoting candidates – many councillors are from community organisations.
- Hosting activities like councillors' surgeries⁷ and hustings events before elections that help councillors and residents talk to each other.
- Providing practical experience of shared decision-making through panels, forums and boards that help to prepare people to participate in wider democratic actions.

Local authorities increasingly make decisions in partnership with others from the public sector, private sector and voluntary and community groups. This emphasis on local partnership has led to community groups being invited to participate on local decision-making bodies.



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Partnerships, including Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) exist in order to allocate resources and decide public service priorities, such as local health or education services, services for young people, regeneration, tackling local crime, or tenants' services, as well as local authority initiatives to devolve decision-making to a neighbourhood level.

In some areas community groups are represented on partnership bodies, generally by umbrella groupings, such as community empowerment networks or local community and voluntary sector forums. How well this representation works varies enormously from area to area.

Those community groups and networks involved in partnerships will work with councillors, most frequently those councillors who are on the executive.

However, for most community groups, their relationship with councils and councillors exists primarily outside the formal structures of partnerships. Community organisations and residents' groups normally build up their own relationship with their local councillors, working together on specific issues, or through long-term joint working.

Traditionally, many community organisations have played an important role in engaging deprived communities and others missed out by formal local authority involvement processes. Community organisations can be strong voices for change because they can link up communities.

5 What can councillors do?

Elected councillors are responsible for making decisions on behalf of their local community about local services, such as land use, refuse collection and leisure services. They agree the council's budget, set the policy framework, and appoint senior staff. They also serve an important community leadership role, stimulating debate and shaping local areas. All councillors come together at full council meetings, which take place roughly four times a year to take major budget and policy decisions.

The role of councillors and the structure that they work in has changed over the last few years, with an 'executive system', replacing the old committee system of local government. Although councils are now being given the option of returning to a committee system, most will have an executive, either a leader and a cabinet executive or a mayor and cabinet executive⁸. Cabinets are now the main decision-making body for most councils and will reflect the political balance of the council as a whole. They are made up of councillors with responsibility for particular aspects of council priorities (e.g. housing, regeneration, and children's services). These portfolio holders recommend a budget for each year for full council approval. Councillors also play a leading role on partnership bodies (including Local Strategic Partnerships).

Those councillors not on the cabinet are known as frontline or backbench councillors. Frontline councillors are expected to play a role in scrutinising and overseeing the decisions of the council, as well as those of council partners, and many will sit on scrutiny committees. The role of overview and scrutiny is to examine policies, evaluate performance, make sure that consultation is carried out properly, and make recommendations for improvement. Councils are currently being asked to strengthen scrutiny processes and make them more open to the public.

Different council tiers have responsibilities for different services and areas of policy. Whether a councillor is elected at parish, district, county or unitary level makes a difference to their level of responsibilities, and what influence they have to affect decisions on certain issues. Additionally, councillors are often members of political parties and can be constrained by party lines.

The overriding responsibility of frontline councillors is to represent the needs of their ward, and they can bring issues from their ward to the attention of the full council⁹. As part of the push to strengthen the function of local councillors as champions of their ward, some councils have started to devolve budgets to local councillors to use in their wards.

6 What can community groups and councillors achieve working together?

“Half of them [local councillors] are self-centred busybodies on an ego trip, and the other half are in it for what they can get out of it.”

Jim Hacker, Yes Minister 1982¹⁰

People’s trust of politicians and political institutions at a local and national level is at an historic low.

This has led many observers to talk of a ‘disconnect’ between elected representatives and the people they serve¹¹. Although councillors as a group are not as unpopular as MPs, voluntary and community sector representatives and residents say that they don’t know who their councillor is, don’t have contact with them, and believe that councillors are not representative enough, and are not in touch¹².

Councillors, too, have misconceptions about the community sector, and sometimes dismiss the role of community organisations who they feel are unrepresentative (‘the usual suspects’), or are simply not aware of the different community groups that exist in their ward. At its worst, this can result in outright hostility between community groups and councillors, with each questioning the others’ motives and legitimacy.

So where do these negative perceptions between community groups and councillors come from? As with most stereotypes, there can be grains of truth. We probably all know of self appointed ‘community leaders’ who exaggerate the extent to which they represent residents, and actually represent mainly themselves. On the other side, community organisers may have come across local councillors who take the credit for their work, or only seem interested in getting their picture in the paper. At the same time, these assumptions are overly simplistic and don’t tell the real story.

Some of these negative stereotypes may also stem from a tension between representative democracy on the one hand, with a more participative democracy on the other. Councillors are rightly concerned that they represent all parts of the community that elected them, and not just those who voted for them or those who are the best organised at vocalising their interests. That isn’t always straightforward



as there will be diverse and competing interests within every community and councillors must take account of these different opinions and try to strike a balance for the good of their wards.

Furthermore, decision-making processes involve different structures in the council, and policies of political parties in charge. It can be unclear for councillors – and members of the community – when and how far councillors can voice opposition to council or party decisions. For community groups it can be frustrating to discover that even where they feel they have a strong case, supported by the wider community, their local councillors will not support them if it appears to go against the decision of the council, where they are in the party with the most seats.

Sylvia Wilson and the Whitefield Residents Action Group succeeded in winning two public enquiries to stop their homes from being demolished as part of regeneration plans. Now their homes are under threat again, with plans for a new school, even though in Sylvia's view there is a perfectly good alternative site that would make demolition unnecessary. In spite of considerable community support, Sylvia described how over the years they tried and failed to get the support of their local councillors. She put the lack of support from their councillors entirely down to that fact that they "won't go against the party line".

Other community groups experience difficulties where their ward councillors are in opposition – in other words, are not in the party with the most seats on the council. Sometimes, issues are taken up by opposition members, but as a way to criticise the ruling party as opposed to effectively working towards a positive outcome.

Peter Batty in Failsworth has been attempting, with community support, to stop the relocation of Oldham Athletic football stadium to an area designated to be an urban county park near where he lives. He wants to develop a better working relationship with councillors, but has found the councillors in charge unwilling to communicate, and opposition councillors have promised to take action but in his view failed to do anything except use the issue as a 'political football'. In Peter's view this is disappointing, and he feels "they should hang up their political hat and deal with the issue as a local councillor. They need to rise above party politics".

These problems exist in many places and present real obstacles. However, where there is a will, and a shared agenda, there are also real opportunities for community groups to work in partnership with councillors, and they can be a valuable resource for each other.

People stand for election as ward councillors because they want to improve things in their area, and a significant proportion of councillors are prompted to stand for election because they are themselves community activists or volunteers. As well as bringing whatever skills they have as an individual and experienced activist, their democratic mandate can strengthen the voice of community groups, and their knowledge, status and contacts as councillors can make all the difference to community groups wanting to change things for the better where they live.

The move to an executive system, which in some ways is more centralised, means many frontline councillors may feel that it is harder to influence the policy of the local authority. This may mean that they want to find new ways to represent their ward. But they have limited resources to do this – they often have full time jobs, and receive little if anything in return for the time they put into being a councillor. Being keyed into community activity by others is an obvious way that councillors can address this.

In Spring 2010 Urban Forum and bassac investigated the relationship between community groups and councillors further. We sent out a call for examples, to which we received over 100 suggestions of effective joint working between councillors and community groups. From these, we selected 10 examples which showed strong councillor involvement, and which exhibited variations of topic, region of England,

and role of the councillor within the project or campaign. We then carried out 14 interviews (nine community organisers and five local councillors) about their experience of working together. The case studies look at what effect this collaboration had and how it worked in practice.

Endnotes for Part One

- 1 Building the Big Society, www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/407789/building-big-society.pdf
- 2 Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition negotiations. Agreement reached 11th May 2010 www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/05/Coalition_Agreement_published.aspx
- 3 Eric Pickles, June 2009 www.ericpickles.com/newsarticle.php?id=1568
- 4 Communities in control: real people, real power. Department of Communities and Local Government, 2008. www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/communitiesincontrol
- 5 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- 6 Effective Community Development Approaches of Community Anchors, www.bassac.org.uk/node/500, bassac 2008
- 7 One fifth of bassac members who responded to its 2009 survey host councillor surgeries
- 8 Local Government Act, 2000.
- 9 Councillor Call for Action, introduced with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, which amended the Local Government Act 2000.
- 10 Quoted in the Reputation of Local Government, LGA 2008 www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageld=1314588
- 11 Ipsos Mori research for LGA 2004, Public Perceptions of Ethics, Standards for England, 2009 – changes between 2007 and 2009
- 12 Leading Lights, Urban Forum April 2009 and in CLG 2008 survey of public perceptions



parttwo

case studies

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the change that we seek.”

Barack Obama,
September 2008

7 Communities delivering change

It is nothing new for community organisations and volunteers to get together to provide things needed in the area where they live. Over many years changes have been introduced that make some sorts of community initiatives easier – for example measures to help community groups take over public assets or for tenants to self manage. Public spending cuts make voluntary activity to meet people's needs increasingly important. Councils are likely to become more interested in projects that can be initiated and run without large investment from their diminishing resources. As well as providing needed facilities, resources and volunteers, community-run initiatives are often felt by those involved to create a sense of community ownership and pride, which may not exist otherwise.

Very often voluntary projects in communities will depend on councillors in the council executive, and council officers to give necessary permission, or professional assistance with issues of planning, contracts, or to help bid for funding. Having backing from their local councillors has helped community projects to gain the necessary council support that they need, cutting through red tape, and adding credibility to their project with other agencies and funders.

Small-scale community initiatives often need only small amounts of funding or support in order to get off the ground. Councillors will often know of sources of local authority funding that can be accessed which volunteers may well be unaware of.

TOP TIPS

- Involving a councillor at the early stages of a project can help tremendously to get it off the ground.
- When a community group wants to take over a public service or develop a project, councillors can help navigate through council processes, and find the right people to talk to.
- Councillors can signpost community groups to sources of funding, or help to research what funding is available.
- Community-led projects can be mutually beneficial for both the group and the councillor.

Cricklewood Homeless Concern: the Yes Project

Cricklewood, London

Involving councillors in community projects can be a valuable way to find sources of funding. They can also give the project credibility with other agencies you want to work with – in this case with the police and with the Home Office. Seek them out with a clear idea and plan and clarify how you'd like them to be involved.



Cricklewood Homeless Concern (CHC) is both a charity and a resource for the community and other community organisations. Cricklewood Homeless Concern is a strong believer in user-led activity, and the Yes Project is one of two user-led projects that it has initiated.

The Yes Project – what it is

The Yes Project came about as a response to residents in Cricklewood complaining about the number of young people hanging around in the streets and behaving anti-socially. The area had high crime rates, low educational attainment and high unemployment. CHC viewed the problem of street crime and violence as both an issue with individual young people in the area and as a wider social problem. They felt that working with local councillors as well as the local police was key to tackling this. Two councillors were approached by CHC and as a result became involved with the project. As Danny Maher of CHC says, “Both are keen, awake and actively involved in the work”.

The Yes Project works with 16 to 25 year old ‘street active’ young people, recruiting young people involved in street crime and anti social behaviour to work as volunteers at CHC, and then supporting these young people to work with other

“The kids are doing things for themselves now”

street active young people and involve them in the work. The project has worked by giving young people responsibility and independence, and investing trust in them. The young people involved have recently won a Metropolitan Police Award for their work with local police.

The aim of involving young people as volunteers at Cricklewood Homeless Concern was to reduce street crime, and to reduce the arrests and court appearances of the street active young people. To achieve success in reaching this aim, they have worked with the police to ‘sentence’ people to volunteer at the project as an alternative to arrest or court action.

How they involved councillors

According to Danny, the level of involvement and support from their local councillors has gone beyond the call of duty. Because they could see the project’s value for the area, councillors have helped with access to funding opportunities, contacts with the Home Office and other government departments, and the local council. They regularly visit CHC to see the project progress, and set up a visit to the House of Commons for the young people involved in the programme to give them an opportunity to showcase their work.



We talked to one councillor, Cllr Hayley Matthews who has been closely involved in the Yes Project. She talked to us about the value and reward in being involved in community projects like this one. “...It is my role, being a councillor. It’s an enabling role, to make lives better and to improve the area. Working with communities is fundamental and it is good to link up community groups”. At the same time she is conscious of the fact that she needs to listen to all parts of the community, not just the loudest voices, so that she can make a balanced judgement and represent the whole of the community.

She told us she felt that councillors could contribute in a number of ways. One of the ways councillors can help is helping with access to funding. For example, at Hayley’s suggestion the Yes Project put in a bid to the Working Neighbourhoods Fund. Councillors can also facilitate contact between the police and community groups.

One lesson that Danny says that CHC learned from working with their councillors on the project is that “councillors will never come to you, don’t expect them to, it won’t happen. You have to seek them out and give them an idea . . . and the idea has to be a good one”.

Friends of Witton Lakes

Erdington, Birmingham

New councillors can act as equal partners in setting up projects, particularly when they agree about how important it is to the community. They may help not only with their connections to the council, but also by offering hands-on assistance.

We spoke to community organiser Linda Hines and Cllr Matt Bennett, who set up Friends of Witton Lakes. Both were concerned that Witton Lakes wasn't as well looked after as another local park, and Linda, a regular visitor to the park, was concerned about the safety of nesting birds. Linda was already active in her community, running the local neighbourhood watch group, and she wondered if a friends group could set up something similar to protect the bird life.

Setting up the friends group and Duckling Watch

Linda and Cllr Bennett decided to meet up soon after Cllr Bennett was elected in May 2008. They talked about the issues in Witton Lakes, and they agreed to work together to set up a group of park users. The first Friends of Witton Lakes meeting took place in autumn 2008, and soon after Linda set up Duckling Watch.

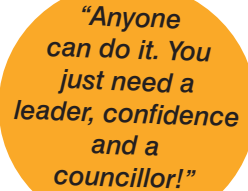
Duckling Watch is a group of residents, who meet three times per week to patrol the park to make sure that no one is disturbing the nesting birds, and educate people on the dangers to wildlife of dropping litter. They have secured Community Chest



funding to purchase high-visibility jackets.

Friends of Witton Lakes has since gone on to many more activities to improve the park for the people who use it: having offenders pick up litter, paint fences and plant daffodils as part of the Community Payback scheme; organising activity to educate people on picking up after their dogs; working on projects with local schools; organising litter picks and planting trees. They've also built up good working relationships with the police, park manager and maintenance contractor.

Linda described how people now felt differently about their local park since the Friends group and Duckling Watch were started, including that they feel safer there. "People feel more ownership over the park now because they're involved and they talk to each other".



"Anyone can do it. You just need a leader, confidence and a councillor!"

Councillors and community organisers working together

Linda described how having the support of a local councillor made a difference, and how they probably wouldn't have been able to set up the group as quickly without councillor involvement, with Cllr Bennett playing a leading role in the group from the outset.

"Working with Cllr Bennett was a breath of fresh air. Many councillors will help in certain ways, like agreeing that the project is a good idea, or helping secure funding... He, however, has been very hands-on throughout."

From Cllr Bennett's point of view, being involved as a councillor has opened doors and given the group more clout and influence. "If a resident wants to set up a group, the council can just ignore them. With a councillor wanting to sponsor a group, if you will, the council has to buy in. This has made it a lot easier for the group, and has meant that council officers come to some meetings." He believes that his involvement has also been helpful because his day to day communication with local people as a councillor publicised the group and helped gain more members.

Linda recognised that Cllr Bennett benefited as a (new) councillor from his involvement, as a way of showing he was making a difference to the community – and she feels the relationship has been mutually beneficial. Indeed, Cllr Bennett also feels that the group helps in his role as a councillor. "What I'm doing is representing the views of the community and engaging with them – they're involved every step of the way so I'm properly representing the community and not just using my judgment to decide what they might want."

According to Linda, "Anyone can do it. You just need a leader, confidence and a councillor!"

Newbiggin Maritime Centre Community-led regeneration

Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, Northumberland

Getting councillors involved can have a snowball effect, oiling the wheels at necessary points, and generating further support and interest for a project.

Overcoming party politics and working together on a shared agenda is key to this.

Newbiggin-by-the-Sea is a former mining and fishing village in Northumberland, with one of the highest levels of deprivation in the UK. Volunteers in the community are leading a regeneration project—The Newbiggin Maritime Centre—which will develop the Newbiggin Heritage Centre as a tourist attraction, providing educational activities, a hall, a restaurant, and training and work experience for young people.



The lifeboat station has been an important part of the village since it was set up in the 1850s following a fishing disaster where fishermen lost their lives. The project started with residents working to bring back one of the old lifeboats, the 'Mary Joicey', to the village and to restore it. The project caught the imagination of local residents, involving the original crew and children from the local school. From the original objective of getting a home for the boat, volunteers saw the opportunity for a bigger regeneration plan for the future, providing community facilities, giving young people the skills they needed for the tourism industry in the area.

We talked to David Futers, one of the volunteer project organisers, about what they had achieved, and how they had worked with local councillors to do this.

How they got the project started

From getting funding for a consultant to develop a business plan, they have set themselves up as a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. Considerable funds have been raised, and the plans are proceeding. They employ an educational worker who has been working with local school children on a 'before



and after project', recording their progress.

David described how there had traditionally been a strong community spirit in Newbiggin, and that it is quite natural for people there to want to do things for themselves and be part of making decisions. However, he felt that some of this spirit had been lost until residents started to be active in projects like this one.

“Seeing their group doing

things for themselves and telling them (the council) rather than the other way round encouraged others to do the same.” He described how this and other voluntary projects in the area have started to give people back a feeling of responsibility for where they live, “...these things don't just happen, it takes volunteers rolling their sleeves up”.

The volunteers aimed from the start to have early dialogue with all local councillors, in order to make it easier later on to get the council backing that they needed, “unblocking blockages” and to give the project credibility. “If you don't work with councillors early on, it's dead easy for a spoke to be put in the wheel later on”.

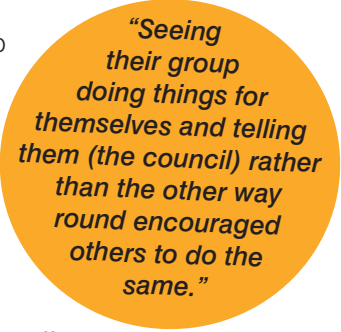
How they got backing by working with their councillors

Getting the support of local councillors enabled them to get support from other councillors in key positions, council officers, the local MP and funders. This backroom support had a 'snowball' effect – people were talking about it at meetings and more and more people got to know about it. The support of local councillors was instrumental in gaining the support of Wansbeck District Council, and then North Northumberland Council when they became a unitary authority.

Councillor support was particularly helpful in gaining planning permission, in addition to being required to get the project approved by NCC Risk Assessment Panel. The project hit a problem when Northumberland County Council identified that the site to be developed was Common Land. Northumberland County Council sought advice from a specialist barrister and under the Commons Act 2006. An application was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by the council with support of Newbiggin Heritage Partnership to build on the Common Land. The application

was approved with costs covered by the council.
“That is something that we couldn’t have afforded to do on our own.”

Councillors’ support was also critical in securing access to local authority funding that they would not have known how to access otherwise, acting as referees on funding bids (for example to CABE), putting them in touch with the right people, and speaking to potential funders on their behalf. As a result of councillor backing, the local authority regeneration team dedicated a member of staff to the project to help with funding bids and to be part of the Project Development Group.



“Seeing their group doing things for themselves and telling them (the council) rather than the other way round encouraged others to do the same.”

David described how they approached getting support from councillors for the project. They worked to build up mutual trust, overcome problems, value support from all parties, and “leave any baggage at the door”. They worked out what was important to the councillors and their agendas. They understood that councillors would be interested in being able to use the project to show what they had done for the community, to get goodwill and good publicity.

They provided councillors with a strong argument for council funding for this project, knowing that there was likely to be pressure for funding to go to other areas. They understood that to support the councillors in return they needed to attend the community forum set up by the council to engage with the community.

David explained his attitude to the fact that councillors could seem to get more kudos and publicity from the project than the volunteers. In his view, as long as the councillors are happy and the project is getting publicity, it doesn’t matter, “It’s a question of getting the most from the relationship.” He also accepted the fact that councillors are bound to seek good publicity, particularly in election time. In his view “no publicity was bad publicity” for the project and that use of the project in election material could just be used at a later date to call on candidates’ support.

Most importantly, David explained that they showed the councillors the value of the project to the area, and that they have a common agenda to improve the community. “They want to help the community. They wouldn’t be councillors if they weren’t interested.”

Blackfriars Settlement Saving a local youth centre

Southwark, London

Who they are

Blackfriars Settlement was founded by women from Oxbridge in 1887 to achieve social change for the poorest communities in Southwark. Now, under Chief Executive Julie Corbett-Bird, it continues to work in the local community to support the efforts and achievements of local people in Southwark.



“They helped us to identify a problem, identify a solution and then pass it on to officers and community organisations.”

Blackfriars Settlement and their councillors – what they did

Southwark is a borough of South London where youth service provision is low and territorial boundaries are important for many young people. In 2007 when Charterhouse in Southwark announced the closure of its popular youth group, this prompted Blackfriars Settlement to get involved. Blackfriars collaborated with councillors, service users and local council officers in an effort to retain this much needed local group.

They did this by working almost daily with the young people who used the centre, built up their trust and made sure they were represented at council meetings and planning sub-groups. Councillors were also keen not to create a situation where yet more local money was going out of an ill-served area and into an area already well-served with youth groups, and wanted to make sure that the youth centre was located in a place convenient for young people.

After discussions with local councillors, they came to the conclusion that the best possible solution was for Blackfriars to take over the youth group. The councillors engaged in dialogue with the young people from Charterhouse to try to aid the succession process. According to Julie, “They helped us to identify a problem, identify a solution and then pass it on to officers and community organisations.”

Blackfriars agreed to take on the costs of running the service, take on staff from the former group where they could, inherit a small proportion of the borough funding, but most importantly made a commitment to continue to deliver the services regardless of the funding, says Julie. “Councillors know us and they were quite resolute they wanted the provision to stay in the area and to get the best outcome in the circumstances.”

8 Community campaigners for change

Community organisations play a lead role in local campaigning, lobbying for change and influencing decisions affecting their area. Sometimes this is reactive – such as campaigning for a service to be maintained, and sometimes it is proactive – such as influencing those who make decisions that affect a local area.

The nature of campaigns is that they have opposing sides which are passionately fought for, and often seek to directly influence council decision-making. Whilst councillors are sometimes wary of supporting campaigns they believe are controversial, where they do agree or public opinion in their ward is clearly in favour of a campaign's goals, many councillors see it as part of their responsibilities to work with the campaign.

Top tips

When working with councillors on campaigns for change in your community:

- A consistent piece of advice given by our interviewees to groups wanting to work with councillors was to get in early – soon after councillors are elected, and early in the stage of the campaign.
- Councillors can be useful in giving a campaign weight and legitimacy, and can help to deliver crucial media coverage.
- While some problems can occur in trying to involve councillors in campaigns (namely dealing with political issues, and with parties potentially taking credit for campaign successes), our interviews have shown that with persistence and good communication, having a councillor involved can significantly increase a campaign's chance of success.

Saving a local nursery in Leicestershire

Albert Village, Leicestershire

Contacting councillors early on in a campaign is a vital way to ensure their interest and participation. Councillors can help both with the legwork of a campaign, and in acting as a link between local people and public bodies.

How the campaign started

On the Leicestershire and Derbyshire border, a group of community activists campaigned successfully to keep open a local nursery. We spoke to Beverley Curry, one of the community organisers leading the campaign.

The local council made the decision to close the last local authority maintained nursery in Leicestershire, which was attached to a local school. Local parents were told by the council that this was due to space and finances, but they also discovered that the local authority was giving money to a private nursery in the area. They did some research and found a government document that said that children

that had gone to local authority maintained nurseries had better outcomes, and that there are linkages with stronger communities and less anti-social behaviour. So they committed themselves to saving the nursery.

“Until you see it first hand, you don’t necessarily realise what an asset councillors are to the community”

As Beverley said, in her view it was a clear case of “the community knows best”.

The parents started meeting regularly, and got in touch with their local councillors from all the parties, gaining considerable support. They found that the councillors who supported them most effectively and passionately were the ones who were residents in the area, including one councillor supporter who had himself attended the school.

The difference local councillors made

Beverley was clear about the difference getting the support of councillors had made to their cause. “Until you see it first hand, you don’t necessarily realise what an asset councillors are to the community... If you want to change something, their doors are open. Get out and ask them, pester them, if you’re not happy with them, ask another

one. If you want to make a change, I think you need to have the backing of your councillor. It does just give you that extra weight and momentum for any campaign”.

Local councillors helped in a variety of ways. They helped the group to collect key information to support the argument to keep the nursery open, such as the official guidance on the distance there should be between parents and their nearest nursery, and the need to factor in the number of new family homes being built in the area. They provided useful insight into the direction they needed to go in, and the people they needed to be in touch with, and how to present their case. Having councillors involved gave them a lot more weight with the people they wanted to influence.



Campaign success

In the end, the community activists were successful in convincing the council to keep the nursery going, and the nursery now makes money that can be invested in the school, and has increased its capacity to take on more children.

Success gives confidence to do more

Following the success of the nursery campaign, they are now campaigning to save their local fire station, which the fire authority proposed closing in order to build a super fire station further away. Local community members were not convinced by the business case put forward, and were concerned about the increased response time due to the local station closing, as well as the loss of community safety activity that the service carries out. So far, they have raised public awareness through the local media and organising activity, such as an election hustings public meeting.

“It amazes me; they’re doing all these things within the community, to get the community to work together. But if they’re taking these things away from the community, such as the nursery and fire station, you’re never going to have community cohesion because there’s no focal point for it.” Beverley Curry.

The campaign is ongoing. Again, at an early stage they contacted all their local councillors, and have gained considerable support through doing so. At a practical level this support has been helpful in overcoming the problems they have experienced getting information from the local authority, and engaging with the fire chief.

Councillors work with the community to keep its post office open

Hertford, East Hertfordshire

In Hertford a group of four councillors joined together with the local postmaster and residents to ensure that the post office in their ward, Bengoe, would not be closed, during a round of Post Office closures.

We spoke to Cllr Peter Ruffles who was clear about the benefits that leading this work brought to both the councillors and the residents.

“It’s given us an opportunity to show that we’re there and ready to work for the community. It’s good to be able to demonstrate our willingness to work.”

Their strategy was to prove that the Post Office was essential to their community before the decision on closures had been taken. Their arguments included highlighting the impact that closure would have on the most deprived neighbourhoods in the county, and on meeting the needs of the growing elderly population. Relevant to this was that although the next nearest post office did not appear to be far, a steep hill made it difficult for elderly residents to get there.

The campaign was largely the initiative of the councillors involved, but they prioritised getting residents and the postmaster involved from day one. “Knowing your community and working with as many people in it as you can is important in instances like this, so we did that”. Cllr Peter Ruffles.

The Post Office had displays, and a well attended public meeting was held at a working men’s club, which was addressed by the postmaster and the local MP. Residents were encouraged to write in support of the Post Office, and the councillors provided template letters to support this.

The outcome of the campaign was that the Bengoe Post Office remained open.

Cllr Ruffles said “I think the overall message is the need for every day contact with people, the ordinary every day nature of contact with your electors, I think is a key to community leadership. If you walk the streets rather than drive through them, for instance, it gives you the opportunity to run into people. This campaign is a good example; because people already knew us they were more comfortable with us”.

“It’s given us an opportunity to show that we’re there and ready to work for the community.”

Lindholme Village Action Group

Lindholme, South Yorkshire

The Lindholme Village Action Group began in May 2009 as a campaign against a planning application from Scottish Power. Although the campaign was unsuccessful, the group continued. Its aim now is to get action taken to deal with infrastructure issues affecting the village.

The village is located on an estate with a prison, and the land and infrastructure are owned and managed by the Ministry of Defence. There have been issues over the maintenance of the land and infrastructure. The MoD are unwilling to pay for the costs of upkeep, and want the villagers to pay half. They are also keen to see villagers take on the management of services, whereas the Lindholme Village Action Group wants local services to be taken on by the local authority. The issue is ongoing.

Councillor involvement has been an important key to the group's formation and continuing work. We interviewed Amanda Lane, one of the Lindholme Village Action Group organisers, who articulated this. "Because we're so young, and none of us have been involved in this sort of activity before, we just didn't know what you had to do. They (the councillors) have been really useful in terms of getting us advice, pointing us in the right direction of who we should be talking to at the council, who you should approach when you've got issues around planning and understanding the whole planning system as well."

Amanda noted that understanding the importance of the political dimension has been an important learning point. "The two councillors we worked with are independents but there were difficulties when it came to getting others involved if they're not wearing the same colour."

Two district councillors have been particularly supportive, coming to the campaign meetings and giving advice on how to approach the local authority, and the group has used them as a source of advice.

Amanda also noted when involving councillors in a community campaign, "just realise they are human beings! You can forget that they've got their own life and family and commitments. To actually turn up every month to a meeting from 7-9 is fantastic!"

9 Supporting community engagement and active citizens

In recent years local councils have placed increasing priority on community consultation, having community representation on decision-making bodies and establishing community or neighbourhood forums. These local forums are used by council officers and councillors to have a dialogue with the public. Similar initiatives have taken place with other public bodies – for example patient forums working with Primary Care Trusts. Some of the council initiatives to engage with communities ask for direct involvement by members of the community in making decisions for their area – such as participatory budgeting schemes.

These new ways of consulting and involving the community vary in how they work, and how effective they are as ways for members of the community to raise concerns and have their views taken into account. When they work well, they can present new opportunities for members of the community wanting to raise issues and influence what happens in their area, and for ward councillors to work alongside members of the community they were elected to represent.

Because of councillors' understanding of their role and mandate, occasionally community consultation and involvement can be met with resistance by local councillors. However, often councillors recognise the importance and will work hard to make sure they know their constituents and that their voices are being heard.

Some of the most effective forums for community consultation are set up independently as a campaign, or in response to a particular situation, and have developed into an independent space that councils recognise as having a legitimate voice and a role in improving consultation and community engagement.

In most areas, voluntary and community groups have played a key role both in participating and in supporting residents, particularly from marginalised groups, to become active in the community.



Top tips

- Come to councillors with the assumption that encouraging active citizenship is mutually beneficial.
- Show how better public consultation improves decision-making.
- Use official consultation forums to have your say if this works for your group.
- Creating independent forums can sometimes be more influential.
- Be clear about the role that the councillor could play – this will differ depending on your project and their interest and availability.
- Dedicated activity is often necessary to involve different sections of the community.

Residents scrutinising planning in Southwark

Southwark, London

Setting up an independent residents' community development group

We spoke to Eileen Conn, co-ordinator of the Bellenden Residents Group, a residents' community development group established eight years ago in Peckham, London. The group helps inform residents in the neighbourhood of a wide range of local planning issues. The residents' group works as an informal network, with an email list of 1,500 local people who have sporadic meetings when planning issues arise. The majority of its work is in alerting residents to planning matters – planning applications, planning enforcement issues, and planning developments. It also encourages residents to use its website.

The group has had varying levels of success over the years, and the most notable successes have generally been the cases that have involved working with a ward councillor.

Building up a long term partnership with councillors

At the last local election four years ago, six new councillors came into office in the two local wards, so the Bellenden Residents Group invited them all to a meeting two weeks after the election. Eileen stresses that this was the key first step in building effective and long-lasting working relationships with their councillors. "Having the encounter so early in the new four year period meant that we were imprinted in their minds as to who we were... after that we began to get in contact by email." Good communication with councillors was seen as key to success in building these relationships. They quickly determined which councillor would be best to contact for specific issues, and tailored their communication so as not to overload all of them with emails and phone calls.

Having the support of local councillors made a difference in a number of ways. It linked the group into the best channels for influencing decision-making, it helped gain more publicity to make the campaigns known to the wider world, it helped to influence the council to improve the scrutiny on planning enforcement, and working with elected representatives has increased the group's democratic authority.

“Each of us knows that what we’re doing is considerably enhanced by the other. We’re all in it together.”

One ward councillor in particular has stood out in the support he has provided. In addition to helping in all of the ways listed, Cllr Gordon Nardell is a planning barrister, and has used his professional expertise to help the group on particular planning issues – for example to save a Victorian house in excellent condition from being demolished and replaced with a block of flats.

“The working relationship that we developed with Cllr Nardell, right across the ward, it’s an equal partnership. It’s really important. None of us stand on our dignity. We are just working partners. It’s as if we are all working together on a team and we all have our different roles. He’s absolutely instrumental in making the connections with key people in the council, as well as giving his support and advice and putting in his objections as the ward councillor.” Eileen Conn

What they’ve achieved

The group has grown significantly in eight years, and has influenced a number of planning decisions and planning enforcement issues. As a result of Eileen’s deputation at the local Community Council meeting (which represents three local wards), a scrutiny review of planning enforcement was conducted by Southwark Council, with support from Cllr Nardell. The Community Council now gets a regular report from council planning officers on all the cases that they are handling in the Community Council area and at what stages the applications are.

“We would have achieved a lot anyway, but it’s just been such a relief being able to work hand in glove with our ward councillor, who we’ve elected. I’ve been a community activist for 35 years and have never had such an easy, effective working relationship with someone who represents my neighbourhood. To me, it’s an ideal example of a working relationship”.

“We’ve developed a human relationship with this ward councillor. There are no barriers. There is no ‘I’m more important than you are; I’m an elected representative’. Each of us knows that what we’re doing is considerably enhanced by the other. We’re all in it together.”

The Hangleton & Knoll Project Inclusive communities

Hangleton & Knoll ward, Hove

Councillors, as former and current volunteers themselves, often have a keen interest in community involvement projects. Establishing shared objectives can make the experience mutually beneficial.

The Hangleton & Knoll Project is a registered charity that was started 27 years ago, with the main objective of increasing participation and improving the lives of Hangleton & Knoll residents. To do this, they support a range of community organisations, and have regular community action meetings, partnering local councillors, service providers, local residents and representatives of local groups.

Activists turned councillor

We spoke to Cllr David Smart, who was actively involved in the Hangleton and Knoll area before he became a councillor – on the committee of the Knoll Community Association, and then as a trustee of the Hangleton & Knoll Project. After becoming a councillor, David continued to work closely with the project. “I’ve always been a community kind of person, and it was from out of that that I became a councillor.”

He described how as a councillor he was able to support the project, promoting the good work of the project (“spreading the gospel”), letting them know about funding opportunities, and encouraging similar work in other areas of the city. He sees his role as “a go-between between the community and the city council... because I think that the community and voluntary sector has a huge importance in the running of a town or city.”

Nicole Monney, Chief Executive of the Hangleton & Knoll Project, believes that councillor involvement has been mutually beneficial. “They’re voted in, so they need to be seen to be active in the community. Our project is very much a part of the community, so I’d say there’s a mutual benefit there. By working with us, they are being involved in the community and working with local residents and there are lots of projects that they can wave the flag for.”

Breaking down barriers to being active in the community

It was raised in the course of the project that membership of the residents' groups was not representative of the different communities in the area. Cllr Smart also noticed during election time in May 2007 that the Bangladeshi community in particular were not generally attending community meetings, and he was concerned that their interests weren't being represented.

Nicole worked with three ward councillors, including Cllr Smart, to set up the Inclusive Communities Project Advisory Group in 2008. The purpose of the group was to talk to residents from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, to identify their needs, and to make sure they were being met, and to facilitate them getting more involved in community activities.

They set up a steering committee and identified that what the communities wanted from the project was help to improve English, gain IT skills, improve health through walking, and make contacts for their families and children. They identified that the main barriers to getting involved were lack of information and time, as well as lack of confidence to go alone, language barriers and not having childcare. They then managed to get funding to set up classes, as well as to train BME community members as group walk leaders. The Multicultural Women's Group, which was established by the steering group, is now fully self sustaining.

On what they had learned, David said "We should have done it earlier!"



The Better Archway Forum

Islington, London

Community campaigns can often lead to successful ongoing community forums. Councils will sometimes come to see the value of independent consultation and forums in improving decision making and community engagement. Being patient and persistent in engaging with the local authority is key.

How it started

The forum came out of a campaign against the redevelopment of Archway Bridge, in Archway, Islington. We talked to Kate Calvert, who helped start the campaign by contacting all the community groups in the area, and arranging a meeting at the local school.

The original objective of the campaign was to stop the demolition of the historical archways, a local landmark, through redevelopment. Since succeeding in this campaign, the Better Archway Forum has carried on, questioning the council and getting residents in the area more involved in local decision-making. Some of their current concerns are around road issues and public rail improvements.

Building support

From the start they sought to involve residents, local organisations, councillors and council officers. Kate's experience was that council officers did not appear to think that community involvement was that necessary, while the councillors seemed more willing to listen. Even so, she said that it took some time, reasonably repeating what they wanted, before they were taken seriously. But eventually they succeeded in convincing some key councillors that the community forum had a worthy cause, and would be valuable to their own work – the knowledge and expertise in the group (local architects, and people who knew about the area and local history) was useful to councillors, and the group helped them to do their job in the community.

Her approach to working with councillors was to “start with the assumption that people generally mean well and that they want to be liked. You have to make it easier for them to work with officers because officers are the ones that make it difficult for councillors to do their job.”

Kate described that through explaining things and being “reasonable and consistent,” and keeping on doing this even when not being listened to, got more councillors on board in the end than becoming openly angry and frustrated would have.

Helping better decision making and better consultation

Kate told us that before the Better Archway Forum began the council employed a firm of research consultants to survey people in the area, who did not visit the area during the consultation. In her view the tick box form did not give people the information they needed to make informed choices, and when people found out that the redevelopment would mean removing the archways, they said 'no'. She believes that the Better Archway Forum has asked people their informed and considered opinion, and then given voice to that.

Kate explained that in her view members of the community can help make better decisions about the area where they live. She views what they do as being very much about local democracy. Islington Council employs thousands of people and there are 40 councillors with other jobs and commitments. The Better Archway Forum can look at documents about development in their area to avert poor decisions being made, like the damage to the archway. They have planned and held focus groups, many forums with influential people, community planning sessions, made contact with the university, and have over 1000 residents on email, and keep everyone up to date with ongoing dialogue.

At their last AGM the councillors thanked them for their advice and help in shaping the redevelopment study, and expressed a wish to continue the relationship.



part**three**

conclusions
and further
information

Conclusions

The case studies in this guide show not only that community groups and activists can accomplish the change they want but also that local councillors are often a key component to achieving this. As councillors are usually actively involved in their communities as volunteers and community activists themselves, they often share the same aims with community groups and can add value as an elected representative and member of the local council.

Local councillors bring a range of skills and experience to the table. For our interviewees, the relationship with councillors provided the following:

- **Formal route to influence the council executive**
- **Informal route to influence – building relationships, providing backroom support**
- **Insight into how council decision-making processes work in practice**
- **Attracting good publicity, knowing how to deal with the media**
- **Signposting to the right people – having contacts, opening doors**
- **Giving weight, credibility**
- **Knowledge from elsewhere to use to build a stronger case**
- **Expertise and experience**
- **Advice about funding – from the local authority, and from elsewhere**

The role that councillors played and their level of involvement varied from place to place. Where both the community organisers and the councillor had a clear understanding of what was expected of the councillor and what they could contribute, the initiative went more smoothly and successfully.

From talking to community activists and councillors, it was clear that councillors involved in successful community campaigns, projects and initiatives had a lot to offer. They also gained from their involvement, and saw it as an important part of their role as a councillor.

There has been a general shift towards greater public accountability and mechanisms to give local people a greater say over decision-making. One of things that community groups hope their local councillors will do is to put issues of importance to their ward on the agenda of the whole council. Making more use of



the ‘Councillor Call for Action’ mechanism could be a way of doing this. For small projects, devolved councillor budgets could allow immediate funding to allow good ideas to be put into practice without delays. And frontline councillors have a vital role to play in strengthening, and giving public access to the process by which services and policies are scrutinised.

Any developing of our local democracy and civil society will need to be based on strengthening the links and mutual learning and co-ordination between community groups and local councillors.

The nature of change and politics is that there are conflicts and differences of opinion. There are also constraints on the amount of time people have, and not everyone can be involved in everything. Clearly not all community groups, or campaigns will get the support of their local councillors, as it is clear that not all groups or residents will agree with each other or be able to work together. But equally true is that there is enormous mutual benefit to community groups and their local councillors working together, demonstrated in the experiences of those active in their communities.

JargonBuster

Community organisers or activists – we have used the terms activist and organiser interchangeably, meaning anyone active in their local community.

Wards – the area that a councillor is elected from. There are on average 23 wards in a local authority area, with around 5500 residents in each.

Frontline councillors - are ward councillors who are not part of the council leadership (the executive). Sometimes referred to as 'back bench' councillors.

Council executive – Some councillors are in executive positions, on the cabinet.

Portfolio – councillors on the cabinet will each have responsibility for a particular area of public policy e.g. education. This is called their 'portfolio'.

Councillor Call for Action – new mechanism for councillors to raise ward issues with the full council.

Local Strategic Partnership – priority setting body run by the local authority, with partners from other public bodies (e.g. police, health), private sector and voluntary and community sector.

Scrutiny – in local authorities this is the process by which council policies and services are monitored by backbench councillors. Scrutiny committees hold hearings, hear evidence and make recommendations.

Representative democracy – used to describe our system of representation, both in terms of councillors being elected to represent wards and being part of the local council, and MPs being elected to Parliament to represent larger areas (constituencies).

Participative democracy – used to describe a system where more citizens are involved in making decisions that affect them, in between voting in elections.

Devolution – means the process of passing down power from above. Used most commonly in the context of giving powers to Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland assemblies. Increasingly used to describe giving power from Parliament to local authorities and from local authorities to the community.

Participatory budgeting – a process of involving local people in making decisions about the spending decisions for a defined public budget.

Civil society – all voluntary and social organisations and activity that makes up society, which is distinct from the state, government and the private sector.

Useful Links

Calling for change: the evidence for supporting community voices to speak out (bassac)

www.bassac.org.uk/node/218

bassac research, published in 2007, exploring the advocacy role of community anchors.

Councillor Call for Action – guidance and information

www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=9410176

Councillor's Guide 2010-11

www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=18636476

Councillor in the Community

www.councillorinthecommunity.org/

A website created by Involve, public participation specialists (www.involve.org.uk). It includes a number of resources for councillors to maximise their influence and leadership potential, with special emphasis on crime and policy, and health.

Finding your voice: Influencing with integrity

www.bassac.org.uk

Step-by-step approach to analysing what voice work you do and how effective it is.

Handy guide to LAAs (Urban Forum)

www.urbanforum.org.uk/handy-guides/handy-guide-to-laas

Local Area Agreements, or LAAs, are now a central part of the design and delivery of public services in all local areas. LAAs are the action plan for priorities and improvements that will be made in an area in the future. With LAAs being such an important part of local public service delivery, it is essential that voluntary and community groups understand and engage with them. This Handy Guide explains everything you need to know about LAAs - what they are, how they work and how you can influence them.

Handy guide to LSPs (Urban Forum)

www.urbanforum.org.uk/handy-guides/the-lsp-guide

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are an increasingly important local body, responsible for co-ordinating local partnership working and taking forward the vision for an area. With decisions being devolved further to local areas, LSPs are critical to understand and engage with. This Handy Guide, now in its 3rd edition, gives you all the basic facts you need to know about LSPs.

How Your Council Works: A Handy Guide for Community Groups (Urban Forum)

www.urbanforum.org.uk/handy-guides/how-your-council-works-%96-a-handy-guide-for-community-groups

Do you need to work with you local council but are not sure where to start? Have you or your community group been unable to find a handy guide to how councils work? Well now just such a guide has been published.

Urban Forum and NAVCA, together with the National Empowerment Partnership and IDeA, have published

Improving Local Partnerships (NAVCA)

www.navca.org.uk/localvs/infobank/ilpunews/jrfcitizeninvolvement.htm

Various guides on how local decision making works and how to influence it

Inspiring Democracy: Exploring the role of community anchors (Bassac)

bassac.org.uk/dms/list/139

The literature review looks at the challenges facing elective and participatory democracy in the UK under New Labour and the ways that these challenges can be balanced and addressed through engagement between councillors and community anchor leaders.

Leading Lights: Research into councillors and third sector representatives in community leadership

www.urbanforum.org.uk/research-reports/leading-lights-research-into-councillors-and-third-sector-representatives-in-community-leadership

The report presents research findings exploring the roles of councillors and third sector representatives in community leadership. The report includes recommendations to strengthen relationships between the two groups to address the major differences in perception that exist.

The Participatory Budgeting Unit

www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/

The Participatory Budgeting Unit is a project of the charity Church Action on Poverty. Their website is a resource for public bodies and community organisations looking to develop participatory budgeting processes/programmes, and contains xyz.

People and Participation

www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Involve/Home

Another website run by Involve, full of practical information about involving people. Includes numerous case studies, methods of participation and a participation process planner.

Planning Aid

www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk/

Planning Aid provides free, independent and professional town planning advice and support to communities and individuals who cannot afford to pay planning consultant fees. It complements the work of local planning authorities, but is wholly independent of them.

Quick guide to the Duty to Involve (Urban Forum)

www.urbanforum.org.uk/briefings/duty-to-involve-a-quick-guide

A quick overview of the duty, its legal and political background and some involvement techniques.

Raising your voice: Reclaiming the radical

www.bassac.org.uk

bassac tool to develop your organisational or individual skills and confidence to put voice strategy into practice.

Social Justice for Communities: the bassac challenge to policymakers

www.bassac.org.uk/node/815

bassac's vision is that citizens and local organisations are able to influence change in their neighbourhoods, which is positive, enduring and innovative. 'Social Justice for Communities: the bassac challenge to policymakers' asks national government to support three fundamental and interlinked policy objectives that will help bassac members deliver social justice.

Voice: An Introduction to Axis of Influence (Bassac)

www.bassac.org.uk/dms/list/139

A series of four information sheets, each addressing a particular question around Voice. They are aimed at organisations working with the Voice framework and facilitators supporting those organisations.

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LocalAction

The Handy Guide for communities
working with councillors

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