

**Tradition, Management, Democracy and Governance in
Scottish Local Government 1996-2008**

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This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has lead to the award of a degree

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the changing nature of Scottish local government between 1996 and 2008. It does so by employing four analytical perspectives (traditional municipal, managerial, democratic and governance). It utilises longitudinal data gained in three case study sites: Fife, Stirling and Highland Councils. The empirical data on which the study is based was gathered between 1996 and 2008 in the three councils. The broad argument of the thesis is that each of these analytical perspectives contributes to an understanding of Scottish local government. However, the managerial, democratic and governance perspectives tend to over-state the degree of change which has occurred. The language of analysis underpinning them would suggest that local government in Scotland, like England, has been transformed by the catalogue of policy interventions and initiatives that have taken place since 1979. Indeed some have gone as far as suggesting 'the demise of traditional local government' in England (Wilson and Stoker 2004: 248). This thesis suggests that Scotland is different and that an understanding of how Scottish local government operates still requires knowledge of the institutional structures associated with traditional municipal local government. Despite three decades of reform, the traditional municipal interpretation of local government retains resonance in Scotland. The new insights gleaned from managerial, democratic and governance perspectives have not fundamentally undermined the traditional local government framework of analysis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: The Research Approach

The Research Context

The nature of democracy, politics and local government in Scotland has changed in the past few decades. This study seeks to describe, analyse and understand the changing nature of Scottish local government since reorganisation in 1995/96. It does so by employing existing analytical perspectives and applying them to aid our understanding of developments in Scottish local government. It utilises longitudinal data gained in three case study sites: Fife, Stirling and Highland Councils. The initial research was undertaken in the immediate post- reorganisation period between 1996 and 1998. This was supplemented in 2008 with a series of follow-up interviews in each of the councils.

On 1 April 1996 Fife, Stirling and Highland were three of the 29 new local councils that took over all of the functions of the previous 53 district and nine regional councils in mainland Scotland. The new structure replaced the two-tier region/district structure that had been created by the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

Like many policy changes in Scottish politics at that time the origins of this change can be traced to events in and around Westminster and Whitehall. The origins of local government reorganisation are linked to the failure of the poll tax in the late 1980s and the appointment of Michael Heseltine as Secretary of State in the Department of Environment in England and Wales in 1990. His brief to establish an alternative to the poll tax brought the issue of structural reform in local government reorganisation in England on to the policy agenda. It was not long after this that the issues emerged on the policy

agenda of the Scottish Office. This 'story' of policy development was not altogether uncommon pre-devolution with the Scottish Office often responding to policy initiatives south of the border (see Midwinter et al 1991).

The Scottish Office published a series of papers (Scottish Office 1991, 1992, 1993) outlining the case for reform. Although widely criticised at the time (see for example Midwinter 1993) the reorganisation proceeded, largely because of the unilateral policymaking approach adopted by the Scottish Office. This was in contrast to its counterpart in England, the Department of Environment, which established a Local Government Commission. The Scottish Office, controlled by the Conservative Party, was able to push its legislation through Parliament largely unhindered.

The councillors for these new local authorities were elected on 6 April 1995 in order that, during what was termed the shadow year, chief officers could be appointed and management structures could be put in place for the new local authorities. The initial fieldwork for this thesis took place in the three councils between 1996 and 1998. The focus of the research was on how the new councils were approaching the organisation, administration, management and democratic aspects of their changing role.

This thesis examines what has happened in these councils post-reorganisation. The empirical material that informs this analysis is derived from case study material generated in fieldwork visits to the three councils – Fife, Highland and Stirling. Whilst not necessarily representative of Scottish local government as a whole, the data gathered from these councils will provide insight into the changing nature of local government in Scotland.

The implicit assumption underpinning this work is that local councils are important political organisations. Local authorities tend to be viewed as lower-tier administrative bodies that undertake statutory functions in the delivery of public services locally. Seldom does local government capture the media headlines (Post-devolution this has become even more the case with the Scottish Parliament dominating media attention). This is despite the fact that local councils are actually central to answering key questions of politics – who gets what, when and how? (see Laswell 1936 for more on this classic definition of politics). Many public services are delivered by local authorities. There are other organisations such as National Health Service (NHS) Trusts, Local Enterprise Companies (LECs), registered social landlords (RSLs), partnerships, voluntary agencies, charitable companies and the private sector. New analysis of local government in the 1990s suggested that its traditional role has been diminished by the increasing use of these new service delivery mechanisms (see for example Stewart and Stoker 1989; Stewart and Stoker 1995; Stoker 1999; Stoker 2000; Stoker and Wilson 2004; Stoker 2004). Amongst other things, this thesis examines the validity of these suggestions.

A New Dawn for Scottish Local Government?

The rhetoric surrounding the establishment of the new local councils was dominated by notions of a new dawn for local government in Scotland. The 1995/96 reorganisation was the second time Scottish local government had been reorganised in the space of just over two decades. Prior to the implementation of the previous 1975 reorganisation the new authorities had a blueprint to guide them in the design of their political, organisational and management structures, in the form of the Paterson Report (1973). In 1995 no

such guidance was available. Attempting to fill this gap, the Scottish Branch of *The Society for Local Authority Chief Executives* (SOLACE) produced a document entitled *The New Management Agenda*. The received opinion, judged from this document, appeared to be that there existed an opportunity for Scottish local authorities to 'catch up' with councils in England in terms of the application of new organisational structures:

Local government is changing rapidly with all sorts of pressures making it a different place. Reorganisation provides a unique opportunity to build local authorities geared up to the late 1990s ... There is an opportunity to be bold and imaginative and to really produce something which is suited to the needs of the second half of the decade. (SOLACE 1994)

This document suggested that the new authorities had an opportunity to experiment with new organisational and managerial methods of working. This made it an area ripe for research.

The Research Approach

This thesis is explicitly focused on the internal dynamics, structure and operations of local government on the officer side. The party political side, although not ignored, is not where the spotlight of this research shines.

The study is located in what is usually termed the public administration sub-discipline of political science. Gains has noted that the literature on local government does not 'reflect the numerical scale, financial cost or policy impact of local government officers' (2004: 92), with most studies concentrating on elected representatives and parties (e.g. Copus 1999; Chandler 2001; Wilson and Game 2002; Stewart 2003). However, this thesis

maintains that the organisational and managerial details of how a council organises itself, and the issues raised by structures, are fundamentally important in respect of the political and power dynamics of a local council.

In the opening line of his book on Scottish local government, McConnell argues that, 'Any understanding of local government in Scotland needs to recognise the defining characteristics of local government and the role it performs' (McConnell 2004: 5). This thesis does this through employing four alternative analytical perspectives which all have something to say, at least implicitly, about the basic functions of local government. In essence this thesis suggests that some existing accounts of local government contain sets of assumptions that form particular schools of thought that inform analysis .

These perspectives can be viewed as alternative conceptual lenses through which to understand local government. Paraphrasing Dowding, a conceptual lens can be viewed as, 'a description of a situation which picks out certain features which are important to understanding that situation' (1994: 112). Each lens can be associated with a particular perspective; and each is based on assumptions and suppositions that inform how local government is perceived and interpreted. Each conceptual lens provides a way of arranging the often confusing and contradictory pieces of a jigsaw of the social world into a pattern which makes 'sense'. As Stoker notes they are, 'representations or stylised, simplified pictures of reality. They identify important components of a system and provide a broad language and the form of reference in which reality can be examined' (1995a: 17-18).

All four perspectives raise different elements as the main objects for the study of local government by raising different issues for consideration. The

different focus of each one results in different empirical or factual material being used as supporting evidence. By using alternative perspectives it is acknowledged that the study of politics is bound to be partial and this makes the adoption of particular perspectives necessary. The identification of four perspectives reflects the lack of a dominant paradigm (Kuhn 1962).

Skocpol (2003) refers to the 'double engagement' of social science – academic theories and methods contribute to 'real world' debates. Analytical frameworks often they serve not only as tools of description, understanding and explanation but also as tools of prescription i.e. they are also normative theories of local government. This is evident in the duality of writings which can lurch between evidence and prescription. Interestingly, as well as perspectives used by academics to analyse local government, there is clear evidence of each connecting to practice and analysis within local councils. This highlights the often wafer-thin dividing line which has tended to exist between objective academic analysis of local government and its actual practice. Indeed, one could argue that the divide is almost non-existent with academics often playing the dual role of both observer and participant in local government politics. Academic authors such as John Stewart, Gerry Stoker, David Wilson, Chris Game and Arthur Midwinter have, as well as describing local government also play roles in its actual practice acting as central and local government policy advisors.

It should also be noted that the perspectives are neither exclusive nor comprehensive. However, for the purposes of this thesis they represent an interpretation of existing literature of local government and how it has tended to organise itself. An outline of these analytical frameworks is a useful way of capturing contemporary political, academic and practitioner local

government analysis. They seek to capture the most dominant conceptual approaches that have been advanced to understand local government in the UK. Four organising perspectives are identified:

- Traditional municipal.
- Management.
- Democratic.
- Governance.

Instead of adopting a single conceptual framework, these alternative approaches are examined serially. The argument, and approach, underlying this thesis is that there are a variety of interpretations capable of providing coherent explanations of changing policy and practice in local government. Sometimes the basis of such interpretations is made explicit, at other times it is implicit.

This chapter as well as outlining the research context will also elaborate on the formal methodology employed and the essence of each of these four conceptual approaches. Before providing an overview of these perspectives it is useful to clarify both the thinking behind and the methodology used in this thesis.

The Research Rationale

A writer may try his best to draw a map of how things are, that will be equally valid for all; but all he can really do is to paint a picture of what he sees from the unique and transient viewpoint which is his alone. (Vickers 1970)

Vickers' statement reflects the basis of the approach adopted in this work. Rather than seek to draw a map of 'how things are' this study seeks to utilise existing analytical perspectives in local government to present alternative interpretations of the empirical 'evidence'.

As a philosophical starting point this study rejects the notion that there is a political world out there waiting to be discovered which is independent of our beliefs, values and tools of understanding. In other words the notion that there is truth out there waiting to be discovered on the basis of pure reason or experience is rejected (see Bevir and Rhodes 2005: 3 who adopt a similar philosophical starting point). Possibly the best summary of this starting point is in the quote from Collingwood cited by Bevir and Rhodes (2005: 3): knowledge is '*created, not discovered, because evidence is not evidence until it makes something evident*' (Collingwood 1965: 99, emphasis in original).

The accounts given here of the different perspectives may not necessarily be shared by authors who have been ascribed to one particular school. In a sense they represent a unique and transient interpretation of each analytical framework. However, in presenting the alternatives a much more comprehensive picture of changes in Scottish local government emerges for the reader.

The approach adopted here reflects an explicit acceptance of the relativist notion that the story of politics, in whatever arena, can be told in many different ways. None of them are inherently true or false. The political science literature is littered with concepts and metaphors. For example if we consider the concept of policy and its study numerous suffixes have been used to refer to its conceptualisation: 'communities' (e.g. Jordan and Ricardson 1987), 'networks' (e.g. Marsh and Rhodes 1992), 'cycles' (e.g.

Hogwood and Gunn 1984), 'streams', 'windows' (Kingdon 1984), and 'stages' (Hogwood 1987), to name but a few. In outlining alternative accounts of local government the influence of unrecognised assumptions will become apparent. Four alternative analytical perspectives are examined that offer contrasting frames of reference through which to view Scottish local government.

As noted above each perspective is not unlike the 'conceptual lens' Allison utilised in his seminal work on the Cuban missile crisis. In this book he argues that:

By comparing and contrasting three frameworks, we see what each magnifies, highlights, and reveals as well as what each blurs or neglects. (Allison 1971: v)

The rationale behind the structure of this thesis reflects that all explanation in politics must of necessity be grounded in theory and reveals a frustration that many theoretical explanations tend to exaggerate the influence of certain factors to the neglect of others, often resulting in only partially convincing analysis. By assessing the relative merits, heuristic qualities and contrasts of four alternative modes of analysis a more rounded account of local government in Scotland can be given.

Allison is not alone in noting such an approach as useful in political science – Dunleavy (1980) and Rhodes (1997) also suggest this as a potential fruitful research strategy. Rhodes (1991) suggested that public administration as a discipline is multi-theoretic and one characterised by methodological pluralism. Citing Reed he notes:

A growing realisation that epistemological uncertainty, theoretical plurality and methodological diversity do not necessarily entail a terminal drift towards a disordered field of study characterised by total disarray over philosophical fundamentals, substantive problematic and conceptual frameworks. Indeed it is the lines of debate that are initiated and developed by different modes of inquiry that hold the field together as a reasonably coherent intellectual practice. (Reed 1993: 176)

Dunleavy, in a similar vein, argued that research, 'should draw on several or all of the theories relevant to the empirical questions examined, using them as sources of competing hypotheses and interpretations to guide the research' (1980: 131) (see also Benyon and Solomos 1986; Davis 1988; John 1998). Hence in this thesis, implicit assumptions behind each conceptual framework are clarified and made explicit. This multi-theoretic approach allows critical engagement with alternative theories. As Rhodes asserts, 'No one theory is ever true, it is only more or less instructive. You can learn more from a comparative political assessment of several theories when they are brought to bear on a single topic' (Rhodes 1995: 56).

By clearly elaborating the basis of each analytical framework the foundations of each 'explanation' will be made explicit to the reader. Moreover, this approach seeks to avoid the problem of not specifying the assumptions and suppositions that inform each approach. As Vickers (1970) notes, there is no such thing as an impartial, objective social scientist who can approach his or her field of study with a blank sheet of paper waiting to be written upon. In all science, knowledge is never positive (Kuhn 1962) and irrefutable (Popper 1964). The assumption underpinning this study is that the study of local government can be, and is, studied using a variety of methods and approaches.

A sceptical note on this could be that it reflects the 'divided and aimless' nature of public administration in the 1990s (Chandler 1991: 45). However, Rhodes' (1995) more positive assessment of the state of the discipline is more accurate - he points towards the rich eclecticism of theoretical frames of reference as evidence of those arguing that public administration, 'must develop an explicitly theoretical approach, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of several theories'. Citing Hood (1990b) he suggests, 'comparison, juxtaposition and synthesis of different ways of understanding ... patterns of public service provision', going on to predict that the discipline's future 'will depend on: a multi-theoretic approach (and) methodological pluralism' (Rhodes 1995: 124).

Scientists, no matter their branch of study, never have unmediated access to the phenomena they are studying. What they do is use concepts, theories, and frameworks to interpret experience. Their view of the world is thus heavily dependent on the initial assumptions on which these theories are based. Morgan (1986) has shown that how you view organisations – be it 'machines', 'organisms' or 'psychic prisons' – influences the sort of evidence you look for in research. Thus far from being neutral and objective as this model of science suggests you are biased and partial.

It is for this reason that this thesis argues that no one perspective can capture or explain the complexity which surrounds Scottish local government today. No one perspective could do justice to the variety, complexity and richness of the changes taking place in local government.

In essence this thesis suggests that some existing accounts of local government contain sets of assumptions that form particular schools of thought that inform analysis (chapters three to six will outline this literature).

The thesis then seeks to highlight these assumptions through a series of hypotheses at the end of each of the 'theory' chapters. Then, whilst acknowledging the philosophical starting point that there is no absolute irrefutable positive knowledge 'out there' waiting to be discovered, the contemporary relevance of each analytical framework is tested against the empirical data collected in the three case study councils.

The perspectives on the practice of local government outlined here do not exist independently from actors in local government. Writing on 'traditions' Bevir and Rhodes note:

We must not claim an existence for them independent of the beliefs and actions of individuals. Traditions are not fixed entities. They are not given, sat in a philological zoo, waiting for people to discover them. They are contingent, produced by the actions of individuals. (2003: 33)

The contention of this thesis is that these traditions become embedded in social interactions and underpin the basis of the beliefs that become reflected in the behaviour of actors within local councils. The traditional municipal view is reflected in the actions of local government officers who reference their professionalism, political neutrality and accountability to the elected chamber as the rationale for their behaviour. The new public management perspective is reflected in managerial codes of practice and operating procedures and the ideology of 'managerialism' subscribed to by some in local government. The local democratic view is reflected in an appeal to the democratic basis of local councils and the belief in the virtue of representative, participatory and deliberative democracy. The newer local governance perspective is reflected in today's orthodox views about the utility of partnerships and networks in the delivery of public services.

The Research Methodology

The approach adopted here is not what could be termed 'a comparative case study approach'. The data draws from each of the councils (Fife, Highland, Stirling); and, although comparisons are drawn, the data is considered as one body of evidence rather than three. This approach fits with Carmichael's observation that, although case studies are subject to charges of atypicality, if the concept of 'locality' is to be understood, then a degree of atypicality in our choice of local councils to study is not only inevitable but desirable (Carmichael 1994: 250). In Scottish local government a representative 'sample' is not possible such is the distinctiveness of many councils. A study of all 32 councils, however, was not possible or practical.

The utilisation of three case study sites also helps avoid the well-documented pitfalls of the single case study method (see Mackie and Marsh 1995: 177-183). The case study method is utilised here without apology. It is seen as an accepted research method within the wider political science community, and has tended to be contrasted in negative terms with the more sophisticated quantitative methodologies 'modern' political scientists have utilised. However, it has been both propounded and defended many times (see for example Lijphart 1971; Rhodes 1994; Yin 1984, 1993). Forty-five years ago (at the height of the behavioural revolution in social sciences), Theodore Lowi was declaring 'case studies of the policy-making process constitute one of the more important methods of political science analysis' (1964: 677). This remains the case.

This is not to argue that the case study method is not without its potential pitfalls. Without sampling there is the danger that a 'deviant' case study site could be selected. The utilisation of three sites with selection based on an elite census of all Scottish local authority chief executives mitigates this potential problem.

The data collection for the thesis was undertaken with each of the analytical perspectives, outlined below, in mind. The starting point for the study was a census of all 32 new local authority chief executives in 1995. Each was asked the simple, straightforward question of which councils (up to three) they thought would be the most innovative. In social scientific terms this technique for case study selection was adopting Floyd Hunter's oft-criticised (1953) reputational methodology. However, this was viewed as a suitable starting point for analysis. It was used solely for the *selection* of the case study sites and the thesis makes no definitive claim that these three councils were, or are, the most innovative in Scotland. Moreover, it should be noted that, although often criticised, the reputational methodology continues to be utilised in political science – see, for example John (1998) and Harding (1999). For the purposes of this research, it was viewed as a useful starting point.

The responses to this survey were utilised for the selection of appropriate case study sites. In the case study sites a wide range of social science quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used – a questionnaire of Highland community councils, participant observation at council meetings (area forums (Stirling), Civic Assembly (Stirling), council committee (Highland), citizen conference (Fife)), interviews with both community councillors, voluntary sector agencies, councillors, and both strategic and operational level managers. In total 56 council officers, community

councillors, councillors and stakeholders were interviewed – some more than once (see Appendix A for a full list of interviewees). In order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, codes (rather than names) have been used. Each council has been labelled A, B or C. Each interviewee has been given a number and the year they were interviewed added to the code. For example an officer in Fife Council interviewed in 1998 may be cited as (B16 1998).

In total over seventy interviews were conducted over a period spanning eleven years. The aim in all of these interviews was to ‘generate data which gave an authentic insight into people’s experiences’ (Silverman 1993: 91). The interviews were semi-structured and conducted face-to-face. The interviews form the main basis for the empirical data chapters. Interviewees were selected from senior officers in each of the case study councils. They were selected on the basis of accessibility and the ‘closeness’ of their roles to key management/democratic/governance reforms being initiated by the council. To avoid potential bias the officers were selected from as broad a spread of the council’s services as possible and from different geographical offices in the council’s boundary i.e. there was an explicit effort to go beyond ‘head office’.

The validity and reliability of the interview data was checked by cross-referencing and checking the accounts of other interviewees, as well as archive materials and other documentary evidence. This is what sociologists would refer to as methodological triangulation – to check the accuracy and consistency of data (see Harvey and MacDonald 1993)

Interpretation

The approach adopted here is best labelled an 'interpretive approach' to local government. The assumption underpinning the dissertation is that analytical perspectives guide political research. These tend to be narrative forms of explanation:

We account for actions, practices and institutions by telling a story about how they came to be as they are and perhaps also about how they are preserved. (Bevir and Rhodes 2002: 134)

These maps, questions and language of each perspective prefigure and encode different stories in distinctive ways (Bevir and Rhodes 2002: 148). Rather than studying individual beliefs, ideas and discourses the approach adopted in this thesis is to outline alternative interpretations of local government. If interpretive theory is accepted as an approach that is opposed to positivism, then this study is 'interpretive'.

The perspectives used in this thesis serve as heuristic tools that are utilised to categorise the data and help reduce the complexity of the data analysis phase of research. The process adopted here follows Spender's (1989) outline:

A research project is not a haphazard gathering of facts in the hope of finding something worth remarking on. Research begins and ends with ideas. There are some initial ideas - hypotheses - and some final ideas - conclusions. The purpose of an empirical test is to see whether this set of ideas holds together when confronted with reality. (Spender 1989: 183)

Spender (1989) also outlines a theory – which is of some significance for this thesis – of how managers search for 'recipes' to act as codes for management

and governance within their particular industries. These recipes become codes for action, they help to resolve uncertainties at a group level and gradually evolves as an accepted and shared rationality in organisations. Each interpretation outlined here is, to a degree, a shared rationality about local government.

In this study the senior officers of each council were important in shaping the nature of change in each council. These officers, whose jobs – particularly during the reorganisation transitional period – were dominated by so much uncertainty, were reliant on certain codes of practice which dominated their particular domain. Drawing on the work of Spender (1989), it could be hypothesized that local government managers would search for ‘recipes’ of management and governance (Spender argued private sector managers are similarly reliant on codes within their particular industries).

In local government at the time of reorganisation council leaders and chief executives were working within a transitional and uncertain environment. Because of their imperfect knowledge they were forced to rely on well-known ‘recipes’ commonly found in similar organisations. These ‘recipes’ were disseminated by organisations such as the Scottish Branch of the Society for Chief Executive Officers, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Local Government Information Unit and public sector management consultants.

These recipes are similar to paradigms of knowledge which exist within a particular organisational field. They are the accepted models of organisational structure which provide the basis within which adaptations are made. They guide managers who face uncertain environments. For Spender recipes are,

'incomplete, ambiguous and in need of interpretation before it can be used as a guide to the firm's action even within its own rationality' (1989: 7). A recipe is not a theory and is 'advisory rather than prescriptive' (1989: 9).

Spender's idea builds upon the work of Schutz (1944). He saw discrete bodies of context-orientated understanding into which the individual must be socialised if she is to meet her fellows expectations and so form part of any organisation. He called these 'recipes' of everyday life (1989: 60). A recipe, for Spender, is a guide to action which resolves uncertainties at a group level, and evolves as an accepted and shared rationality. In the local government context, a good example of a recipe is professional assumptions – 'the shared knowledge-base that those socialised into an industry take as familiar professional common sense' (Spender 1989: 69). According to Spender:

managers do not seek support that is substantive, detailed or prescriptive, a specific formula which tells them precisely what to do ... managers adopt a way of looking at their situations that is widely shared within their industry. I call this pattern of judgements the industry's 'recipe'. I argue that the recipe is an unintended consequence of managers' need to communicate, because of their uncertainties, by word and example within the industry. The recipe develops as a context and experience bound synthesis of the knowledge the industry considers managers need to have in order to acquire an adequate conceptual grasp of their firms. (1989: 188)

For Spender, the recipes and the ideas which inform managers are not new. In the real world, 'the entrepreneurial manager discovers, copies, creates and manipulates information and ideas' (1989: 37). The idea of recipes is that they inform the rationality of individual approaches, however as Spender correctly argues 'we must recognise that when we look behind peoples rationality we see interests rather than logical arguments' (1989: 40). The structures of the new Scottish councils inevitably reflect their own internal political and power

dynamics. A notable feature of each of the councils examined in this research is that, although each proclaimed itself as decentralised, all three retained a strong central core around the office of the chief executive. It was clear that each chief executive shaped their organisations - or as Dunleavy (1991c) referred to them 'bureaus' - in order to retain key strategic tasks within their domain. Operational matters tended to be kept at arms length, or in some cases, decentralised parts of the council.

The Analytical Perspectives

The methods of enquiry used to study local government are usually informed and underpinned by certain features that are deemed more important than others. In reality all explanation in social science demands that certain assumptions are made. As Allison notes:

Conceptual models not only fix the mesh of the nets that the analyst drags through the material in order to explain a particular action; they also direct him you cast his nets in select ponds, at certain depths, in order to catch the fish he is after. (1971: 4)

The structure of the dissertation reflects Allison's method of inquiry. Four of the chapters outline the frames of reference (or analytical perspectives).

Each of the chapters uses one perspective to outline its interpretation of local government in Scotland. By addressing the data from each analytical perspective in chapters 6 to 10 each one will be used to uncover alternative insights and alternative lines of analysis. These chapters will also demonstrate how 'alternative conceptual lenses lead one to see, emphasise, and worry about quite different aspects of events' (Allison 1971:v).

In summary, this thesis employs four alternative analytical frameworks on Scottish local government. It adopts an unashamedly pluralist view of how political science can be conducted viewing the discipline as 'a broad church with different starting points and concerns but a shared commitment to developing a better understanding of politics' (Marsh and Stoker 2002: 4).

Outlined below are four basic outlines of each perspective. These introduce each perspective. The perspectives used here are the 'analytical toolkits' (Biggs and Dunleavy 1995) used to inform the subsequent discussion and analysis of data gained during the fieldwork 'stage' of the research. They are akin to 'organising perspectives' identified by Gamble (1990). According to Gamble these precede theory and provide 'a map of how things relate, a set of research questions' (1990: 405). The four utilised are:

- *Traditional Municipal.* The first analytical framework used here is the 'traditional municipal' one. It is the most long-standing one and is one that outlines key features of local government. It takes both the history and the legislative framework of local government seriously and acknowledges the influence of both on contemporary local government structure and operations. The traditional municipal analytical framework is close to what is usually termed an institutional approach. It takes institutions seriously. As Oakeshott notes:

political institutions express particular choices about how political relationships ought to be shaped; they are in the nature of continuing injunctions to members of a society that they should try to conduct themselves in specific ways when engaged in the pursuit of political ends. This is to define political institutions as necessarily containing a normative element. (cited in Rhodes 1995: 47)

- *Managerial.* The second framework is labelled 'managerial' and focuses on the management aspects of recent changes in local government. In the 1980s and 1990s managerial conceptions of local government were dominated by the influence of what has been termed new public management (NPM). A 'definition' (or perhaps more properly an 'interpretation') of NPM is outlined in chapter 4. Developments such as performance-orientated reforms, organisational decentralisation, outsourcing and public-private partnerships are deemed important new features of local government. The focus is very much on local government and how it goes about delivering public services.
- *Democratic.* The third framework eschews a focus on local public administration in favour of a focus on local democracy. It focuses on the democratic dimensions of local government's role. It is democracy rather than management that is seen as the driving force of local governmental change in Scotland. The reform of local government, rather than being a process driven by managerial considerations, is driven by democratic criteria.
- *Governance.* The final perspective is 'local governance'. This perspective is one that, at least within political science, has almost gained the status of orthodoxy in analysing recent structural change in local government. An *Economic and Social Science Research Council* (ESRC) programme in the 1990s placed heavy emphasis on the concept of governance through which local institutional change could be explored. Local governance starts with the assumption that local governments cannot govern alone. They are, by necessity, reliant on others to govern. The local governance perspective focuses attention

on the processes of intra and inter-institutional dynamics and bargaining. The governance perspective emphasises that there is no clear distinction between the 'public' and 'private' realms. Interdependency, messiness and fuzziness characterise relationships in the field of the public and private sector. It is for this reason that the term 'governance' has gained such popular currency: it captures succinctly the changes that have taken place. This line of analysis moves the focus away from the actors or institutions of government to an emphasis on wider civic society, in which the private and voluntary sector are important.

To summarise, the traditional municipal view emphasises the relevance of historical inheritance and the statutory framework that governs local councils. The managerial perspective emphasises the management dimensions of recent local government reform and the influence of NPM. The democratic perspective, emphasises that local government reforms have been inspired by democratic concerns and were followed by more democratic innovation and renewal. The governance narrative extends analysis beyond the traditional institutions of government, and widens the focus to include the changing methods of service delivery in the Scottish public sector.

The plurality of analytical perspectives used in this study will be used to generate alternative insights into the changing nature of local government in Scotland. Each perspective asks and answers different questions of recent developments in Scottish politics. What are the implications for public management and administration? What will be the impact of democracy? Who was responsible for instigating the changes and how constrained were

they? What impact have the reforms had on institutions beyond traditional local government?

The traditional municipal perspective asks questions about the impact of the legacy of existing modes of operation in local government. Is local government moving away from bureaucratic and hierarchical forms of organisation? Are existing codes of accountability being challenged with new forms of accountability emerging?

The managerial perspective asks how the reforms have changed the practice of public management in Scottish local government? Does the public sector remain distinct from the private sector? Are new managerial techniques being pursued across local government in Scotland?

The democratic analytical framework asks questions concerning the changing nature and practice of local democracy? Are unitary local councils re-engaging with communities in new ways? Has the reorganisation resulted in an injection of new democratic practice in Scottish local government?

The governance school asks questions about the impact of a wider set of actors in the political process. Were networks of key actors responsible for the germination and dissemination of key ideas? What was the role of groups and institutions out-with the traditional institutions of government?

In employing four alternative analytical perspectives more fruitful conclusions will be generated than would be generated by a mono-focal framework. As Reich notes, to begin with the wrong set of questions is to start building a conceptual prison (1998: 31). In social (and indeed natural)

science the research questions asked are almost as important as the questions gained, if not even more so.

By adopting alternative conceptualisations the possibility of being imprisoned in only one approach is lessened. A critic may say that the analysis here merely offers four conceptual prisons instead of one but it will be shown that it offers more than simply the sum of its four parts. The four perspectives seek to broaden and enrich understanding of recent developments in Scottish local government.

As noted above, the approach of utilising alternative explanatory perspectives adopted here is not original. The present study's originality however stems from three factors. First, the use of four alternative frames of reference. Whilst all have been employed by some authors they have never been used together. Second, there is no analysis of Scottish local government that has adopted such a multi-theoretical framework. Third, a new body of empirical data will be reported based on extensive fieldwork in three Scottish local authorities.

What is the research seeking to achieve?

In utilising this approach the thesis seeks to achieve various objectives. First, to provide an account of change in Scottish local government since 1996. Second, to present conceptually informed analysis of those changes. Third, to emphasise that there is not some 'truth' about Scottish local government 'out there' waiting to be discovered. How local government is theorised and conceptualised is important in both the research questions we ask and the answers gained. Analytical perspectives can be seen as non-competitive

alternatives for use simultaneously rather than exclusively, as it is unlikely one can be telling the whole 'truth'.

This research will thus not seek to generate or formulate laws (at least not under the normal scientific criteria of testability). It does however seek to answer a number of research questions that stem from each analytical framework. Do the maps of local government each perspective points towards help clarify our understanding of changes in contemporary Scottish local government? Are the hypotheses that stem from their frame of reference supported by the empirical data collected?

At a broad level the thesis examines the two stories of local government outlined by Lowndes (2004): 'local government transformed' and 'local government unmoved'. The transformation narrative focuses on the scale of local government policy change since 1979 and suggests that no aspect of local government remains untouched. Lowndes cites a long list of managerial and political discourses of governance, partnership, leadership, participation. These combine with 'overarching narratives of reinvention, re-engineering, renewal and modernization' and 'unifying themes' of 'flexibility, specialization, networking and customer orientation' (2004: 231). In contrast the 'local government unmoved' narrative emphasises the slow moving nature of change and the blocking tactics of 'traditionalists' (2004: 232). It places stresses on the slow moving nature of change, the continuance of direct service provision, departmentalism and the 'stubborn resilience of traditional local government forms' (2004: 233). This research provides evidence of relevance to both these stories of change.

The dissertation proceeds in chapter 2, by providing the background to local government reorganisation and the research context. By the end of this chapter the reader should have both a clear understanding of the rationale behind this work, the methods of social science enquiry adopted by the author and the context within which the research was undertaken.

Chapters 3 to 6 outline in some depth the analytical frameworks employed, while chapters 7 to 10 examine the empirical data collected in fieldwork with reference to the analytical perspectives employed. The perspectives are employed as aids to understanding contemporary developments in Scottish local government. The key insights of each will be summarised with the strengths and weaknesses of each heuristic framework discussed. As well as evaluating the perspectives the concluding chapter 10 will emphasise the broad findings of the study.

In summary this work looks at the changing nature of local government, management and democracy in Scotland. It uses a multi-analytical framework of analysis, with each perspective having heuristic qualities that generate alternative insights on the changing nature of Scottish local government. Although generating insights this work will also seek to demonstrate that an interactive approach which utilises alternative analytical frameworks could also be fruitful in an analysis of local government more broadly.

The analytical chapters identify the basic structure and assumptions of each perspective. This is important in order that a clear and precise account of each is given before the empirical data is introduced. Prior to that analysis the

study seeks, in chapter two, to contextualise Scottish local government as it existed during the time frame of this enquiry.

Chapter 2: The research context

Introduction

Local government in Scotland (as in the rest of the UK) since 1979 has gone through an almost continual cycle of reform (see Midwinter 1995; Stoker 2004). One need only think of a policy area like housing to reflect on how far the role of local government has been transformed in the past two decades or so (see Reid 1999). Accounts of changes - such as compulsory competitive tendering (CCT), the private finance initiative (PFI)/public-private partnerships (PPP) and the associated client-contractors splits within local authorities - have emphasized that although politically inspired, these changes were, in large part, welcomed and utilised by government officers to effect and shape change within their own environments (see for example, Dunleavy 1991c; Heald and Gaughan 1999).

Many accounts of the reform process suggest it has been primarily management driven i.e. the focus of both politicians and bureaucrats was to effect change in the managerial side of local government operations (see Stoker 1999). To a significant extent this is undoubtedly true. However, any analysis that focuses exclusively on managerial factors is likely to give an incomplete and partial account of change (this is a key theme of the governance and local democracy perspectives). As outlined in chapter 1 the approach adopted in this thesis encompasses the possibility that traditional administrative, democratic and governance factors may also be relevant.

One need only think of the language of democratic renewal, participation and civic engagement employed in recent years in local government circles to become aware that not all reform has been exclusively managerially driven.

On the surface the discourse of reform may appear managerially inspired but often it has have other more traditional, democratic or governance connotations.

This chapter introduces the context of Scottish local government reform. This is a useful way of introducing the analytical perspectives that will be outlined more fully in the succeeding chapters. It also introduces the notion that there has been a degree of exaggeration in terms of the impact of new ideas on the day-to-day practices of local government. The rhetoric of local governance has undoubtedly changed. However, it is the impact of these new ideas on daily activities that is more important and revealing.

There is also the question of the pre-occupation of academics with change. There is undoubtedly a degree of consensus across the public administration literature that things have changed in local government (see for example Leach et al. 1994; Rhodes 1997; Stoker 1999; Stoker 2000a; Leach and Percy Smith 2003; Stoker 2004; Wilson and Game 2005). However, the impact of these changes is still subject to differing interpretations (Lowndes 2004). Rhodes (1997) refers to the movement towards a 'differentiated polity' across British politics in general, Hood et al. (1999) emphasise the movement towards more regulatory structures in government, the chapters in Stoker's edited collections (1999; 2000) emphasise the movement towards new structures of governance. All these commentators seem to be agreed that the complexity of local government is increasing with new organisational forms emerging at different levels of government.

Much of what is written in political science focuses on explaining *change*, this is often to the neglect of a focus on *continuity* in political institutions. This is despite the fact that one of the most striking aspects of local government reform is the degree to which old structures, practices and procedures have informed the new structures of government (chapters 3 and 7 will review the traditional perspective on local government and assess its continuing relevance).

This chapter introduces one of the themes of the thesis, that rather than undergoing a sweeping transformation, the old features of traditional local government institutions - characterised by cultures of paternalism, bureaucracy and departmentalism - are still readily identifiable in Scottish local government. Locally the relatively closed traditional municipal policy-making structures of councils have been challenged by initiatives such as Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), opting out, deregulation and modernisation. Indeed, much of the local governance literature argues, old style councils are being, or have been replaced, with enabling councils working in conjunction with a range of other agencies to achieve local governance of their areas (Leach et al. 1994; Rhodes 1997; Stoker 1999; Stoker 2000a; Leach and Percy Smith 2003; Stoker 2004; Wilson and Game 2005; and see chapter 6).

This chapter examines contrasting analyses of what these new forms of local government amount to, focusing on the language used by reformers. At each level the contemporary debate about the role and purpose of government can be seen as a clash of differing interpretations of government. These have always existed within, and impacted upon, politics – but each, in recent years, has become more pronounced.

Of the new analytical perspectives one places emphasis on management, another on politics and democracy more broadly and a third on the changing environment and operating style of councils. The New Public Management (NPM) analytical perspective tends to focus on efficiency and financial economy in government. In the late-1980s and 1990s, the NPM analysis 'mellowed' with the emphasis moving more towards quality management (Pollitt 1995). The alternative, more political, analysis of government reform reflects more democratic aspirations. Electoral reform, devolution and decentralisation of power are usually among the policy prescriptions. Within this analytical perspective there is agreement upon the need for democratic experimentation, but there is some disagreement on whether local councils can be viewed as bastions of democracy capable of 'reinventing' the local democratic polity. The newest perspective – local governance – externalises the focus and highlights the changing operational context of local authorities and the increasing importance of other institutions in the processes of local service delivery.

The NPM, democratic and governance perspectives challenge the traditional ways of operating in local government that existed in Scotland during the post-war period. These perspectives are in many ways reactions to the political consensus that grew out of the UK Labour Government's reform programme from 1945-51. They contrast with the traditional municipal perspective which places more emphasis on the virtues of public administration and bureaucracy.

Each of the four perspectives are, to a degree, overlapping. However, it is the contention of this chapter that each can be distinguished with reference to their fundamental conceptions of the role and purpose of local government.

In summary, the traditional perspective tends to emphasise the delivery of public services within a framework of political accountability. The democratic perspective accepts this purpose, but also emphasises wider questions of democratic representation, participation and deliberation. The NPM perspective places emphasis on the role of local councils as economical, efficient and effective deliverers of public services and tends to downplay the democratic dimension. The governance perspective emphasizes local government's broader focus as the legitimate democratic body within a broader network of public, voluntary and commercial institutions delivering local public services.

The analytical perspectives will be outlined in greater depth in chapters 3 to 6, with the empirical data relating to each reviewed in chapter 7 to 10. Prior to this though it is necessary to outline the background to the three councils which formed the backdrop to the research.

The Three Case Study Councils

As noted in chapter 1, each of the councils was formed under the provisions of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1995. This involved a major change in local government on mainland Scotland. The nine regional and 53 district councils were abolished and replaced by 29 new unitary authorities on mainland Scotland. These 29 new councils took over all the functions of the district and regional councils that had previously existed within their boundaries.

As outlined in chapter 1, the three case study councils were not chosen at random. They emerged as the three most likely 'innovative' councils from a

survey of chief executives that was conducted in 1995. Each new chief executive was given the opportunity to select three councils he/she considered to be the most likely to be innovative in the post-reorganisation period. Not all chief executives felt comfortable selecting councils. Some gave perfectly valid reasons for failing to answer ranging from , 'I simply do not have the knowledge to answer the question' to 'I am loath to attempt to guess' and 'it is too early to identify a top three'. In total 32 questionnaires were sent with 24 returned – this represented a 75% response rate which is considered excellent for a postal questionnaire (Dillman 1978; Woong Yun and Trumbo 2000). Of the 24 respondents, nine chief executives indicated their unwillingness/inability to nominate - leaving 15 chief executives giving their opinions. The table below sets out the results:

Table 2.1: Scotland's most innovative councils?

Council	Nominations
Fife	11
Stirling	6
Highland	5
Dumfries & Galloway	4
South Ayrshire	4

** The rest of the councils received between zero and two nominations each.*

In the context of Scottish local government these three councils were – at least according to their peers – the most likely to have experienced change (and least likely to be marked by significant continuity). The null hypothesis of this thesis, therefore, is that if Scottish local government is marked by more continuity than change, then these councils provide the most stringent test. These three councils had reputations for having the most potential to be

innovative – in this sense, they are not ‘average’ Scottish local authorities (assuming such an institution could possibly exist). If change has occurred, it is likely to be most prevalent in these three councils.

Prior to examining the extent of innovation in terms of administrative, managerial, democratic and governance reforms taking place in these councils, it is necessary to provide some general background information.

The three councils: the basics

The three case study councils represent what could be termed a reflective or purposeful sample of Scotland’s 32 local councils. In other words, each is in some way reflective of a mainstream Scottish local authority. Between them they encompass over half a million of Scotland’s population i.e. 10% (see table 2.2 below).

The Highland region is a large sparsely populated region stretching from Scotland’s mainland’s northern-most point - taking in the Isle of Skye to the west and stretching all the way down to just north of Perth in the South, with Inverness as its largest town. It covers the largest geographical area of any council in Scotland and is one of the largest in Europe (<http://www.highland.gov.uk>).

Fife is an ancient Scottish ‘kingdom’ located between the cities of Dundee to the north and Edinburgh to the south in the east of Scotland. It is the largest, in population terms, of the three case study councils (it is the third largest in Scotland). Within its borders lie towns such as Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and St. Andrews.

Stirling Council covers a significant geographical area around the historic town of Stirling in the central belt of Scotland. It is north of, and roughly equidistant between, the cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. It is one of Scotland's smaller local councils in terms of population (see table 2.2).

Table: 2.2 Population of the Three Case study Councils

	Fife	Highland	Stirling
Population (1996)	351,600	208,300	82,280
Population (2006)	358,930	213,590	87,800

Table 2.3 sets out the details of the staffing levels in each council, immediately post-reorganisation and in 2008. Each had a significant bureaucracy and was a significant employer within their local areas. In terms of full-time staff per 1,000 of population (excluding the three Islands councils), Fife was fifth in Scotland, Stirling sixth and Highland fifteenth. In terms of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in salary Band A per 1,000 population: Stirling was sixth, Highland eighth and Fife twenty-sixth.

Between 1996 and 2008 all three councils expanded in size. Contrary to much received popular opinion, Scottish local councils have actually been expanding in terms of staffing.

Table 2.3: Full-Time Equivalents in the Three Case Study Councils (July 1996)

	Fife		Highland		Stirling	
	1996	2008	1996	2008	1996	2008
<i>Education Teachers</i>	4377	3915	2479	2774	724	984
<i>Education Others</i>	2252	2456	756	1758	658	604
<i>Social Work</i>	2355	3511	1252	1728	543	514
<i>Other Staff</i>	7044	7465	3409	3563	1548	1601
Total	16028	17348	7876	9824	3473	3703

Sources: Scottish Office Joint Staffing Watch 1996; Joint Staffing Watch 2008 quarter 2.

Table 2.4 outlines the political membership of each council after the first elections to the new councils in 1995 and the elections in 2007. In 1996 both Stirling and Fife were Labour controlled councils, with Highland Council dominated by independent councilors. By 2007 all three councils were 'controlled' by coalitions. This reflects the introduction of the single transferable vote method for local elections in 2007 as well as the changing fortunes of political parties and independents in each area.

Each council, in its own way, had an outward focus. All three had a vibrant service sector economy, tourist numbers above the Scottish (non-city) average and a varied industrial base. All three council areas combined towns with rural hinterlands. None was dominated by one party (at least not to the degree of councils such as Glasgow or North Lanarkshire). All three appointed chief executives with clear visions of what they were seeking to

achieve – their reputations were reflected in the responses received from their peers.

Table 2.4: Political Membership of the Councils 1995 and 2007

	<i>Fife</i>		<i>Stirling</i>		<i>Highland</i>	
	1995	2007	1995	2007	1995	2007
<i>Labour</i>	54	24	13	8	6	7
<i>SNP</i>	9	23	2	7	9	17
<i>Liberal Democrat</i>	25	21	0	3	4	21
<i>Conservative</i>	0	5	7	4	1	0
<i>Independent/Other</i>	4	5	0	0	52	35

The reorganization transition

The councils existed in ‘shadow’ form for one year before 1 April 1996. During this year senior officers were recruited and new structures were put in place so that that the changeover could occur as seamlessly as possible. Existing staff were ‘matched’ into positions onto the new council. Matching was undertaken by each service on a layered basis from the senior posts down. The more senior the staff position, the greater the likelihood that it would be filled by a competitive process of selection. Staff were grouped according to their function by services so that those who undertook broadly comparable work were considered together.

For most staff this process was relatively straightforward. The majority of preceding council staff made the transition without the need for matching, as much of their organisation or establishment transferred unchanged to their

successor council. In each of the councils staff - such as teachers, social workers, Direct Service Organisation (DSO)/ Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) - were only marginally affected by the changeover. However, staff in central services and in the headquarters of services, were more likely to experience change. All three councils were committed to consultation with public sector trade unions over the procedure and throughout the change over process.

The Conservative Government, when reviewing the 1975 reorganisation, suggested that the public perception at that time was that it 'had allowed a large number of people to acquire jobs at significantly increased salaries' (Scottish Office 1992). The 1992 Green Paper asserted the Government's determination not to allow this to happen again (Scottish Office 1992). The reorganization process involved a slimming down of senior officer posts – Evans (1996) suggests that in general there was a reduction of about 30%, from 420 chief officers under the two-tier system to 291 under the unitary system. However, such figures have to be treated with caution as they tend to reflect assumptions about job titles and salary levels.

It should be noted that, even before the 1996 reorganisation, the restructuring of departments was not uncommon. Of the councils responding to a pre-reorganisation survey, four of seven regions and nine of 26 district councils had reorganised their structures in the three years leading up to reorganization. One of seven regional councils and 11 of 26 district councils had reported restructuring committees. Indeed, restructuring internal operations prompted by new central government legislation and policy directive had become commonplace in the 1980s and 1990s. This point is worth emphasizing – the new councils did not always inherit departmental and committee structures that had been set in stone for decades. In many

instances they had undergone much tinkering and even wholesale restructuring not long before the 1995/96 reorganization.

The three councils in detail

Fife

Many of Fife Council's population perceive themselves as 'Fifers'. 'The Kingdom of Fife' is a phrase that is immediately recognised by the rest of the population of Scotland. It is the ancestral home of Scottish kings. Thus despite being a new council, 'Fife' as a geographical area was by no means an artificial creation of the 1995/96 reorganisation. Indeed the council inherited the same geographical boundaries as the previous regional council.

It covers an area of 130,709 hectares - to the south the Firth of Forth gives it an obvious geographical border with Lothian and Edinburgh, whilst to the north the River Tay separates the borders of Fife with those of Tayside and Dundee. To the east Fife has 185 kilometres of coastline next to the North Sea.

At the time of the initial research (June 1996) the unemployment rate in Fife was 10.5% - considerably higher than the Scottish average of 7.9%. In December 2007 it was 4.4%, still higher than the Scottish average of 3.6%. Fife's higher unemployment rate reflects the decline of manufacturing, heavy industry and mining in the area. It is a poorer area than the Scottish average - in 1996 the average weekly earnings were 96% of the Scottish average. The area, however, was still more dependent on manufacturing for employment than was typical in Scotland - in 1996 there were 24.1% employed in this sector compared to a Scottish average of 18.2%. In Fife's Economy Audit

(2007) factors such as the continuing over-reliance on declining industries, poor quality environment and poor transport links were identified as weaknesses in the Fife economy.

The Fife Council was formed through the combining of the old Fife Regional Council (whose boundaries were identical) and the three district councils within the area: North East Fife, Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline. Because of the concurrence of the Regional Council's borders with the new council numerous officers (in interviews) perceived the new council as the old region 're-born', subsuming the district councils 'below' it.

The previous constituent councils were, in the main, organized along fairly traditional lines. For example, Fife Regional Council had 17 service departments. The districts were similarly organized though Kirkcaldy District Council did experiment with what has now become known as 'the executive model'. It introduced a 'cabinet like' system without statutory change in the early 1990s. Alexander (1995) suggested this was a good example of how traditional structures could be changed even within the then existing statutes. However, he did recognize the reality that there could only be policy, not executive, leadership (at least formally) in councils.

North East Fife was a very traditional centralised council with minimal investment in new information and communication technologies (Interviewee A2 1997). Kirkcaldy was more decentralized with a heavier investment in IT and staff development. The administration was more 'member led' than north east Fife. Dunfermline, on the other hand was fairly traditionally organized. Table 2.6 outlines the political make-up of each area. The Liberal Democrats monopolized representation in the largely rural east Fife area,

while the Labour Party was dominant in the more urban central and west areas.

Table 2.6: Fife Council: Membership by Area 1996

	Total	East	Central	West
Labour	54	0	31	23
SNP	9	0	6	3
Liberal Democrat	25	17	2	6
Conservative	0	0	0	0
Independent	0	0	0	0
Others	4	1	1	2

There were problems in bringing these councils together. Differing policies regarding issues such as car allowances and public holidays meant that decisions had to be taken on how to merge four different institutions with differing conditions of service. One officer told the anecdotal story of the problem with naming of streets - in Dunfermline District Council it was the responsibility of Building Control, in Kirkcaldy it was Property Services, in East Fife it was Environmental Health and in the new Fife Council the Roads Service wanted to take over this responsibility. To resolve this problem the function was eventually delegated down to area level (Interviewee A18 1997).

Speaking before reorganisation, Alan Alexander (Scottish Local Authorities Management Centre) expressed the view that the new chief executive, John Markland was likely to 'try to do things differently', although he 'could be stopped by political neanderthals in Fife' (Alexander 1996 interview). The reality, however, was that 'progressives' had taken over the leadership. Fife

Council was led by Alex Rowley who was a young leader at the heart of what could be described as the Scottish Labour Party's local council network. Along with other colleagues (notably Christine May) he was keen to be seen as the leader of one of Scotland's more innovative local councils. It was suggested that Fife Council was well placed to be progressive as it lacked the budget problems of the big cities (Perez, Fife 1996). The size and stability of its political composition (a strong Labour majority) made it an attractive option for senior personnel seeking new posts during the reorganization. In 1996 Fife Council had 78 councillors with the Scottish Labour Party forming the ruling group.

Significant features of the new Fife Council structure were:

- *Corporate Managers.* The rationale behind Fife's structure was that there should be a small number of corporate managers providing strategic guidance over a range of functions. Fife deliberately kept a very strong centre in response to the perceived failure of decentralization experiments such as Tower Hamlets with its weak centre (see Lowndes and Stoker 1994).
- *Area Managers.* Area managers were part of the Council's management team (along with the chief executive, directors of finance, personnel and corporate procurement and strategic managers). Although based in decentralized areas they were also a key part of the centre's strategic management team. One Area Manager indicated he was 'as much part of the centre as the area' in the Fife Council organization (Interviewee A15 1997)
- *Area Committees.* Three area committees were structured around the three former district council boundaries. They were made up of the elected councillors from each geographical area. Their role was to monitor and review local service provision and performance; to exercise regulatory powers (e.g. planning); and to ensure that the wider community was kept informed of the work of the council.
- *Citizenship Commission.* Its remit was to review the quality of representative and participatory democracy in Fife.

- *Locality Management.* The locality management initiative came one year after the council was set up and was based on the council's existing housing office network. It was based on a local office network and was established at a community level throughout Fife Council. It was envisaged that locality managers would play a key role in the development of local community planning and developing and planning networks and partnerships with other key local organizations such as police and health authorities.

Fife's structure incorporated a strong centre which looked after the key policy, strategy and budgeting decisions, with areas monitoring the quality and performance of service provision and 'localities' establishing mechanisms whereby individuals could represent their views to the council. In other words there would be a clear linkage between the managerial, service delivery and democratic dimensions of the council.

Table 2.7: Fife Structure: The Theory

LOCALITY	AREA	STRATEGIC CENTRE
<i>Forums</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Policy & resource allocation</i>
Representing citizens	Monitoring of Services in Areas	Budgeting and strategy

The reality immediately after reorganisation was that, as with other Scottish councils at the time, Fife was an insecure organization. The merging of four different councils created tensions as regards working practices and other issues (this was highlighted by various Fife officers). Fife Council was implementing many new initiatives:

- the appointment of new strategic directors.
- the development of an area approach.

- locality management.
- the need to rationalize 36 heads of service.

Thus, it is not difficult to understand why Fife could be described as being in transition during the period of the initial research for this thesis.

As was the case with Highland (see below), Fife adopted the 'big bang' approach to decentralisation when it was first created. The former three district council areas acted as decentralised units of the Council from 1 April 1996. However, Fife Council referred to decentralisation as a 'long term evolutionary process' (Fife Council, undated: 2). Senior managers indicated that they were not sure of the path that decentralisation would take and, at least interviewees, appeared fairly ambivalent about it (Interviewee A9 1997, Interviewee A10 1997)

Fife outlined four aims of decentralisation:

- Making it easier for people to contact the Council, improving customer service and providing responsive services.
- Improving information on services and policies.
- Enhancing the council's presence in local communities.
- Involving local people and communities in making decisions which affect their communities and in influencing the way that the council serves the communities. (Fife Council, undated: 2).

Fife Council operated under the 'presumption that all services should be decentralised unless there is a specific reason not to decentralise a particular individual service' (Fife Council 1996: 7).

Highland

Highland is unique amongst British, indeed European, local councils in terms of its geographical size. In terms of land mass it is larger than Wales and not far short of Belgium. Given the size of the land mass it was predictable that there would be a high degree of decentralisation within the Council. Indeed during the lead up to reorganisation, when each of the old councils was presenting their case for the retention of their boundaries to the Secretary of State for Scotland, the case for one Highland Council (made by Highland Regional Council) was inextricably bound up with arguments and assurances that the new council would actively pursue a radical decentralisation scheme (Highland Regional Council 1993).

The case was also bound up in arguments that Highland was distinct in Scotland due to its unique combination of geography, history and culture. It was also suggested that it was largely a self-contained socio-economic unit with distinct institutions and policies provided by successive governments to meet the Highlands' distinct needs (Highland Regional Council 1993).

As a largely rural Council it has carried on the independent councillor tradition in Scottish local government – party politics in 1996 had yet to make significant inroads in many areas. However, by 2007 councillors with party political labels outnumbered independents, by 45 to 35 (see table 2.4).

As one community councillor in the Highlands put it in 1997: 'our council remains a rarity in Scotland because it remains dominated by rural interests' (Interviewee C7). Highland saw the continuation of arch-typical parish politicians, and an 'independent conservative tradition'. Frequently long-

standing independent councillors were returned unopposed. Its geographical location and non-party political basis – in 1996, 80 per cent of its councillors were independents - meant that it saw itself as being apart from mainstream 'central belt' Scottish local government.

Highland Council has a lower unemployment rate than the Scottish average at 5.3 per cent. However, many areas of Highland Council area are identified as economically 'fragile', indicating that they may be in danger of long term decline due to their remoteness, an ageing population, lack of economic opportunity and access to essential services. Highland Council delivers services across an area with the lowest population density of all UK local authorities. Overall, Highland has only eight people per square kilometre, falling to two per square kilometre in Sutherland, compared with 66 people per square kilometre in Scotland as a whole (<http://www.highland.gov.uk>).

The organisational and political structures of Highland were conventional and traditional and consisted of 14 different services (including chief executive). The only major departure from tradition was the adoption of a decentralisation scheme which involved the establishment of eight area managers. The eight decentralised areas had the same boundaries as the eight pre-reorganisation district councils in the region.

On the political side this structure was replicated with Area Committees. The political committees largely mirrored the services. In other words, the traditional local government power axis between committee chair and director of service had the potential to remain in place.

The area covered by Highland Council is coterminous with the border of the old Highland Regional Council which had eight district councils within its

borders. Like Fife, these district council borders became the same as those for Highland Council's decentralised units. It thus 'inherited' the structures and staff of one regional and eight district councils. Highland Regional Council had 17 departments before reorganisation. To most observers, it was seen as a relatively traditional council. For example, Highland Regional Council was the only regional council in Scotland, before reorganization, not to publish a mission statement or its corporate values. In the words of Malcolm Green, Highland councillor at the COSLA Decentralisation Conference in November 1997:

the ex-district councillors in Highland came to the new local authority 'with enough baggage to fill a freight train', which meant the Council had no option but to base its decentralisation boundaries on those of the ex-district council. (Green 1997)

Unlike the new structures in Fife and Stirling, there was nothing particularly unique or different beyond the decentralisation scheme about the new structures. Highland Council had the characteristics of a well-ordered and rational, bureaucratic organisation – boundaries were clear and well defined. There was nothing particularly messy and unpredictable about the way the organisation had been set up or operated. Clear lines of accountability flowed through the organisation – the complexities of matrix management structures, like those in Fife, were avoided. The structure of Highland Council appeared, at least at face value, entirely predictable if the inheritance of the region and district councils was taken into consideration.

This apparent predictability was despite the fact that the chief executive went there with a reputation for being innovative. It was suggested in another council that the elected councilors held back any radical impulse that the chief executive may have had (Interviewee B20 1997). There were few allies on the

political side of the council who were in favour of any radical changes to the local authority's structure. The new initiatives can be traced back to political expediency – Highland was amongst the last councils to appoint its chief executive and a decentralisation scheme was required under statute and a key plank of the campaign for a single council was that decentralization would take place. Change in Highland appeared very incremental. The rest of the council's structure could be described as tinkering with the inherited structures of the two-tier councils.

Significant features of the structure

- *Eight area committees.* These committees corresponded to the pre-existing district councils. Councillors from each area sat on these committees.
- *No depute and assistant director posts.* The council reduced the number of senior managers by 30%. It did this by scrapping the posts of deputy at the upper tiers (apart from chief executive).
- *Service Points.* One-stop shops were created with council services located in localized environments.
- *Decentralised units.* These units were established to serve the areas of the previous eight district councils.

Stirling

Stirling Council was classified as 'mainly urban' by the Local Government Boundary Commission (1995). It is the most economically vibrant of the three councils – having the lowest unemployment rate (2%) – and projections of a rapidly expanding population.

The previous Stirling District Council had in earlier decades, in the words of one officer (Interviewee B20 1997), 'bounced between Labour and Conservative' political administrations. The regional council, Central - of which both the towns of Stirling and Falkirk had been a part - had been Labour controlled. Stirling was a small council (in terms of population, if not in terms of land mass) with a dominant urban core.

Stirling, despite the fuss over its gerrymandered boundaries prior to reorganisation (the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party were accused of trying to create Conservative 'havens' in an otherwise Labour dominated landscape of Scottish local government in the central belt), is a council whose base is very much rooted in the past. Stirling is one of Scotland's oldest towns and has always enjoyed more than its fair share of the nation's tourist trade. In recent years it has benefited substantially from the interest in one of its sons, William Wallace, inspired by the Hollywood epic movie, *Braveheart*.

In the 1980s and 1990s Stirling played host to much political controversy. In the 1980s Stirling District Council, led by Michael Connarty (who went on to become a Labour Member of Parliament), was one of only two councils - the other being Lothian Region - which attracted the 'New Left' label in Scotland. The parliamentary constituency in the area was one of Scotland's few marginal seats and was the target of all the major parties at each General Election, the incumbent until 1997 was the then Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth. Stirling Council inherited a tradition of radical (left versus right) politics.

Within its borders the village of Dunblane has become synonymous with the tragedy which afflicted its primary school on March 13 1995. The tragedy came just a few weeks before the new council came into existence.

In Stirling the new organisation was made up of a 'merger' between staff from the old Central Regional Council and the old Stirling District Council. It is a much smaller council (in terms of geographical and population size) than both Highland and Fife and thus approached decentralisation with a far more localised focus.

The chief executive followed the example of Kirklees Council in England in attempting to separate the strategic functions of the council from those of delivery. The leadership identified nine key issues it wanted to focus on (and create committees for) before dropping three (including equal opportunities and community participation), believing that such issues could be handled by all committees. It was suggested that to have created committees for those issues would lead to 'the ghettoisation of a committee' (Interviewee B20 1997) and the sidelining of a major corporate policy concern to a peripheral committee instead of ensuring it was reflected in work throughout the council. Stirling also attempted to avoid the mirroring of departments/committees believing that this created too powerful a political axis and exacerbated departmentalism (Alexander, 1995 interview).

Five of the seven directors in Stirling were ex-Central Region officers whereas most heads of service in the new Council came from district councils. The political and officer leadership in Stirling Council, reflected their central Scotland geographic location and were at the heart of local policy networks that disseminated new ideas within Scottish local government. For example, Keith Yates was a prominent member of the Scottish branch for the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

Significant features of the structure

- *Joint Social Work and Housing Department.* This new department brought together two of the functions that had traditionally been departmentally oriented in outlook.
- *Children's Committee.* This committee cut across the boundaries of the Social Work and Education Services, and sought to avoid the mirroring of departments/committees.
- *Democratic renewal agenda.* This was reflected in the establishment of Area Forums throughout the district and the creation of a new deliberative body: The Stirling Assembly.

Conclusion

Chapters 1 and 2 have introduced both the research context and the research approach. The rest of the thesis will outline the details of the four analytical perspectives and their relevance to the empirical data generated in the three case study sites. Chapters 3 to 6 will outline each perspective noting their base in academic literature, government commissions and committees as well as practitioner outlooks on local government. Chapters 7 to 10 will examine the relevance of each school of thought when set against the contemporary organisational, managerial, democratic and governmental practice of each of the three councils. The final chapter will seek to reflect on the utility of each analytical perspective as well as outlining the key themes of the thesis and potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 3: The Traditional Municipal Perspective

The oldest analytical perspective in UK local government studies is what could be termed as 'the traditional municipal perspective'. It has proved to be both long-standing and durable. It was evident in academic writings on local government during the initial phase of the research for this thesis (see for example Midwinter 1995; Monies 1996). This chapter seeks to outline the basis for the traditional municipal perspective. As a representation of reality about local government it has a long lineage. In doing so it draws on government reports and White Papers, conventional academic accounts of local government written until around the 1970s as well as academic texts. It will then examine approaches to the study of this perspective, reviewing both their strengths and weaknesses.

This municipal tradition has many descriptions including: 'traditional' (Elcock 1989), 'classical' (Midwinter 1995), 'bureaucratic paternalist' (Hambleton and Hoggett-1990), 'traditional bureaucratic' (Leach et al 1994), 'the inherited world of local government' (Leach et al 1994). Elcock's overview of a traditional local authority is a useful summary of some of the key features of how writers from this perspective have tended to describe a typical local authority:

it was usually an honest, relatively efficient but not creative organisation. Its staff were narrowly confined by formal rules and departmental specialisms; their creativity was stifled by bureaucratic rules and hierarchical control, mostly in the name of accountability to councillors. (1989: 145)

It is this perspective that key government reports have outlined (usually prior to a critique) when calling for reform of local government. The durability of the traditional structures of municipal government is emphasised, usually as a precursor to outlining their weaknesses (see for example Maud 1967;

Wheatley 1969; Bains 1973; Paterson 1973; DOE 1993; DETR 1998; Lapsley et al. 2002). It is noticeable that most outlines of this perspective tend to come from 'reformist' critics, be they academics or government appointed committees. Like the perspective itself, critiques tend to veer between description and prescription and it is often difficult to disentangle the former from the latter.

Reformers with new management, democratic and governance ideas have tended to attack the deficiencies of traditional ways local councils have been organised. Nonetheless, in the sub-discipline of local government studies academics, practitioners, policy advisers, civil servants and think tanks have tended to operate within (and created) this shared 'traditional' language and framework of analysis about local government. Conventionally the traditional municipal perspective provided this shared language, though as this thesis outlines, in recent years this has been changing. These networks as well as various government reports have questioned the traditional perspective's usefulness as the basis for analysis. In the late-1970s the traditional approach to studying local government came under attack from various academics (see for example Dearlove 1979; Dunleavy 1980). Dunleavy (1980: 1) argues:

The interests and orientations of politicians and administrators in local government have exerted a distorting influence on the scope of local politics as an object of study, on the problems that are seen as important and even on the sort of answers that are provided.

This has resulted in an unnecessarily dry practitioner-orientated approach to the subject matter i.e. such accounts of local government failed to place local government within wider local social and economic processes (1980: 7). Academics are overly influenced by the questions and answers provided by

local councillors and officers in what Dunleavy terms 'inside dopester' (1980: 7) accounts.

Stanyer (1976: 17) suggests that the study of local government in Britain was restricted by a 'legalistic bias':

The academic study of government was for long dominated by law and history and this dominance was maintained far longer for local government than for many other fields. Reliance on law produced the mistakes usually referred to as *excessive legalism* and *institutionalism*. (Stanyer 1976: 21 original emphasis)

Accounts of this perspective are frequently outlined in older books on UK local government. It also became apparent in the fieldwork for this thesis with many practitioners feeling most comfortable with the traditional municipal perspective on local government structure and operations (see chapter 8). Just as recent research in British government (Marsh et al 2000) identified how civil servants maintain faith in what has been termed the 'Westminster Model' of UK politics, local government officers and councillors apparently maintain an attachment to the traditional municipal model of local government.

In textbooks the traditional municipal perspective of local government usually involves the listing of local authority functions, an outline of the role of councillors, officers and committees as well as reference to how these functions and roles fit within a framework of public accountability (see for example Monies 1996: chapter 2, 3 and 4). All of this tends to amount to a rather narrow legalistic description of the role and functions of local government.

As Dunleavy (1980) notes, the description is often couched in terms emphasising the virtue and value of local government within the British polity. This is what Stoker (1996: 24) refers to as 'the trap of localism' – the tendency to view local government through romantic eyes.

The traditional perspective tends to emphasise the conservatism, probity, cohesion and continuity of existing structures in local councils, and - through sheer longevity - can be classified as the conventional or mainstream view of local government. The outline is essentially conservative. It stresses a practical approach to understanding local government, and is sceptical of new ideas as fads and fashions.

In essence the traditional municipal perspective revolves around the following ideas: a key function of local government is service delivery; local public services are delivered and administered by 'experts', be they bureaucrats or professionals; and local government has remained 'as it is' because that is the way it has proved to work.

The historical roots of traditional local government

The basis of this perspective lie in the past, and it is through examining history that present-day structures can be understood. The roots of contemporary local government in Scotland are to be found in the 19th century – the first major rationalisation of local government did not take place until the 1890s (Monies 1996: 1). Prior to this local public services tended to be administered by various bodies that mainly concentrated on specific services. Local 'public' services were a 'mish-mash' of different boards and administrations. Local councils were created to try and bring those disparate

services under one institutional roof and in the 20th century municipal and county councils developed into significant institutions as the number of public services delivered through them expanded. Initially however, councils were small in scale and the key professions within them were lawyers, engineers and accountants. The emphasis was very much on planning, construction and keeping control of local public finances. As Cochrane notes:

The legacy of the nineteenth century was one which emphasised legal and financial rectitude and links to the traditional middle-class professions. (1994: 142)

This culture of professionalism, expertise and specialism became rooted in 20th century local council structures.

Many of the buildings of councils in Scotland today are physical embodiments of the 19th century legacy. They tend to be steeped in history – their formality, scale and decoration act as an almost historical backdrop emphasising inherited council procedures and culture. Within council buildings there may be statues, portraits of previous meetings, pictures of previous provosts. All of which act as visible reminders to existing councillors and officers of a bygone age, and reinforce what could be termed ‘traditionalism’ in local government. As Stewart (2000: 19) notes, ‘In buildings, history is given physical representation in the present’.

It is the assumptive worlds of councillors and officers that come to be reflected in this traditional perspective. Their everyday behaviour is governed by statute, rules, procedures and attitudes. The durability of such standard operating practices, or in more modern academic parlance ‘institutionalism’, is a key part of understanding how local councils operate

according to this traditional perspective. Traditions stem from social interaction which over time builds up a set of mutual expectations which, when confirmed, are treated as social or organisational understanding. Indeed these expectations may be formally or informally constituted as rules and become a shared rationality. Individuals within the organisations are socialised into meeting the expectations of this rationality (for reviews of new institutional literature see Hall and Taylor 1996: 942-6; Lowndes 2002; Judge 2005: 5-22).

Stewart refers to 'a remarkable uniformity in the past organisation and management of local authorities' (1989: 172). He suggests that a set of organisational principles became embedded in the culture of local authorities: 'Those principles supported and expressed their role as agencies for the delivery of a series of services, rather than as local government' (1989: 172).

In the 20th century the responsibilities of local councils, like government as a whole, grew year on year and so did the size and complexity of the administrative task facing local authorities. No one sat down and designed local councils as institutions to cope with their increasing scale; it was only in the 1960s and 1970s that serious attention was given to the internal organisational processes. Local government in Scotland prior to reorganisation in 1975 was founded upon a system of counties and burghs and it was highly fragmented. It was during this period (the late 1960s/early 1970s) that serious questions about traditional ways of working began to be raised. Government committees instigated research and analysis into local council structures and began to ask serious questions about their appropriateness for the new environment local councils were facing.

For example the Paterson Report maintained that:

Our review of the existing scene has confirmed our previous belief that most Scottish local authorities are still organised on the traditional departmental basis. It has also shown, however, that some councils have become increasingly aware of the limitations which the traditional set-up imposes on the development of comprehensive policies and cohesive programmes of action properly geared to meet the needs of the community. (1973 para 3.18)

Increasingly questions were asked about the utility of the existing organisational and administrative structures of local government. 'Traditional' structures and practices, instead of being looked on as strengths, were more likely to be viewed as obstacles to change.

A series of government committees and reports in the late 1960s and early 1970s (e.g. Redcliffe Maud 1969, Bains 1973; Paterson 1973) outlined what they considered to be the traditional perspective of local government as well as numerous recommendations on how to reform it. The committees examined the democratic aspects of the traditional ways of operating; the departmental structures on which it was based; the parallel committee system on the member side; the councillor-officer dichotomy which was a by-product of this structure; as well as its professional and bureaucratic structure. The following sections will expand on this basic description in order that a full account of the municipal traditional perspective may be given.

The municipal tradition and local democracy

Traditional accounts of local government tend to view local democracy rather narrowly and conceptualise the council as the key (in some accounts the only) institution in terms of democratic process. As McConnell (2004: 69), notes, 'The long-standing tradition in local government ... is that the full council, as

a corporate body, is legally responsible for taking executive decisions'. This tends to be seen as both *what is* and *what ought to be*. A good example of this traditional mode of analysis is the Wheatley Commission's opinion:

We believe... that the council should be supreme in the direction and control of the affairs of the authority. (1969: Para.946)

The Wheatley Commission outlined three parts of the supremacy of the council. First, the council is collectively the body corporate or legal person – property is vested in the council, staff are appointed by the council, charges are levied by the council and powers delegated to committees are exercised in the names of the council. Second, major decisions are taken by the council – the broad policies are set, expenditure approved and the budget debated. Third, the council is the forum for deliberation as regards policymaking in the council: 'It is in the council chamber that local democracy should be at its most visible' (Wheatley 1969 para. 948).

The elected council chamber is emphasised as being the key democratic forum with all decisions and policymaking in the council flowing from its authority. Although in theory the public are represented through the council chamber, in practice the need for specialisation means that council committees have traditionally served as the main forum for elected member engagement with council policy processes.

Democracy is internalised within the council. A quotation from Hill reflects this perspective:

Democracy is what councillors and officers do in their day to day work. The definition of democratic local government is their definition. (1974: 230)

In terms of broader democracy and accountability the traditional perspective tends to assume local government is accountable simply by virtue of the fact that it is elected (Stoker 1988: 219). Strong local democracy tends to be equated with strong local government. This is reflected in a Conservative Government White Paper in 1971:

A vigorous local democracy means that authorities must be given real functions - with power of decision and ability to take action without being subjected to excessive regulation by central government through financial or other controls. (cited in Blunkett and Jackson 1987: 143)

Local democracy is defined as giving councils the 'power of decision and ability', there is no mention of the role of the local citizenry in this process.

The most important form of accountability is through the ballot box and that mechanism remains a powerful one. Local council chambers, committees and members shadowing departments ensure that chief officers and directors of local services are accountable to democratically elected representatives and forums.

At a national level in the UK constitutional notions of parliamentary sovereignty tend to translate into excessive power being concentrated in the political executive. At the local level, notions of the supremacy of the council tend similarly to translate into more power for the, albeit informal, executive.

This fits rather neatly into what could be termed, the traditional Schumpeterian conception of representative democracy that has existed within the UK. The purpose of elections, at both national and local levels, is to elect individuals to executive positions and form administrations capable of governing in a 'strong' fashion. Historically, Britain has elected such

governments and is assumed to favour them. Britain's representative democratic mechanisms are designed to produce strong government.

At the national level this is usually manifest in a political executive that enjoys a majority in the House of Commons. At the local level although a single party may gain an electoral majority the position is slightly more complicated and permeable. Executive authority in councils has tended to be vested in committees and the relationship between the permanent bureaucracy and elected politicians is not quite as straightforward. In Westminster and Whitehall the constitutional position of civil servants is relatively straightforward – their loyalty is to the crown, as represented by the elected government of the day. In local authorities, officers' loyalty is to the council corporate body as a whole. Formally in public law, until recently, a political executive did not exist. Thus historically the segmented nature of executive authority in local authorities meant that the chairmen of committees tended to enjoy significant power and authority within their chosen domains. Within these sectors the key power axis tended to be between the committee chair and lead professional officer in the department. This 'strong government' tended to manifest itself in these particular fiefdoms within the council (see the section on departmentalism below).

Overall the traditional perspective, in terms of democracy, outlines the legalistic picture – there are elections every four years allowing local electorates to vote for or against their incumbent representative councillor. These elected members, and thus the council as a whole, are accountable to the wider electorate through the ballot box.

The traditional conception of democracy outlined here is one exclusively focused on the elected chamber of the council. The elected democratic forum

(i.e. the full assembly and/or the committee) is taken to be the expression of local democracy in local government. Democratic authority for decisions within the council flows from this forum. The emphasis is on councillors as the embodiment of democracy. However, as Tony Blair has argued, this reflects a rather minimalist view of local democracy with councils becoming 'trapped in the secret world of caucus and the party group' (Blair 1998: 15). The reality in single party controlled councils is that decisions made in democratic forums have actually been made in pre-meetings by the majority party groupings.

Departmentalism

A second key aspect of the traditional perspective is the emphasis on a departmental structure within the council. During the rapid post-war expansion of local government new and expanded functions and responsibilities were given to local government. The obvious response to each one was to establish new departments to take care of them. New areas of responsibility generated new professions and new bureaucracies.

In each local authority department there would be an administrative elite recruited from the relevant professional group with a large administrative, non-professional staff subordinate to them. There was no room for the generalist within local government career structures – the only route into a local authority hierarchy was via a professional qualification and career. So individuals working within these structures were encouraged to adopt a narrow career path specifically focused on individual professions and departments.

Yet criticism of the fragmentation of local councils was heard, prior to the post-war expansion, as early as 1934. The Hadow Committee reports published between 1923 and 1934 on the qualification, recruitment, training and promotion of local government officers referred to the fragmentation of responsibilities between departments. It suggested that town clerks should be general administrators and undertake a co-ordinating role and not be recruited from the narrow specialist ranks of local government lawyers:

He should be a person of broad and constructive outlook interested in the wider issues of local government, skilled in negotiation. And he should ordinarily have had expertise in administrative work. (Hadow Committee 1934 para.98)

The situation with departments is described by Cochrane:

each was basically left to run by its own professionals, within apparently non-controversial financial guidelines laid down by the Finance Department and legal constraints set by the Town Clerk's Department. (1994: 143)

The professionals running these departments had been accorded a certain status and granted a degree of autonomy in terms of how they delivered their services, controlled entry to their profession and regulated the conduct of their own members. Gradually over the course of the 20th century, and particularly after 1945, welfare professionals who had been recruited as the scope of public services expanded, increasingly grew in importance within local councils. As Clarke et al. note:

In practice in the first twenty years or so after 1945 the professional approaches associated with particular service areas rather than the old (generalizing) expertise of law and finance, tended to take the lead in local policymaking. (Clarke et al. 1994: 144)

These new professions were largely absorbed into local councils without any change to the basics of the dominant existing organisational structure. Indeed departmentalism increased with the incorporation of these new professions.

Mintzberg (1983) argues that the new public sector professionals created by the expansion of the welfare state were different from older professions in that their existence was dependent on the bureaux in which they were employed. As Reade argues:

The new bureaucratic professions ... have no choice but to be public employees ... they generally welcome the extension of state power, for it is the only source of such power as they themselves possess; indeed these occupational groups owe their very existence to the extension of the power of the state. (Reade 1987: 126)

The new local government professions were also different in that they tended not to be completely dominated by men (although males tended to be well represented in the senior echelons of these professions). However, they exacerbated the culture of departmentalism and added to the divisions within local councils. This created councils where policy development was very segmented as the expertise in specified areas tended to be concentrated within departments.

Committees

The traditional structure of local government is such that the culture of departmentalism on the local government officer side is paralleled on the member side. Most councils have traditionally been structured in a way where the committees on the council shadow each department. These

committees would usually be supplemented by a large number of sub-committees that report to them.

The committee system was necessary as statute required that local councils create committees to undertake certain functions e.g. education, social work, planning. The Bains (1973) interim report urged the removal of all statutory requirements upon local authorities to appoint particular committees (but this was not wholly accepted by Government). It argued that the creation of statutory or 'special' committees for particular services encouraged both members and officers for those services to adopt a departmental approach (Bains 1973: 20). In Scotland, however, the Local Government Scotland Act which preceded the 1974 reorganisation, made mandatory the establishment of education and social work committees and the appointment of certain officers including directors of education and social work. In a way this legislation reinforced both the departmental and committee structures of councils.

Committees have been part of local councils since the origin of local elections and before and have become the 'ingrained habit' of local government (Stewart 2000: 43-4). As Stewart notes:

it has been assumed almost without question that a local authority requires a committee system or that the council meeting should follow established practice centring on committee reports or minutes. (2000: 5)

The committee cycle of meetings, formal agendas, reports, standing orders of the council all help shape councillors' perceptions of their roles – it sets out a rhythm of council business for both council members and senior officers (Stewart 2000: 46). They define for the councillors the agendas of local

politics and the 'way it is done here' (Stewart 2000: 19). New officers and councillors are socialised into the council's mode of operations. Stewart notes:

despite the fact that most of the legislation requiring local authorities to appoint specific committees has now been repealed, the habit of committee working continues almost as though legislation demanded it. (Stewart 2000: 23).

Councillor/Officer dichotomy

Committees in the main shadowed one of the professional departments on the officer side. This fits in neatly with the policy-administration dichotomy and gives it a tangible expression within council structures. The councillors on the committee were responsible for the development of policy, whilst the officers in the department were responsible for implementing it. This created an axis between the leading officer in the department and the chair of the shadow committee. As the Bains Report noted, it was a traditional and generally accepted part of the officer's role to meet the chairman of committee before the committee meeting and brief him about the various items on the agenda (1973 para. 3.43)

The Bains Report noted how many members and officers still subscribed to the policy/administration dichotomy as 'as one behind which they can shelter as occasion requires' (1973 para. 3.2) thus inhibiting the creation of any sense of unity of purpose within councils. The policy/administration dichotomy describes in formal terms the relationship between elected members and salaried officers. Officers are cast in a subservient role 'below' members who - with their elected status and the democratic legitimacy it bestows - are

deemed to be the key policymakers. Officers are there to 'service' committees and ensure the efficient and effective implementation of services.

Stoker and Wilson (1986) describe the notion of councillors making policy and officers simply implementing it as that 'hoary old chestnut of local government studies'. Whilst recognising that this is the relationship in terms of convention, the reality of modern-day local government (as established by various empirical studies) is that the power dynamic in local government is a lot more fluid and dynamic than this stale interpretation would suggest (see for example Cockburn 1977; Saunders 1980; Leach and Wilson 2000). The reality in terms of internal relations is that leading officers are in charge of vast budgets and, in terms of line management, in charge of a significant number of employees. These factors coupled with their expertise and professional status gives officers control over significant political resources. Their access to such resources is inevitably reflected in their relations with council members. Thus, modern accounts of the dynamics of local policymaking seldom dismiss such officers as the mere 'implementers' of councillor-dictated local authority policy.

A more realistic account of policymaking, drawn from empirical research in the 1970s and 1980s, is what has been called the 'joint elite' model. This line of analysis emphasises that in most councils key policy decisions tend to be taken by a management team consisting of both leading councillors and officers – with the latter not always necessarily subservient to the former. As Wilson and Game (2002) note this interpretation is supported by a number of empirical studies conducted by Cockburn (1977) in Lambeth, Saunders (1980) in Croydon, and by Green (1981) in Newcastle. However, Wilson and Game do go on to note that any broad-brush interpretation of the power dynamics within any local authority is difficult. The power dynamics within a ruling

party group, back-bench councillors, internal departments, between departments or on a hung or balanced council could all change the nature of the relationship between councillors and officers in a council. The simplicity of the councillor/officer dichotomy yields little explanatory potential when set against the complexity and scale of modern-day local council organisations.

Mutuality, Professionalism and Trust

Another aspect of the traditional perspective identified in official reports is that of professionalism. The Bains Report noted:

The local government service at officer level is based upon a tradition of professional skills, each operating within its own specialism. (1973 para 3.35)

The report notes how some of these professional groupings have as a key aim 'the desire to preserve their position in relation to other professions', before going on to suggest:

Local government has been engaged over a considerable period in the provision of a number of separate services, each controlled by a separate department, with its own independent head of profession. The situation has developed strong professional motivation and loyalty to departments, but has resulted in certain basic weaknesses which are now being tackled by a number of authorities. (Bains 1973: para 5.11)

A key weakness identified by Bains was that the culture of mutuality and professionalism and trust resulted in under-managed local councils. The Bains Report in acknowledging the relationship between traditional professionalism and management noted:

it must be recognised that at senior levels, particularly in the larger authorities, management skills are as important as professional skills and appointments to senior positions should be made on that basis. (Bains 1973: 6)

The report recommended a corporate management approach and suggested that the need for one 'is beyond dispute if local government is to be efficient and effective' (Bains 1973: 7). Bains pointed to the lack of resources and staff devoted in local authorities to central functions such as human resource management (Bains 1973 paras.6.14 and 6.40). The Wheatley Report in Scotland had a similar diagnosis:

What is missing in local government is unified management ... Some organ is needed beside the council itself in which aims can be formulated for the authority as a whole, as well as the means of achieving these aims. (Wheatley 1969: para. 950)

The picture of local authorities projected by the traditional perspective is that within these departments there was a culture of mutuality and collegiality – most were organised along professional lines with codes of standards and ethics presumed to bind individuals together. Stewart states quite categorically, 'The culture of local authorities has been a professional culture' (1989: 174). Within such a culture there is a high degree of trust between professionals which allows for low levels of regulation, monitoring and management within councils.

Professionals were bound together with what was referred to as a public sector ethos - a shared belief system amongst council employees. Roughly summarised, it amounts to a belief in the capability of the public sector to make a difference in people's lives and the utility of governmental action in general (see Pratchett and Wingfield 1996 for a detailed discussion of the

public sector ethos in local government). The notion of the public sector ethos stands in direct contrast to public choice critiques of bureaucratic behaviour (see, for example, Niskanen 1973; Pirie 1988; Ridley 1988)

Particularly post-1945 this public administration orientation was inspired by the professions' social policy concerns and the belief in state policies to tackle social problems. It thus has its roots in the early post-war period. Those working within state institutions developed a certain ethos, which distinguished them from their private sector counterparts. There was an inherent belief and optimism that they could make a difference to society. There was a belief that government worked with, 'The Enlightenment notion that the world was full of puzzles and problems which, through the application of human reason and knowledge, could be solved' (Parsons 1995: 17).

Local authorities were conceived as part of the Welfare State and would ensure equal social citizenship for all. Health care and education, instead of being viewed as goods to be purchased in market-place exchanges, were increasingly viewed as being a right. Local government was expanded on the values that underpinned the welfare state - statutory standards achieved through regulation. Underpinning this was a public sector ethos – a belief amongst public servants that their activities were serving the public good and interest. This was reflected in the financial remuneration received by public sector workers which was frequently less than their private sector counterparts. This was underpinned by a hierarchical public sector bureaucracy with experience and long service rewarded through career structures.

The ethos of professionalism inculcated a sense of continuity, skills and knowledge within its particular domain in each council (Stewart 2000: 47). As Laffin notes, 'the professions, once established, tend to be forces for conservatism and policy maintenance' (1986: 224). Career paths for many council officers have tended to be dictated by these professions. An ambitious professional is likely to move from council to council – loyalty to the profession can thus have greater meaning than loyalty to a council (Stewart 2000: 48).

The professionalisation of policy-making in the UK created a context of national occupational communities in local government with the professional associations of local government officers acting as important national influences on policy development diluting the influence of localities.

Professional codes of accountability emphasise that professionals (as a group) are accountable to each other and their professional association for the maintenance of standards. In legal terms they were, of course, accountable to the body politic of the local council. However, professional ideology was such that 'amateur' politicians were viewed as lacking the expertise to hold professionals accountable for standards. Professions were emphasised as the guardians of standards with mutuality the dominant regulatory 'tool'. There was a high degree of trust permeating the internal organisation of the council.

The dominance of the professional culture was said to have inhibited the development of a management one:

Until the mid-1960s there was little serious attempt to impose any form of council-wide management on the various departments and the professional leadership within them. Management was the responsibility of professional experts and administrators, rather than a

set of managers with specifically managerial skills, training or expertise. Whatever management skills were acquired were learned 'on the job'. (Cochrane 1994: 144)

Bureaucracy

The bureaucratic structure of local government facilitated a powerful role for the 'bureaucracy' as:

This structure is grounded in the role of the local authority as an agency for the delivery of a series of services and the definition of services or functions as the main building blocks of the departmental structure reflects the key professions of local government. (Leach et al. 1994: 20)

Departments tend to be headed by a chief officer drawn from the dominant profession. Below the head is a clear line of bureaucracy right down to the street level. The bureaucracy and professionals within Scottish local government are there to administer local public services. They are defined as administrators as they are deemed to be non-political, non-partisan, objective, impartial public service deliverers. McConnell (2004: 38) notes, 'For local authorities in Scotland, the first priority is to operate within the law'. As the Accounts Commission noted:

Within the public sector, the emphasis traditionally has been on administration, and in particular, satisfying statutory and regulatory requirements. (Accounts Commission 1994: 74)

The focus in local government according to the Accounts Commission (1994: 75) was on the committee process, financial regularity, meeting statutory obligations and the avoidance of unauthorised action.

It is possible that this description of local government was at some point in its historical development reasonably valid. The post-war period was an era of expanding budgets and services with the welfare state being built on the basis of a relatively homogeneous public. Public services tended to be mass produced on a uniform basis and consumed likewise, in what Stoker (1989) has described as a Fordist mode of production. During this era the technical skills of impartial bureaucrats were deemed to be highly useful in administrative and practical terms. They would deliver services on the basis of clearly defined rules and procedures. Local councils were deemed self-sufficient in the production of many services for their citizens.

However, in the 1990s the conventional wisdom was that the task of local government was growing ever more complex and this required a change in structures. The Society for Local Authority Chief Executives referred to a, 'growing realisation of the complexity of the issues facing government and an increasing frustration at the rigidity of the bureaucratic frameworks by which they are bound' (SOLACE 1995).

The traditional municipal perspective was compatible with the view of local government as a production-orientated service. Local government was there to provide social services such as education, housing and social work. The growth of the welfare state brought with it an identifiable category of welfare professionals in the public sector. The professionals who delivered public services were deemed to be suitably qualified to decide the quantity, manner and detail of service provision. As Greenwood and Stewart (1974: 5) note, this left little time to examine the social, economic and physical environment of the local authority, or the demands and preferences of consumers of these services. The focus was almost solely on service delivery, with local councils deemed to have the in-house self-sufficiency to undertake this task.

Some seven years after the 1995-6 reorganisation, Lapsley et al. (2002) argued that a major driving force for change in Scottish local government had been the desire to dispense with outmoded bureaucratic practices (2002: ix). Traditional ways of working had led to local authorities being criticised as rigid, hierarchical organisations (Lapsley et al. 2002: xi).

The traditional municipal organisational perspective with its conventional mechanistic design and orientation was compatible with a traditionally held view of local authorities as mechanical producers of a set range of unchanging services designed to meet the needs of an equally static and predictable environment (Haynes 1980: 34). The structure of local council procedures and operations were classically bureaucratic leading Haynes to suggest that the notion of traditional local government was closely linked to the classical perspective in organisational theory.

Classical theory is closely identified with the work of Fayol (1949) and Weber (1947). Fayol's work emphasised management authority and implementation and the argument that there were certain core principles that all organisations could follow. Weber focused on dividing organizations into hierarchies, establishing strong lines of authority and control. He suggested that organizations develop comprehensive and detailed standard operating procedures for all routinised tasks. Haynes was correct to identify the link between the classical perspective and traditional local government, however insights of classical theory could be applied to any significant bureaucracy, not just those in local authorities.

In the context of local government there was 'prolonged adherence to classical principles' partly due to certain operational requirements, which gradually

assumed crucial importance as the work of local authorities developed. These were the need to cope with the logistical problems that accompanied the growth in the scale and complexity of administrative tasks and the need to provide impartial and accountable administration (Haynes 1980: 10).

The classical perspective places emphasis on the achievement of internal, machine-like efficiency within an organisation. This objective is attained through the imposition of rigid, hierarchical structures and authoritarian practices and procedures (Haynes 1980: 3). Traditional local councils were good examples of this organisational form – at the departmental level there was a clear line of bureaucratic control running from the professional - acting as head of service - to those engaged in the delivery of front-line services.

Haynes contrasts classical organisational theory with more modern theory, but maintains its relevance as a conceptual framework through which to understand change in an organisation:

Once their limitations are recognised and the need for substantial augmentation is accepted then classical principles and concepts can still provide a useful analytical framework, a back-cloth against which the other dimensions of organisational dynamics can be placed. (1980: 3)

This insight is relevant to the approach of this research. Contemporary 'theory' in local government studies is largely based around competing notions of how best to conceptualise change in local government with varying degrees of emphasis on management, democratic and 'governance' aspects of change. However, if one is to understand the contemporary organisation of local government a useful starting point is the classically influenced

municipal tradition as it is this one that new approaches are often contrasted with.

Accountability

The traditional structures of committees and departments in local government were designed with the intention of ensuring that there were clear lines of accountability in the organisation. The frameworks underpinning these structures ensure lines between the actions and decisions of a street-level bureaucrat up through the tiers of the council organisation to the chamber of elected officials and the public at large. The traditional municipal perspective on local government tends to emphasise these relations.

As noted above, within councils there are bureaucratic rules and procedures, as well as staff structures that follow a clear grading structure with transparent lines of accountability up and down the organisation. Accountability is a bureaucratic form rooted very much in Weberian conceptions of bureaucracy. Honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity inform the behaviour of officers as they administer rules decided by the politicians. The importance of accountability is reflected in the work of central departments (treasurers, personnel officers, lawyers etc.) enforcing formal accountability of departments as well as adherence to rules and procedure (Stewart 1989: 173-4).

In comparison to central government, the emphasis in local government tends to be more on collective rather than individual political accountability. As McConnell (2004: 6) notes, there is no legal provision for policies to be made by individual councillors. What this has tended to do, is inject a sense of

collectivism into the endeavours and work of councils. Standing orders tend to be constructed around the assumption of the full council as the ultimate decision-making arena. There is no notion of individualised responsibility (along the lines of UK conventions of individual ministerial accountability).

In terms of upward accountability the traditional perspective tends to emphasise the subordinate legal position of local councils in relation to Parliament. This reflects the legal reality in Scotland (as in Britain) that the formal constitutional position of local councils is that they have only been able to do what statute allows them to. They have duties and competencies but all of them can be traced back to Acts of Parliament. No council can act *ultra vires* (beyond its powers). A legalistic analysis of local government in Scotland would emphasise its subordinate status – on this reading councils are bodies created by central government for its convenience.

Critiques of the traditional perspective

The key features of the traditional perspective have been outlined above. As noted there are numerous accounts of 'traditional local government' but all share the same essential features. Leach et al. (1994: 2) in their description of a traditional bureaucratic authority suggest it is dominated by values of self-sufficiency, uniformity, direct provision, professionalism and departmentalism. Stewart (2000) refers to the 'The Inherited World of Local Government' in which he outlines shared assumptions that are part of the inheritance of local government. He includes in these shared assumptions: the committee habit, professional necessities, the bureaucratic habit, departmental base, chief officers, the search for co-ordination, council-officer relations, rituals of local government. Leach et al. (1994: 15) note:

Local authorities generally have shared a set of organisational assumptions which have moulded their way of working over the years and ensured organisational continuity. Those assumptions ... have expressed and supported a view of local authorities as predominantly agencies for the delivery of large-scale services on a uniform and pre-determined pattern, required for the maintenance and development of the welfare state.

Leach et al. then go on to identify a similar list of implicit assumptions that inform the culture of traditional bureaucratic authorities: the necessity of the committee system; the tradition of departmentalism; the enforced role of the centre; the assumption of self-sufficiency; the assumption of uniformity; the assumption of direct control; the dominance of professionalism; and the formalities of accountability (Leach et al. 1994: 17-18).

As mentioned above the traditional perspective, despite its durability, has attracted much criticism. The following section outlines the criticisms that the traditional perspective has tended to attract.

Critiques of 'bureaucrats'

As noted above most of the critique of traditional local government was observable in the official reports commissioned in the 1960s and 1970s. The culture of professionalism was deemed to have resulted in under-managed local government. However, a branch of academic literature – public choice – which emerged in the 1970s, suggested that the behaviour of these professionals tended to have far more serious repercussions for councils than this. Disregarding traditional accounts of public sector employees being motivated by 'public interest', public choice theorists argued that such agents were primarily oriented by their own self-interest (see Niskanen 1971, 1973).

From the public choice perspective, the expanding role of the professional in local government created what economists term the 'principal-agent problem' (Brown and Jackson 1990: 203-5). Through their professional autonomy the needs of clients were defined by those delivering the services to them. There is supplier-induced demand, where the level and quality of the service produced is reflective of the interests of the agent (professional) rather than the principal (the public). The agent has an interest in service expansion, as it will benefit him/her in terms of prestige and monetary reward. Thus, from a public choice perspective, what this professional autonomy in local government creates is an upward pressure on expenditure. Welfare professionals in effect become a pressure group with a unique position in local government policy-making: as well as producing the services, they define the demand for those services. Public choice theory would suggest that the fact that local government services are labour intensive activities and employ more professionals than other levels of government, means that it suffers disproportionately from these defects.

This school of thought emphasised the ills of government bureaucracy and thus indirectly, those of local government. The roots of this critique lie in the public choice theory of the motivation and behaviour of public sector bureaucrats. The relevant insight emerging from this theory was that far from being neutral, non-partisan and interested in serving the public good, bureaucrats were best conceptualised as utility maximising individuals with self-serving interests. For public choice scholars this came to be reflected in bureau aggrandisement and budget maximising behaviour (see for example Niskanen 1971; 1973, Buchanan 1968, Tullock 1965). Public servants are seen as no different from economic agents in that they are utility maximising agents. The following variables are identified as factors motivating the

public bureaucrats: salary, prerequisites of office, public reputation, power, patronage, output of the bureau, ease of making changes and ease of managing the bureau. Their self-interest pushed budgets upwards as bureaucrats seek to increase their numbers, job security and promotion prospects.

Later accounts suggested bureaucratic motivations were more complex than these theorists suggested. In the British context, Dunleavy (1989) suggests that rational bureaucratic behaviour would be exhibited through bureau-shaping rather than budget maximisation behaviour.

Another branch of literature in the UK, usually labelled 'urban managerialist' also emphasised the unique power of professionals in local government. It emphasised local bureaucrats as having sufficient autonomy to constitute an independent influence upon patterns of local services. Pahl's (1975) Weberian sociological framework emphasised urban managers as an important independent variable in the politics of local decision-making. He suggested that they had sufficient autonomy to constitute an independent influence upon patterns of local services.

Whatever its merit, the public choice critique began to feed directly into local government policymaking upon the election of the Thatcher Government in 1979. Mrs Thatcher was reported to have given her senior civil servants a copy of Niskanen's work to read upon her arrival in office. This outlook on bureaucracy was gradually reflected in central government policy towards local government. Initiatives such as compulsory competitive tendering (CCT), council house sales, the expanding role of the Accounts Commission were all ways to undermine existing council bureaucracies.

Ian Lang, the Secretary of State for Scotland during the initial local government reorganisation consultation period, summarised the Conservative philosophy of the period when he agreed that:

(a) post-war consensus – founded on support for monopolistic, one-dimensional public service delivery, with public services themselves acting as purchaser, provider and regulator – was unsustainable. It was a recipe for spiralling costs and ultimately poorer services. (1992: 3)

This view of bureaucracy was evident after the local government reorganisation. The Labour government identified a ‘public service producer culture’:

because institutions tend to look after their own interests, public services can be organised too much around the structure of the providers rather than the users. (Cabinet Office 1999: 11)

Few commentators today would question the argument that it was naïve to assume that the primary motivation of bureaucrats was the promotion of the public interest. In the post-war period the programmes of the new professionals in local government tended to be ‘needs-led’ (or ‘demand-led’) initiatives, with the needs defined by the professionals themselves (Cochrane 1994: 144).

Narrow Focus

A common criticism of the traditional local government perspective in recent years is that it focuses too narrowly on the institutions of local government and in doing so neglects the wider economic and social context within which they operate (see for example Dunleavy 1980; Stoker and Wilson 2004). It tends to over-emphasise the role of local authorities as bodies responsible for

effective public service delivery while downplaying their role as political institutions constituted for debate and exchange. To the extent that the traditional perspective focuses on questions of power in local politics it does so in a very circumscribed way and largely accepts the legal myth that power lay where it was supposed to i.e. with the full council. Formal rules, structures and relations tend to be overplayed while informal influences and dynamics are ignored. Urban politics literature from the pluralist (Newton 1976), Neo-Marxist (Cockburn 1977; Saunders 1980) and state orientated perspectives (Pahl 1975; Dunleavy 1980) challenged traditional approaches to local government studies (see also Judge et al. 1995). More recently the local governance literature has done likewise (Rhodes 1997; Stoker 1999, 2000; 2004; Denters and Rose 2005).

Another problem of the traditional perspective is that it was essentially static in character. Its strength is in the explanation of continuity in local government. It identified long-standing and accepted practices in local government highlighting them as the keys to understanding how local government operated. The municipal tradition therefore reflects many of the unquestioned ways of working within a local council – the standard operating procedures that reflect years and decades of past practice. The picture projected is one of a durable, slow changing institution.

However from around the mid-1970s onwards a series of pressures resulted in the local political environment becoming far more turbulent and fluid. In the words of Richard Crossman (1976), the then Labour minister responsible for local government, 'the party was over'. The traditional perspective does not explain change and most observers of local government in the 1980s and 1990s characterised it as being in a state of perpetual flux with continuous reform (e.g. Rhodes 1988; Stoker 1991). Answers were being sought to

questions that could not be answered within the confines of this 'paradigm' of local government. This, together with the adoption of new research methods which involved new ways of analysing local politics meant the traditional approach to studying and understanding local government came under increasing challenge (see Dunleavy 1980; Duncan and Goodwin 1988).

The traditional mode of analysis of local government is largely ethnocentric in character. There is no attempt to locate the current structure and operation of local government in Scotland in a comparative context, beyond the UK. Although constitutional doctrines such as 'ultra vires' reflect specific national differences, there still remains scope for locating the analysis of local government within a comparative scope of enquiry.

Empirical Reliability

Stewart (2000: 15) sums up a key basis for the traditional perspective when he argues that:

The nature of local government has been shaped by its history. Shared understandings that have developed over time have become part of the assumptive world of local government. They have formed beliefs about the role of local government, and its ways of working.

Laws, rule-books and standing orders (which are fundamentally prescriptive) are taken to be descriptive of reality. The traditional municipal perspective projects an image of local councils as stable institutions with clear operating rules and procedures that provide a clear structure within which local politics and administration takes place. However, as researchers schooled in the behavioural methods of social science demonstrated in the 1970s and 1980s the expectations of the law is not always the same as how people actually

behave within council structures. Much empirical research within local councils has highlighted how 'what should be' often bears little resemblance to what actually 'is' (see for example Cockburn 1977; Saunders 1980).

Another criticism of the traditional perspective has been that as a 'representation of reality' it has been declining in usefulness. Local government has changed and viewing it through the traditional perspective is not a particularly fruitful method of enquiry. However, not all observers have been as quick to reject its empirical reliability, for as Midwinter argues:

Local authority structures remain essentially those of service department/committee links with integrating resource departments and committees. There is scepticism of the need for change over tried and tested methods, and any change will in the main be gradual, not radical. (1995: 130)

Midwinter's (1995) account of Scottish local government emphasises that the ethos of direct public provision, professionalism and bureaucracy are all important in understanding the practices and procedures of local councils. In short he suggests that despite all the reformist rhetoric in local government studies, the structure of local government in 1995 was still dominated by the principle of directly elected local authorities delivering services within a framework of political accountability.

Departmentalism

As noted above, various government reports (Maud 1967; Wheatley 1969; Bains 1973; Paterson 1974) acknowledged the existence of a segregated departmental culture in councils. The corporate management critique contained in these reports question the problems of the traditional municipal

'model' of local government; specifically its inward-looking focus, departmentalism and lack of external orientation. The corporate management 'revolution' took its cue from several government-initiated reports of the period. Amongst these was the Maud Report's diagnosis on local government that:

There exists an organisation which is based on separate parts in each of which there is gathered the individual service, with its professional departmental hierarchy led by a principal officer and, supervising it, a committee of members. There may be unity in the parts, but there is disunity in the whole. (Maud 1967 vol.1, para. 97)

In Scotland, the Wheatley Report (1969) referred to a lack of 'unified management'. It called for:

A body with definite management functions including responsibility for such matters as developing and co-ordinating the policy of the authority, assessing priorities and planning the broad assignment of finance; putting up major policy proposals for approval of the council; and co-ordinating the action needed to implement the policy. (1969: 230)

Four years later, the Paterson Report (1973) also identified the problem of departmentalism:

With certain significant exceptions ... the structure found in most Scottish authorities is still largely traditional ... a high degree of specialisation or departmentalism is found ... In general the process of formulating policies and devising plans to implement these policies is carried out independently within the various service committees and their respective departments, each making separate recommendations to full council. (1973 para 3.5)

Rhodes and Midwinter (1980: 99) reflect that the Paterson Report's recommendations were not altogether surprising if the committee's

membership is examined. Only two local government professions were represented: law and accountancy. These professions are found in the central departments that seek to control the big spending social services departments (none of whose professions were represented). As Kerley (1994: 60) notes, this reflected a long standing underlying tension in councils between the centre (the focus of corporate and strategic thinking about management in a council) and departments (the focus of both service delivery and the professional ethos).

Previously, the Bains Report in England and Wales also acknowledged the problem of departmentalism, and noted how the management structures of many local authorities remained those that emerged from the development of local government in the 19th century (1973: 4). It argued that, 'The traditional departmental attitude within much of local government must give way to a wider ranging corporate outlook' (Bains Para 2.11). It also suggested that 'reorganisation provides a unique opportunity for local government to take a critical look at itself and to make changes which might not be possible at any other time' (Bains 1973: 4). This it viewed as necessary, as 'The separateness of committees contributes to the separateness of departments, and the professionalism of departmental staff feeds on this separateness' (Bains 1973: 5).

The Bains Report argued that, 'a number of traditional practices should be challenged'. These included day-to-day involvement of members in administration and consequent misuse of the committee system, the failure of officers to develop and display a corporate approach, and the lack of machinery to ensure VFM (value-for-money) (Bains 1973: 4).

McConnell refers to the traditional approach as adhering to a logic that made sense when there was 'relatively minimalist state intervention' and whose only reference point was the functional specialism of *ad hoc* boards. His characterisation is of 'a system of local authority management which was fragmented, departmentalised, lacking in co-ordination and driven largely by professional and bureaucratic interests' (McConnell 2004: 71).

The Labour Government's modernisation agenda since 1997 reflected similar critiques of local government departmentalism. The language has changed though – the government refers to the fact that services are not sufficiently 'joined-up'. It argues that too little attention has been paid to ensuring that services meet people's various and mixed needs in a holistic manner, and where necessary to working across departmental and institutional barriers (Cabinet Office 1999, Ch.3).

Committees

A variety of government reports have identified the problems associated with the aforementioned committee systems in local councils (Maud 1969; Bains 1973; Paterson 1973). The Maud Committee (1969) identified the multiplicity of committees and sub-committees as a major contributory element in the excessive fragmentation of local government management organisation. The Paterson Report (1973) recommended the creation of a policy and resources committee to try to develop a sense of corporate thinking and overcome the narrow specialisms of committees. However, as Monies notes:

Although proposals for the reform of the committee system were suggested as necessary at the time of the 1975 reorganisation ... the old conventions have been difficult to change, and therefore it is important to be aware of the traditional committee system. (1996: 44)

Bains cited a *McKinsey and Co* management consultancy report that reflects a conventional critique of the traditional authority:

in common with many other authorities, (this council) finds itself with an organisation and a system of making decisions that has changed little since the present structure of authorities was created out of the tangled web of local boards and functional administrations in the latter half of the 19th century. The democratic forms of Council and committee and the rigid hierarchical structure of the service have some great strengths but in many ways are not geared to the modern task of managing thousands of people and hundreds of millions of pounds of assets, nor to making complex often technical decisions on the development of those assets. The city has neither the organisation structure nor the planning system nor the management methods commensurate with the job. (cited in Bains 1973 para 4.11)

The Bains Report suggested that these words applied with 'some force' at all levels of local authority (1973: para. 4.12). It therefore recommended: 'As a general rule we do not believe that it is necessary, or even desirable, for the committee and departmental structure to coincide' (Bains 1973: para. 5.74).

Prior to reorganisation in the 1990s, the Scottish Local Government Information Unit criticised committees for stifling debate, focusing on service provision rather than long-term policy strategies, compartmentalising discussions, seldom providing opportunity for discussion of service provision that cut across departments and emphasising chief officer input while limiting the input of less senior staff (SLGIU 1995: 2).

Over a decade ago, the Audit Commission (1997) also adopted a critical stance. It argued in 1997 that, 'committees can be slow and cumbersome' and

'the system is also expensive in terms of the opportunity cost of senior management time' (Audit Commission 1997). More recently the DETR described the committee system as opaque because 'despite the time and resources councils devote to running it, their major decisions are in reality taken outside it' (DETR 1999: 8).

Tony Blair also criticised the committee system arguing that it failed to foster leadership in local authorities:

The way that local government currently operates is inefficient and opaque. It is not fit for its modern role. Councillors are very diligent and spend many hours on civic business. But the heart of the problem is that local government needs recognised leaders if it is to fulfil the community leadership role. People and outside organisations need to know who is politically responsible for running the council ... The shifting sands of committee membership and chairs fails to foster leaders and leadership. (Blair 1998: 16)

From once being regarded as a strength of local government, the committee system in recent years has been almost universally criticised (Stewart 2000: 45). Most committee structures shadow the service departments of the council – reflecting the perceived role of the council to be an institution existing to facilitate the delivery of a series of public services. The strong alliances that have inevitably developed between committee chairs and heads of department have been criticised as reinforcing the departmental orientation of councils and act as a barrier to more corporate working. In building up councillor specialisms, it is suggested the committee system also narrows their concerns. As Cockburn argues:

what had existed as a loose assembly of council committees and a multiplicity of small departments. Their worlds barely co-ordinated had become a tightly-knit hierarchy under the control of a board of powerful directors (senior officers), in close partnership with a top-level caucus of majority party members. (1977: 6)

The picture painted by Cockburn was that committees were merely the formal mechanism for rubber-stamping decisions taken in private meetings that involved the key members of the majority party.

The committee system in local councils has faced continual criticism that it was inefficient and time consuming with too much time spent on operational day-to-day details and not enough considering more important strategic policy questions. Lack of co-ordination between departments and the large number of committees in councils has been a continual theme of critiques of local government.

Stewart (2003: 59-60) suggests that although much of this analysis has some merit in that it identifies key weaknesses of the committee system, it falls down in failing to acknowledge its strengths. Stewart argues these are numerous: formal decisions are made in public; decisions taken in private still have to be justified; councillors' committee specialism could easily be viewed as a strength rather than a weakness – it established their position in the authority giving them access to information regarding the council's operation.

A Department of Environment Working Group in 1993 argued:

Many local authorities consider that the existing committee system is a satisfactory internal management mechanism. It is tried, tested, well established and understood by the public. It is sufficiently flexible to permit a multiplicity of arrangements to meet the needs and circumstances of individual authorities. It is open to the public and, in

theory at least, allows for full debate by all council members, and therefore the proper scrutiny of the council's proposed actions or decisions. Councils therefore are openly accountable for the decisions they take. (DoE 1993: para.5.2)

Local democracy

The traditional perspective's conception of local democracy forms the basis of official, established or conventional interpretations of the political processes in local government. Local elections are assumed to communicate voter wishes to a responsive elected body. Dearlove refers to this as 'the electoral chain of command model' with democratic representation assumed to be secured via local elections. Dunleavy cites writers such as Chester (1951), Hart (1968), Gowan (1962) and Jones (1969) as subscribers to this perspective:

The effectiveness and value of local democracy is widely taken as read in this literature, and detailed evidence to support this view is rarely thought necessary. (Dunleavy 1980: 9)

However, this uncritical view of local democracy has been increasingly challenged. For example, Dunleavy writing in 1980 argues that, 'the dominant picture of local government as electorally responsive, effectively representative or indeed locally orientated in any democratic sense is misplaced or unfounded' (1980: 5). Dunleavy refers to an institutional/public administration approach, 'which overwhelmingly reflect official, established or ultra-conventional interpretations of political process in local government' (1980: 6-8).

Dunleavy's own short-hand account of local government stands in direct contrast to the traditional one:

local authorities are insulated from electoral influences ... representative roles within local government have become highly fragmented and accentuated ... policymaking at the local level can be understood more in terms of general organisational ideologies than in terms of locally directed responses to the needs of particular areas or citizens. (1980: 5)

In a biting critique, the narrowness, simplicity and naivety of the traditional account of local democracy was challenged by Dunleavy (1980) who argued that political power did not lie, formally or legally, where traditional accounts suggested. Government and mainstream accounts of local democracy were deemed hopelessly inadequate.

A de-politicised, conservative picture of local government?

Although not always acknowledged, underpinning the traditional perspective on local government is a rather limited view of its role. The emphasis is on statutory responsibilities and public service delivery. Local governments have fairly precisely defined constitutional, statutory and legal limitations on the extent of their independent activities. Government reports have tended to reflect this outlook. For example, a recent report reflected this description of the role of officers in local government:

Officers should be responsible for day-to-day managerial and operational decisions within the local authority and should provide support to both the executive and all councillors in their several roles. (DETR 2002: para. 2.8)

The report described the role of the chief executive as 'under-pinned by the fundamental principles of political neutrality and service to the whole council' (DETR 2002 para 8.15).

The picture projected of local government could be described as technical one (or at least an essentially non-contested 'public administration' conception of the task). The emphasis on public service delivery and the narrowness of what is considered as the policy agenda of local authorities circumscribes its scope for action.

The traditional municipal organisational perspective - with its conventional mechanistic design and orientation - was compatible with a traditionally held view of local authorities as mechanical producers of a set range of unchanging services designed to meet the needs of an equally static and predictable environment (Haynes 1980: 34).

This may well reflect its historical roots – for much of its history Scottish local government was considered technical in character. However, one should not fall into the trap of equating 'politics' with 'party politics'. Local councils have always been political institutions in the sense that they decide how, when and where public services should be delivered. The description of them as technical reflects the fact that for many years the answers to these questions were viewed as relatively unproblematic and there was a broad consensus that the answers fell into the field of public administration.

Leach et al. (1994: 10) refer to a 'dynamic conservatism' in some local authority responses to external pressures for change. One quote from Monies highlights the underlying usually un-stated perspective, 'Councillors have ... come in for criticism in recent years with claims that they have become too 'professional' and political'' (1996: 38). Such 'modern' developments are viewed as an impingement on 'traditional' methods of working in local authorities.

The durability of traditional local government

Despite all of the criticisms of the traditional perspective, would-be reformers of local council structures and operations have found that traditional administrative management holds a powerful hold for many. Stewart (2000: 43) has suggested 'the inherited world of local government' – current practice dictated by professional, bureaucratic and political institutions – constrains options for future possibilities. Administrative and bureaucratic cultures that have developed over many years and decades act as unwritten codes of practice and rules that bind the internal policy and bureaucratic dynamics of local councils. The attempted implementation of policies does not automatically result in the transformation of operations and structures (Pressman and Wildavsky 1974).

Path-dependency theory suggests that once an organisation moves down a particular organisational path the costs of changing direction are high. As Pierson (2000: 252) argues:

In an increasing returns process, the probability of further steps along the same path increases with each move down that path. This is because the relative benefits of the current activity compared with other possible options increase over time. To put it a different way, the costs of exit – or switching to some previously plausible alternative – rise.

This insight has obvious relevance when the durability of the traditional municipal way of organising a local council is considered. It may persist, despite its inefficiency, because the costs of changing it are too high?

As well as describing perceived reality the traditional perspective also has normative undercurrents – the merits of organising local authorities in a traditional manner are, it is argued, all too often overlooked. The municipal tradition emphasises the inherent value and virtue of a public sector ethos (see Pratchett and Wingfield 1996). Midwinter (1995: 120-131) makes, ‘the case for municipal provision’, emphasising the benefits of organising local government within a framework of political accountability. Similarly the Local Government Management Board (LGMB) in England, refers to ‘great strength in the traditional approach to local governance and service delivery ... organisational structures, processes and personnel policies ... should remain rooted in an ethos of direct public provision’ (1994: para 2.17). Local public service providers were accountable to the relevant local government committees and through them, the council as a whole. Other public service delivery agencies were accountable to the Scottish Office and through the Secretary of State for Scotland, the UK Parliament. This model of accountability is underpinned by the conventions of the UK Constitution.

Government reports whilst often criticising traditional approaches to local government organisation and management also acknowledge its strengths – for example Paterson (1973) suggests, ‘while substantial change in some ways is certainly necessary, existing strengths must be preserved and built upon’ (1973: para 1.5). This is not surprising as the authors of such reports tend to be well-established local government practitioners. In many ways parts of the municipal traditional account of local government are an insider local government account of local government. Dunleavy suggests:

The interests and orientations of politicians and administrators in local government have exerted a distorting influence on the scope of local politics as an object of study, on the problems that are seen as important and even on the sort of answers that are provided. (1980: 1)

For its advocates 'traditional local government, despite some admitted shortcomings, is viewed positively, while almost everything which is not traditional local government tends to be perceived negatively' (Leach and Percy-Smith 2001: 2). This problem would appear not to be limited to Britain. Judd notes how, 'At least since the early 1960s, urban scholars have identified so closely with the object of their analysis that scholarship, advocacy, and ideology often have become hopelessly entangled' (2005: 120). In recent accounts of local government, 'defenders' of municipal local government have been notable for their absence.

However, Midwinter (1995) is notable for his dissension from mainstream thought. He called for a 'reconsideration of ... critiques of local government' arguing:

Despite the welter of rhetoric, the image of radical reform, the language of new public management, the glitz of marketing and public relations, the central role of the local authority remains – municipal provision of services. (1995: 131)

Midwinter suggested that the impact of new notions of governance, partnership and enabling have been overplayed. Likewise, Travers (1993: 1), noted that the service range provided by local authorities was little different from the 1970s, councils were still major providers of services as well as major employers. Small changes in practices of government have been exaggerated and extrapolated to fundamental re-shaping of local governance. In fact the fundamentals of traditional public administration - service delivery by directly employed staff and professionals - were still in place (Midwinter 1995: 131)

Midwinter views new frameworks of thinking about local government as complementary, rather than alternatives, to the traditional perspective. Local government has always been, and still is, about managing the margins (Elcock et al. 1989). Any faults within the local government system are viewed as vastly exaggerated and amenable to solution within the existing model of government. Defenders of traditional local government point to evidence highlighting that major studies of citizen attitudes to Scottish government are very favourable (see Midwinter 1995: 123-124). Traditional local government is viewed as embodying the merits of continuity and accrued institutional wisdom. McConnell (2004: 174) notes that: 'The traditional system (of accountability in local government) rested on long-standing principles of public administration'. Jordan (1994: 93) argues that it is, 'premature to abandon the traditional public administration literature as administrative forms may be more resistant to change than those who follow 'restructuring' suggest'.

This thesis will seek to examine the merits of this perspective i.e. the durability of the traditional perspective and the impact of new management and democratic reforms on it.

Conclusion

The traditional perspective could be criticised for being static in character – it identified local government 'customs', but could not account for how these might change. However, if one adopts a slightly different definition of 'traditional' this outlook on local government could prove fruitful when analysing contemporary developments. Bevir et al. (2003), argue that a tradition is best understood, 'as a set of understandings someone receives

during socialization. So a government tradition is a set of inherited beliefs about the institutions and history of government' (2003: 6).

The suggestion is that traditions are passed on from generation to generation in the form of beliefs and practices relayed in training, development and everyday work. In the local government context induction, training and development practices and the professional associations would play a key part in the transmission of such beliefs.

Bevir et al. argue that traditional practices can be fixed and static only if the environment in which they operate is likewise, if new or novel circumstances are faced then traditions will inevitably change (even if people think they are sticking fast to a tradition) (2003: 11). Over the past few decades the external environment of local government has presented many new circumstances for local councils to respond to.

Conceptualising 'tradition' in the manner suggested by Bevir et al. is likely to be more useful in understanding change in local government. Bevir et al.'s (2003) approach is rooted in a desire to identify circumstances when such traditions come under pressure to change.

Utilising this approach may be fruitful in analysing contemporary developments in local government as it is one that suggests the municipal tradition remains one that should not be neglected. As Pollitt and Summa argue when assessing change in public management:

the most convincing explanations ... appear to rest ... upon the characteristics of the political and administrative systems already in place ... (T)hese characteristics ... most significantly influenced what

was possible in terms of scope, process and speed of reform (1997: 13-15)

In summary this thesis will not disregard the relevance of the traditional perspective in local government studies. Its durability will be tested through a series of hypotheses directly flowing from the discussion of this chapter:

- The direct delivery of public services through a line management of accountable bureaucracy remains an important part of what local councils do.
- Local councils are still organised in a departmental manner with professionals dominant within their relevant department. Departmental boundaries are fiercely defended.
- Inherited council procedures and culture inform significant parts of what councils have done since reorganisation.
- For officers and councillors local democracy is expressed through the ballot box and the elected council chamber and its committees are the key expressions of that democracy. Committee systems are regarded as sacrosanct.
- Councillors are the key policymakers, with officers working through bureaucratic structures delivering these policies.
- Mutuality and professionalism are key parts of the ethos of the council, that is firmly rooted in the public sector.

Chapter 4: The New Public Management perspective

In the 1980s and 1990s the dominant municipal traditional analysis of local government studies was challenged by a new perspective. Continuous reform meant that traditional methods of analyzing local government did not necessarily help understand contemporary practice. A new public management (NPM) perspective emphasised the impact of various managerial reforms on local government structure and operations. Pratchett and Wingfield referred to:

The belief that the public sector ethos in local government has been eroded in favour of a new managerialist culture that emphasises efficiency and effectiveness as the primary values of the organisation. (1994: 5)

In a sense this new perspective on local government emerged in order to account for and understand the changing practice. The Scottish Branch of the Society for Local Authority Chief Executive's (SOLACE 1995) used the term 'new management agenda'. This is but one of a long list of attempts to summarise concisely the changes taking place in the management of government. This list includes 'managerialism' (Pollitt 1993); 'entrepreneurial government' (Osborne and Gaebler 1992); 'new wave management' (Hambleton and Hoggett 1990; Stoker and Mossberger 1995); or - the most common (and the term used in this thesis) - 'new public management' (Hood 1991, 1994; Dunleavy and Hood 1994; Hughes 1994; Biggs and Dunleavy 1995). There are subtle differences and emphasis amongst each term but each refers to distinctive new patterns of management in the public sector in the 1980s and 1990s. This chapter will review and analyse NPM orientated conceptions of local government.

Local government is of course not alone in modern times in being pervaded by the new ideology of managerialism (see Pollitt 1990). One of the many criticisms of traditional styles of working in local authorities was that they were 'under-managed' institutions (see chapter 3) and many of the reforms instigated in recent years have been focused on changing that. NPM perspectives on local government emphasise that this focus on management has become so dominant that it is the best conceptual lens through which to analyse the workings of local government. NPM perspectives place much emphasis on a view of local government that ascribes crucial importance to the management dimension of the political process.

Defining the politics of local government in such a manner echoes some wider definitions of politics. Some authors invoke managerial matters as encapsulating much of what politics is about, the emphasis being very much on the organisation of collective endeavour. For example, Anderson suggests:

In essence we act politically whenever we make decisions on behalf of other people and not for ourselves alone. Politics means planning and organising common projects, setting rules and standards that define the relationships of people to one another, and allocating resources among rival human needs and purposes. (Anderson, 1977: vii)

Leftwich also outlines a management-focused definition of politics:

politics comprises all the activities of co-operation and conflict, within and between societies, whereby the human species goes about organising the use, production and distribution of human, natural and other resources in the course of the production and reproduction of its biological and social life. (Leftwich, 1984: 64-5)

Administrative and managerial change has been a continual theme of public sector reform programmes in the past thirty years. Managerial perspectives of politics tend to focus on the 'production' part of politics – politics exists because people want to 'do things'.

Although public management is a subject widely written about there is no one over-arching account of Scottish local government written from this perspective. There are, however, numerous accounts of politics in the UK emphasising the management dimension of recent changes (e.g. Clarke et al. 1994; Farnham and Horton 1993; Stoker 1999; Walsh 1995). In the 1980s and 1990s numerous academic works emphasised the increasing importance of the managerial function in government. Clarke et al. (1994) went as far as to suggest that the UK was moving towards a 'managerial state'.

This perspective on politics places emphasis on public management practice as an important variable in shaping and promoting the needs, wishes, beliefs and identities of individual citizens. It is for this reason that any student of politics should be interested in this activity for as Alvesson and Willmott argue:

management is simply too important an activity and field of inquiry to be left to the mainstream thinking of management departments and business schools. Established management discourse and practice tends to incorporate and 'swallow up' larger and larger domains of social and personal life, such as culture (and) conflict. (1992: 3)

The problems facing a manager in local government are important: does he/she spend more money on nursery education or tackling the problem of urban/rural poverty? Does he/she invest in a new school or increase the pay

of social workers? These are decisions that are fundamentally what politics is about; as Laswell (1936) stated in his classic definition, politics is about who gets what, when and how. These decisions are virtually always taken within an environment of legitimate competing demands. Local government managers in Scotland are responsible for the rationing of scarce resources and taking important political decisions i.e. the politics of redistribution.

Public administration has traditionally been a sub-discipline of political science that has examined public sector management. One strand has reflected the policy-administration dichotomy that can be traced back to Max Weber and was popularised by Woodrow Wilson's famous proposition in *The Political Science Quarterly* of 1887 that public administration lay outside the sphere of politics (cited in Jordan 1994: 71)

Under the policy-administration dichotomy, the goals of policies were to be established by politicians, with the execution of policies to be undertaken by administrators as they attempted to reach the ends desired. However, as Lipsky (1980) has argued, 'street level bureaucrats' through their discretion at a local level can re-work and re-cast policies to such an extent that they themselves can be conceived as the policymakers.

Defining the concerns of public management can be tricky, as it is in essence a political question. The important point to be made for the purposes of this chapter (and indeed thesis) is that the study of management and politics, while they have commonly been perceived as discrete activities (see below), can also be just as easily conceptualised as one and the same thing. Decisions as regards the management and

allocation of government resources could serve as important aspects of definitions of both public management and politics.

The NPM perspective tends to emphasise how aspects of public sector management have come to resemble, far more closely, private sector management. Historically the distinction between public and private sector management has tended to emphasise the predisposition in the public sector with due process and rules and regulations i.e. public administration (as in the traditional municipal perspective). Managers in the public sector are bound, to a much greater extent, by legal and administrative procedures. However, with increased joint working and partnerships (see chapter 6), the traditional distinction between public and private sectors has faded and become more blurred. Numerous policy initiatives in Scottish local government have been designed to result in closer working between the public and private sectors e.g. compulsory competitive tendering, best value, urban regeneration partnerships, care in the community, private finance initiative/public-private partnerships. These and other reforms have also moved the focus of the public sector outward to a concern with both the outputs and outcomes of their activities. Politicians have repeatedly stated that the fundamental test of politics is its impact on the welfare of the Scottish public – any assessment of this will inevitably bring into focus the managerial function in local government. To re-state: the NPM perspective straddles the academic/practitioner divide in that it emerges from changing practice in local government as well as seeking to analyse that changing practice.

The NPM perspective emphasises that the world of management, both public and private, changed dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s. In the world of management, the corporate management movement of the 1970s was heavily influenced by the idea that technology, in particular computers, could serve

as a solution to organizational and policy problems. Computers would allow for more detailed analysis of policy problems, which would in turn lead to more informed solutions to public policy problems. Much of what is management theory is still dominated by machine-like metaphors that seem hopelessly dated. As Hoggett has noted:

The mechanistic and rationalistic principles of bureaucratic organisational control appear to have corresponded to a much wider, and deeply rooted, way of visualising the world and using language. (1991: 245)

However, as Berkeley Thomas correctly points out, the 'world is probably better described by such words as ambiguity, change, uncertainty, recalcitrance, improvisation, conflict and mess rather than stability, order, consensus, clarity and certainty' (1993: 4).

Managers are thus best conceived of as managing in an uncertain environment rather than attempting to solve problems in a well-ordered world. In the management literature there has been a gradual move away from what Berkeley Thomas refers to as the 'engineering' view of management. This perspective views management as being about control, with the concern of managers focused upon the application of techniques which achieve their objectives - be they profit, growth, lower costs or increased efficiency. It is consistent with the old idea that a science of management could be achieved with rules, principles, theories being applied in the real world. In this sense, those interested in management could follow the natural science model and search for generalisable laws and theories. The role of management researchers was seen as the accumulation of evidence and development of theories about how organisations work.

In management theory in general there has been historically great confusion over what *is* and what *ought to be*. NPM perspectives tend to straddle this divide very loosely. Frequently, exponents of new management methods are schizophrenic in their writings: in many instances it is difficult to disentangle if they are prescribing or describing. By making a series of assumptions, writers came up with prescriptions for managers. Best selling management books such as Peters and Waterman (1982) and Osborne and Gaebler (1992) are prime examples of writings in this style.

However, probably the most 'famous' management theory (in the field of political and policy analysis) is the rational model of management (see Simon 1960 for what is generally considered its classic exposition). Among the assumptions underpinning this model were a consensus on values and a clear hierarchy in the organisation, in other words politics was simply assumed away. Managers decide on an objective and use their levers of power in an organisation to influence events and achieve them.

NPM management theories tend to give more emphasis to flexibility, in terms of management and personnel policies (Hughes 1998: 67). In contrast to the vertical, centralised hierarchies of bureaucracy of local government in the post-war period, there is an encouragement of decentralised decision-making. In local government in the 1980s external decentralisation was widespread having been forced on local government through centrally inspired legislative reforms – CCT, opting out, deregulation and community care being the most notable. As Hoggett notes:

The problem of segmentalism (or 'departmentalism' or 'divisionalism') became recognised as a basic dysfunction of the bureaucratic form which emerged in terms of the tension between the principle of

ordered and centralised command on the one hand and the necessary forms of functional specialisation within complex bureaucracies on the other. (1991: 246)

Hoggett argues further that:

the centre of the bureaucracy was forced to adopt a policing role which led it towards progressive encroachment on routine and administrative operations and details themselves. Hence the constant experience of policy makers within state bureaucracies in the later 1970s and 1980s of being bogged down in detail, of never having time to focus upon real strategic issues. (1991: 247)

As noted above, discussion of the managerial function in government during the 1980s and 1990s was dominated by the term New Public Management (NPM). It is thus worthwhile outlining the main aspects of the 'new management agenda' (SOLACE 1994) facing Scottish local government in the 1990s. The Society for Local Authority Chief Executive's use of the term 'new management agenda' was but one of a long list of attempts to summarise the changes taking place in the management of government. As Aucion noted:

What has been taking place in almost every government in developed political systems ... is a new emphasis on the organisational designs for public management ... This internationalization of public management parallels the internationalization of public and private sector economies. (1990 : 134)

In academic discourse new public management (NPM) has become the dominant label for these changes. It is argued by Hood (1994: 128-9) that this label best captures the broad ranging shift in public management styles which has occurred across the globe, the analogy being 'with equally general terms like "new politics", "new right" and "new industrial state", which were invented for a similar reason'.

The new devolved patterns of management were compatible with a range of political and institutional objectives. As well as having the potential to lead to more genuinely emancipatory forms of public service management, they can also be the means of effecting cutbacks, budgetary control and service rationalisation (Hoggett 1991: 249). Despite its claims to be a politically neutral instrument (Hood 1995b: 173) the new managerialism appeared at first to be more conducive to the anti-public sector agenda of the Thatcher Government in the 1980s. However, the 1990s showed that the systems 'settings' can be readily adjusted to different political goals (Hood 1995b: 173). This reflects the analysis of writers such as Walsh (1995), Hood (1991) and Pollitt (1993) who identify alternative sources of NPM inspiration. Walsh identifies the Taylorist emphasis on managerial control and decentralist school promoting empowerment of managers. Hood (1991) adds a third: the public choice school with an emphasis on contestability and user choice, transparency and motivation.

In order to outline an NPM analysis of local government, this chapter reviews the literature associated with the concept. This allows the recurrent empirical features of NPM to be identified. NPM has undergone transformations since its first 'appearance'. For example in Britain, Pollitt (1993) had already identify two stages in the development of NPM: neo-Taylorian tightening of labour discipline and cutting costs by measurement of output; and a later 'quality' phase - attempts to rescue the perceived decline in standards of public services by specifying and monitoring performance targets.

In reviewing the literature it is apparent that there is a multitude of different 'ingredients' of NPM. In total 16 can be identified and these are outlined below.

1. A shift from process to output in controls and accountability mechanisms (Aucion 1990; Hood 1991,1994), with greater attention paid to achievement of results and personal responsibility of managers (Hughes 1994; Pollitt 1986) and holding cost centres and trading units accountable for pre-determined targets (Stewart and Stoker 1995).
2. An emphasis on performance review and quality (Hambleton and Hoggett 1990; Thomson 1992; Stewart and Walsh 1992; Hughes 1994).
3. Explicit standards and measures of performance (Hood 1991,1994; Hughes 1994; Stoker and Mossberger 1995; Stewart and Stoker 1995; Isaac-Henry et al 1994; Poliitt 1993).
4. Reconsideration of the regulatory role with outside agencies rather than professional inspectorates becoming more responsible for inspection and regulation of performance (Stewart and Walsh 1992).
- 5 A shift from democratic accountability to other forms of accountability through contracts and charters (Cochrane 1994; Stewart 1993).
6. A shift from aggregation to disaggregation (Aucion 1990; Biggs and Dunleavy 1995; Hood 1991,1994).
7. Decentralisation and devolution (Hambleton and Hoggett 1990; Stoker and Mossberger 1995; Stewart and Stoker 1995; Birchall et al 1995; Clarke et al 1994; Flynn 1994; Hoggett 1991), with organisations moving towards having tight centres with broad, flat peripheries (Stoker and Mossberger 1995).
8. A divorce of provision from production (or 'delivery') (Aucion 1990), with the establishment of client/contractor, purchaser/provider roles, and consequent organisational restructuring (Thomson 1992; Stewart and Walsh 1992; Stewart and Stoker 1995) In Osborne and Gaebler's terminology, a separation of 'steering' from 'rowing'.
9. A stress on the importance of organisational values and culture (Hambleton and Hoggett 1990; Thomson 1992; Stewart and Walsh 1992; Cochrane 1994; Wilson and Game 1994; Stoker and Stewart 1995; Clarke et al 1994).

11. A stress on private sector styles of management practice (Hood 1991,1994; Prior 1993; Isaac-Henry et al 1994) as justification for changing practices (Cochrane 1993b), with more use of private sector terminology (Wilson and Game 1994) such as the development of mission statements and corporate values (Wilson and Game 1994; Stewart and Stoker 1995).

12. A desire to achieve greater flexibility in organisations, personnel and the terms and conditions of employment (Hughes 1994; Stoker and Mossberger 1995; Hoggett 1991) and moves away from national pay bargaining (Flynn 1994).

13. Customer orientation (Hambleton and Hoggett 1990; Thomson 1992; Stewart and Walsh 1992; Hughes 1994; Stoker and Mossberger 1995; Stoker and Stewart 1995; Isaac-Henry et al 1994) with a stress on quality in service delivery (Stoker and Mossberger 1995; Stoker and Stewart 1995; Pollitt 1993) with 'charterism' and customer care codes (Hood 1995).

14. Hands-on professional management (Hood 1991; 1994) or a more consciously managerial approach (Thomson 1992) leading to an emphasis on the manager (rather than politician, administrator or professional) as the progressive force in economic and social change with greater managerial discretion in staff and resource usage (Hood 1995). Related to this was a shift from policy-making to management skills in the upper reaches of public sector organisations (Aucion 1990; Hood 1994). This involves the separation of the political process from the management process (Stewart and Walsh 1992; Hood 1995) or in Flynn's (1994) word's 'the separation of conception from execution'.

15. A generic approach to management or 'managerialism' (Cochrane 1993a; 1993b) with the function viewed as having an apolitical, technical and portable character (Clarke et al. 1994; Hood 1995).

16. A shift to greater competition (Hood 1991,1994; Biggs and Dunleavy 1995) with the creation of market or quasi-market conditions (Stewart and Walsh 1992; Stoker and Mossberger 1995), such as contracting (Hughes 1994), trading units for the provision of support services (Stewart and Stoker 1995), 'competition by comparison' through league tables (Biggs and Dunleavy 1995) and buyers and sellers (Flynn 1994).

The fact that the 16 features outlined above can be identified highlights the fact that New Public Management comes in many distinctive guises in

different continents, countries, levels of government and policy areas. Biggs and Dunleavy's suggestion that, 'an effective characterization of new public management must identify unambiguous empirical features (rather than contested normative claims or values) which underlie a broad range of NPM strategies' (1995: 685), could therefore be contested.

NPM does not have 'unambiguous empirical features' due to its very nature. Attempts to identify such features and then measure their influence, assume that NPM is a uni-dimensional phenomenon. The features identified will be too broad in scope to be of utility in terms of investigation. For example, Biggs and Dunleavy outline three: incentivization; disaggregation; and competition. But each of these features can take radically different forms, and each receives differing emphasis in different contexts. For example, disaggregation in local government could take place for reasons concerning routine administration, managerial restructuring, democratic engagement or strategic governance.

However, this is not to say that there is not a lot of overlap. In recognising this, this chapter will now classify the features of NPM that were most relevant to understanding Scottish local government. By undertaking such categorisation there is an implicit acceptance of Hood's observation that, 'though the commentators' interpretations differ in detail, there is much overlap in their accounts of what NPM entailed' (1994: 129). However, no area of Scottish local government will necessarily display all of the five ingredients outlined in the following section. Indeed most may have only sampled a few. However a review of each area is necessary if we are to gain a full picture of what the NPM perspective on local government entails.

In the local government literature five recurring themes can be identified in most definitions of NPM:

- new performance accountability mechanisms;
- decentralisation, disaggregation and devolution;
- private sector styles of management;
- managerialism;
- and competition.

An outline of each of these themes allows for the contextualisation of the main ingredients of NPM. (The numbers below each heading indicate which 'ingredients' are included). This categorisation is broader than Biggs and Dunleavy's and more adequately captures NPM features as identified in Scottish local government.

A. New Performance Accountability Mechanisms (1,2,3,4,5)

All sectors of Scottish local government have been subject to new performance accountability mechanisms. The Accounts Commission has developed a multitude of indicators of council performance on activities. The activities of the Accounts Commission can be traced back to a new audit and accountability culture in the 1980s. As Hood notes:

A new breed of accountants and management consultants started to colonize the public sector in many countries, to the point where 'accountability' began to be jestingly defined by sceptics as putting accountants in charge of everything. (1994: 125)

In the 1980s financial codes of accountability began to replace the previously dominant professional codes. Professional codes, 'draw on lateral rather than

vertical authority as professional acts are subject to the judgement of peers rather than organizational rules and structures. In this the primary rationalities are technical (means-end effectiveness), legal (the promotion of order), and social (a professional act is justified according to its integration of the profession)' (Gray and Jenkins 1993: 57).

The rise of the finance professional to an influential position in local government in the 1980s partially undermined the previously dominant professions such as lawyers, engineers, teachers, social workers and housing professionals. New techniques such as Value-For-Money studies suggested that it was possible to scrutinize the actions of these professionals with the help of a superior set of tools (Cochrane 1993a). Thus, the rise of the finance professional is best seen as a pre-cursor to the rise of managerial codes of accountability. Professionally based peer evaluations were no longer deemed sufficient, they were replaced with the establishment of systems and procedures consistent with the established pattern of authority within the organisation (Gray and Jenkins 1993: 57). Expected performance standards were made explicit and quantified with clear lines of accountability drawn in the organisation.

These new performance indicators (PIs) were seen by professionals as symbolic of managerialism and its ascendancy. The most controversial application of PIs designed to enhance accountability, is probably in fields such as education, social work and policing where professional norms and standards predominate. From the perspective of the professional, he or she - once licensed by training into professional knowledge and values - becomes the guardian of standards and innovation in his or her chosen profession (Editorial *Public Money and Management* 1988 8:4). For professionals, PIs are seen, in many instances, as incapable of capturing the essence (or essential

functions) of their role (Jowett and Rothwell 1988: 99). However, from the perspective of the manager, professionals break the accountability chain in local government and, without assessment of their performance, inefficiency may creep in. In its initial stages the power of professionals meant it was hard to strengthen the hand of managers. However, this problem has been overcome by shifting the strategy to one of making managers out of professionals (Hoggett 1991: 254).

The new mechanisms are designed to ensure real accountability for performance. As Pollitt notes:

In the context of politics and management, performance is a very attractive term. It exudes an aroma of action, dynamism, purposeful effort. It suggests a sorting out of the good from bad. Its seeming neutrality permits managers to discuss assessment and appraisal as though they were technical, non-political procedures. (1986: 160)

The rationale underlying these new accountability mechanisms is the assumption that performance is not what it could be i.e. local government services are not provided in the most economical, efficient or effective (the three Es) manner. There is a parallel shift away from the tradition of 'high-trust' relations towards a 'low trust' arm's length style (Hood 1994: 131).

The main accountability mechanisms stressed in the NPM literature are *internal* rather than external. The focus of accountability shifts from process to output, with greater attention being paid to the achievement of results and the responsibility of managers to achieve them. This is especially true when the relationship inside a bureaucracy is one of purchaser/provider regulated through contracts. The Local Government Acts in 1980, 1988 and 1992 compelled Scottish councils to put specified services out to tender.

These new forms of internal relationship are designed to clarify accountability through making costs and the activities of each department of governmental organisation more transparent with explicit standards and measures of performance being set down. For Waldegrave (1993), 'A contract makes explicit the performance targets and standards that are expected, and ... accountability links are not only unbroken; they are made clearer' (cited in Birchall et al 1995: 43).

Other new mechanisms have also been deployed to make public sector services more accountable to customers. Charters or contracts in both central and local government specified, sometimes in quantifiable terms, the standard of service 'citizens', 'clients', 'customers' or 'consumers' could expect to receive from public bodies e.g. waiting times for replies to letters, medical operations, public transport. The argument was that previously public services were delivered *to* rather than *for* their recipients:

understanding customers will ... be one of the most important characteristics of a competitive council - and one of its most difficult tasks. 'Clients' need to be treated as 'customers', services need to be provided for the public rather than simply to it. (Audit Commission 1988)

Paternalistic professionalism and bureaucratic immobilism were in retreat (Pollitt 1993: 186) as the need to involve customers of public services was accepted across the political spectrum. Since the 1980s, local councils have increasingly surveyed their populations and given marketing a higher profile. At the UK national level, the Conservative Government in the 1990s developed the Citizens Charter initiative around the themes of 'giving more power to the citizen' (Cabinet Office 1992).

Also underlying this desire for these new accountability mechanisms was the perception that traditional methods of accountability were inadequate. Too many public bodies were at arm's length from politicians and the searchlight of elections did not come into focus very often. There was an implicit belief that democracy and elections could not, on their own, deliver adequately performing government, and the ballot box had to be supplemented by the new mechanisms outlined above.

Another dimension of the stress on accountability for performance was the belief in performance mechanisms as managerial tools for motivation. As Hood noted the accountability metaphor underlying this type of change is, 'that of a principal dealing with a potentially untrustworthy agent, aiming to spell out goals with maximum precision and setting up monitoring and incentive schemes to induce the agent to follow the principal's wishes' (1994: 131-2).

B. Decentralisation, Devolution and Disaggregation (6,7,8)

The 'three Ds' are recurring themes in the NPM literature. Decentralisation can mean very different things to different people (Hambleton 1992). However, it should be noted that the rationale for decentralisation is not always managerial. For example, it would be difficult to trace the introduction of Glasgow's Area Committees in the early 1990s to NPM influence. Indeed the Municipal Left in the 1980s discovered the potential merits of decentralisation before advocates of NPM. As Hoggett (1991: 248) notes many local Labour councils began decentralising service provision in the early 1980s with a view to enhancing their popularity with the public in

the face of the perceived threat of privatisation. The language adopted of 'empowerment ... consultation, community action, citizenship, participation, community development and user control' (Skelcher 1993 p.13). The link was made between quality and decentralisation of services (for a discussion see Gaster 1991)

NPM advocates talk more about the delegation of managerial authority than the decentralisation of service delivery (Hughes 1998: 63). Local managers for particular services are given a budget and sufficient flexibility to carry out their task as they wish. The key term is *empowerment*. This, it is assumed, will encourage flexibility, innovation, increased accountability and more informed local responses to particular problems as they arise. As Lane notes:

Decentralization is a powerful slogan ... Yet the ideology of decentralization is as vague as it is attractive for policymakers and political parties looking for solutions to problems in a period of fiscal austerity. (1990: 218)

The second 'D', devolution, is usually mentioned in financial terms with cost centres, support services (usually finance) and devolved financial management – more managerial powers and responsibilities are given to department heads (Hughes 1998: 62). It is thus closely related to decentralisation and there is no great virtue in trying to distinguish it. Thus devolved, decentralised structures replace the traditional hierarchical single units with organization-wide rules, with the same levels of service provision in different areas and close central control of pay-bargaining and staffing levels (Hood 1994: 129). There is no longer a *top* of the organisation only a *centre*.

Public bureaucracies have faced pressure to adjust in the same way as the private sector – it would be ‘defying the credibility of governments if they did not’ (Hughes 1998: 15). Osborne and Gaebler make the argument that corporations were ‘decentralising authority, flattening hierarchies, focusing on quality, getting close to their customers ... striving to become more flexible, more innovative, and more entrepreneurial’ (1992: 12). The public sector was expected to do likewise, as their traditional structures were viewed as insufficiently flexible. Power is now dispersed throughout private organisations, and they are no longer governed by rules given from the top (Hambleton and Hoggett 1990). Public bodies should follow a similar pattern, with decision-making delegated to decentralised units which regulate themselves. This creates a sense of ownership amongst staff as they are empowered to take decisions previously taken only at the top. This freedom to manage, in the view of the NPM advocates ‘will help transform ponderous, centralised, rule-following bureaucracies into leaner, swifter, more goal orientated and user responsive public service agencies’ (Birchall et al 1995: 3).

There is an element of public choice thinking underlying this rationale for decentralisation. By decentralising power to front-line staff and as near to the point of provision as possible, the assumption is that the potentially negative distorting effects of the bureaucracy can be offset. The theory appears to be that by opening up the bureaucracy so that the consumers of public services become closer to them, a higher level of performance in the delivery of local services can be achieved.

Also underlying the rationale for decentralisation is the equation identified by Birchall et al. (1995: 13): Greater Organisational Autonomy = Better Organisational Performance. The cultural change brought about by

decentralisation will act as a catalyst to staff as they become more goal orientated, more conscious of the performance of their own units and begin to exhibit 'ownership' and 'commitment'. (Birchall et al 1995: 46). Clarke et al. (1994) suggest that decentralisation of responsibility may imbed managerialism deep inside the organisation as everyone accepts responsibility for their performance.

The third 'D', disaggregation, has a more precise meaning than decentralisation. It signifies 'unbundling' large monolithic bureaucracies to make units within them more manageable, and giving them more flexibility, with less centrally determined 'rules', in terms of budgeting and personnel.

In the local government context, disaggregation reduces the previously distinctive profile of local councils as multiple service provider organisations (Biggs and Dunleavy 1995). There are now a variety of organisations providing the services local authorities once collectively delivered as an integral whole e.g. Housing Associations, Voluntary Care Organisations, the private sector, QUANGOs. On the ideological Right the preference is for this disaggregation to entail *external* decentralisation with outside agencies contracted to provide and supply a range of services previously directly provided by the public sector. On the Left on the other hand, the preference is for *internal* disaggregation with Direct Labour and Service Organisations remaining within the public corporate body, although sometimes through an arm's length relationship.

Dis-aggregation is related closely to the themes generated by Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) text *Reinventing Government*. They argue that:

entrepreneurial governments have begun to shift to systems that separate policy decisions (steering) from service delivery (rowing). Drucker long ago noted that successful organisations separate top management from operations, so as to allow 'top management to concentrate on decision-making and direction'. Operations, Drucker said, should be run by separate staffs, 'each with its own mission and goals, and with its own sphere of action and autonomy'. Otherwise, managers will be distracted by operations tasks and basic steering decisions will not be made. (Osbourne and Gaebler 1992: 10)

Steering requires strategic managers to detach themselves from everyday concerns so they can balance competing demands for resources. Rowing, on the other hand, requires people who focus solely on operations. For Osbourne and Gaebler entrepreneurial government requires public agencies to separate rowing from steering.

C. Private Sector Styles of Management (9,10,11,12,13)

The private sector in any capitalist country invariably has significant political influence over government, at all levels. Scotland is no exception. Interaction with commercial companies leads to policy learning and transfer between organisations – such interaction has increased in recent years. However, it would be inaccurate to state that the stress on private sector styles of management is new. Many changes in local government have been reflective of, and thus justified, with reference to concurrent developments in the private sector. For example, in the 1970s Scottish local governments followed the private sector in seeking to imitate corporate management techniques. Corporate objectives were published, with councils everywhere commissioning consultants to tell them how to re-organise in line with best (private sector management) practice (Cochrane 1994: 151).

The emphasis of NPM on private sector styles of management and terminology is most noticeable in terms of the language of core values and mission statements. As Cochrane, while discussing managerial changes in government, observes 'increasingly evangelical statements of visions and missions (are) being produced throughout the country' (1994: 153). Considerable emphasis is placed on the key role of changing organisational values in the public sector. These new documents are viewed by NPM doctrine as a catalytic mechanism for transforming the whole culture of the authority. For example Osborne and Gaebler argue that, 'when it is done right, a mission statement can drive an entire organisation, from top to bottom. It can help people at all levels decide what they should do and what they stop doing' (1992: 131).

This is no new development, although it is often portrayed as such. Documents setting out corporate objectives were published by public bodies in the 1970s (see Greenwood and Stewart 1974). However, the main difference with the corporate values of the 1990s is that they usually emphasise cultural change involving a customer/client orientation.

The terminology in the 1990s was about risks, consumerism, entrepreneurialism and managerial and organisational learning. Public bodies and local councils, in the post-war period, competed with each other in terms of new professional initiatives. The stress on private sector management styles seeks to give this added emphasis with public agencies competing with others in seeking to establish innovative approaches to service delivery. The traditions of administration, hierarchy and professionalism embedded in public bureaucracies are seen as obstacles to the creation of more dynamic organisations, with decentralisation and new accountability mechanisms integral to replacing them (see above). In terms

of changing culture, the most often cited change is the movement towards a customer orientation (see discussion above). Advocates of NPM solutions ask managers to look beyond internal processes and procedures and become more enterprising and risk-taking i.e. break free from the constraints of bureaucratic rules and try doing things differently and innovate.

In terms of resource and personnel management, distinctive local government attitudes are challenged and more private sector practices are adopted. There is greater flexibility in terms of pay and conditions. Traditionally recruits to the public sector have been highly insulated from labour markets (see Doogan 1999), NPM advocates a discontinuation of this practice. Hood (1991) refers to 'greater parsimony in resource use'. As the 1980s progressed, the focus on value for money was replaced with a focus on the quality of services. Indeed Hood (1994) recognised this when he dropped this feature from his earlier characterisation of NPM.

D. Managerialism (14,15)

Managerialism is an idea integral to the NPM agenda. As Clarke, Cochrane and McLaughlin (1994) suggest, the apolitical character of management is stressed as replacing the 'apolitical' bureau-professional who previously exemplified a technical, de-politicised state response to social problems:

Both bureaucracy and professionalism were 'sold' to the public in the 1960s and 1970s as representing transcendent sets of rules and knowledge (expertise) which supposedly guaranteed the neutrality of state intervention. By comparison, in the 1980s and 1990s bureaucracy and professionalism have been identified as partisan interests which require the creation of new 'apolitical' disciplines (the market place, management and the evaluative state) to check their powers. (Clarke et al. 1994: 231)

Thus management was viewed as a generic profession which crosses the public-private sector divide (which NPM advocates would see as artificial in any case) with little or no modification. As Cochrane (1993b) outlined, with the dictates of financial control in ascendancy in the 1980s, accountants achieved a pivotal role. In the 1990s managers assumed this role as the autonomy of professionals was increasingly questioned. 'Professional management' was viewed as portable and as central and indispensable to organisational performance.

The distinction between public and private sector work was no longer seen as applicable (if it ever was). Change in the socio-technical system has served to remove these barriers (Jessop 1988). In this sense, as Hood (1991) has noted NPM is presented as a framework for general application and a 'public management for all seasons'.

It is the allegedly apolitical and technical nature of NPM that makes it so portable. There is a reinvention of the policy-administration dichotomy, with management merely replacing 'policy'. In this sense it does not matter what policy precedes the management stage as this stage can be adjusted to different political goals (Hood 1995: 173). As Woodrow Wilson, a Professor in Public Administration prior to becoming the US President, argued in 1886:

Administration lies outside the sphere of *politics*. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices ... Public administration is detailed and systematic execution of public law. Every particular application of general law is an act of administration. The broad plans of government action are not administrative; the detailed execution of such plans is administrative. (original emphasis, cited in Hughes 1994: 33)

The idea of a policy-administration dichotomy fitted neatly into Frederick Taylor's (1911) scientific management ideas. As Stillman notes, 'it all fits neatly together: a strong, effective administrative system could flourish if politics was restricted to its proper sphere, if scientific methods were applied, and if economy and efficiency were societal goals' (1991: 110).

However, NPM tends to argue that bureaucracy is not appropriate for non-routine activities that involve creativity and innovation (Hughes 1994: 49).

E. Competition (16)

A theme of NPM is the idea that competition will improve the quality of services and standards of efficiency. (Birchall et al. 1995)

This element of NPM has received more emphasis in central than local government. Hughes (1994) identifies a reduction of government functions through privatisation as being central to NPM. While full-scale privatisation has not occurred, mechanisms such as market testing, competitive tendering and contracting out became more common in local government in the 1980s and 1990s. There is thus externalisation of activities in many public agencies.

Although the rhetoric surrounding NHS reform in the late-1980s suggested competition within the NHS, the reality was that it was heavily managed and regulated. Similarly in local councils few key services (e.g. education, social work) were exposed to the full rigours of competition. Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) was one of the few policies that emphasised competitive pressures. CCT was first introduced after the 1980 Local

Government Planning and Land Act which required local authorities to engage in competitive tendering for the construction and maintenance of buildings and highways. The deregulation of Transport followed in 1985. The most far-reaching change was the Local Government Act 1988 which extended CCT to refuse collection, street cleaning, building cleaning, catering, schools and welfare catering, vehicle maintenance, grounds maintenance and sports and leisure management. This Act also required local authorities not to 'act in a manner having the effect or intended or likely to have the effect of restricting, distorting or preventing competition'. These legislative requirements led to both external and internal changes in local authorities.

Internally, new structures replaced the traditional structure of 'permanent captive markets in the interests of professional continuity and the avoidance of corrupt practices in soliciting contracts' (Hood 1994: 131). There was an attempt to establish quasi-markets in local authorities with service level agreements among different departments (legal services and finance being the most common services organised on this basis). This created the need for these services to be just as competitive in terms of price and expertise as their private sector counterparts. By the mid-1990s all local authorities were required to keep internal trading accounts for corporate services provided by professionals, with the spectre of CCT looming large on all of these services at the time (Greenwood and Wilson 1994: 416).

There is thus the attempted instillation of a market-orientated culture, the argument being that:

Markets should be established wherever possible on both the demand and supply sides. The claimed advantage on the demand side is that people are able to maximise their individual welfare constrained only

by their willingness and ability to pay, rather than by government budgetary constraint. On the supply side the advantages arise from competition for customers and profits (which) allow enterprises to satisfy consumer demand efficiently, by looking for profitable opportunities and seeking innovation. (Flynn 1990: 20)

Biggs and Dunleavy (1995) refer to 'competition by comparison', with the establishment of country-wide league tables for each particular local authority service. Through these tables, it is suggested, each local authority would become aware of the areas in which they were better than other councils, and areas where there is room for improvement. A competitive culture would, according to this thinking, be further reinforced, reaching even those areas unaffected by the other developments. The justification usually follows the line outlined by Brooke:

consumers must be encouraged to be more aggressive and given more information on which they can base choices. League tables of council performance must be disseminated. School results and truancy levels must be published. The consumer must have weapons to punish the inefficient public sector provider. (1992: 86)

The implicit assumption underlying NPM thinking in this area is thus the inherent benefits of markets. This ingredient belongs to what Hood (1991) has identified as the public choice strand of NPM. There is a reliance on the principles of market economics (Prior 1994) and a desire to imitate the private sector in organisational arrangements and the management task. Developments thus shadow many of the other public policy changes introduced by Conservative administrations since 1979:

the creation of competitive markets in service provision, the establishment of power and rights to the consumer, subordination and curtailment of producer power and interests, the pursuit of efficiency

and cost-cutting in the quest for public expenditure cuts, the provision of excellence over equity, all driven by the neo-liberal belief in the wider social value of the enlightened pursuit of self interest as the means of raising standards. (Fergusson 1994: 96)

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the NPM perspective on the changes taking place in Scottish local government in the 1990s. It has identified five features of NPM. These are intended to highlight the main ideas in public sector management that were influential in shaping managerial reform in Scottish local government during the period when the initial research was conducted. As noted previously, NPM as a perspective has its roots in the reform programmes undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore in understanding (and outlining) the perspective, it is necessary to draw on some of the changing practice during this period.

Those who believe in NPM policy prescriptions have faith that the ideas provide the solutions to the ills of public bureaucracy (see Pollitt 1995). There is definitely a rhetorical power to much of the writing and it is difficult to argue against reforms which provide 'more effective, more efficient, more accountable' government. However, cynics say that many of the ideas are very similar to others in the past and these 'solutions' to the ills of the public sector cyclically re-emerge. As Hood suggests: 'In public management, like the repeat weddings of some much married film stars, hope tends to triumph over experience' (Hood 1994). Hood writing with Jackson also argues:

Winning administrative ideas, when we strip them down to their essentials are rarely very profound. Often they are repackaged and relabelled versions of an idea which has been advanced many times before ... 'Proof' typically consists of no more than a few colourful

examples ... What makes for winning administrative doctrines is rhetorical power: the standing of the proponent and the packaging of the argument. (Hood and Jackson 1991: 11)

As we will see in chapter 8, such cynicism of the usefulness of much new managerial language extends beyond academic to practitioner circles.

However, the NPM perspective is important because of its currency at the time the original field-work for this thesis was conducted. NPM ideas were a direct challenge to the old traditions of 'municipalism' as outlined in chapter three. They also had an influence on public sector reform programmes during the 1980s and 1990s. Thus the question of NPM's influence on Scottish local government was an obvious question to ask, representing – as it did – the most significant challenge to traditional ways of working in local councils.

The NPM perspective on local government studies does generate a number of hypotheses which can be tested in the case study councils:

- New managerial codes of accountability became more relevant than traditional bureaucratic, professional and democratic codes
- Decentralisation, devolution and disaggregation are features of organisational reform within the councils
- Private sector styles of management impact on each council's strategic, resource and personnel management policies
- A belief in the utility and portability of the management function is likely to be evident amongst leading council officers
- Markets, competition and consumerism play increasing roles in the way the council approaches its service provision role.

In chapter 8 each of these hypotheses will be tested against the data generated in the three case study councils.

Chapter 5: The Local Democracy Perspective

The third analytical perspective under consideration is the local democracy perspective. This chapter will examine and outline this analytical perspective highlighting its emphasis on pluralism and democracy as the basis for local government. Writers using this perspective tend to be more comfortable with an expansive view of local government's role. Representative, participatory and deliberative dimensions of local democracy are emphasised. The democratic credentials of local government tend to be put at the forefront of analysis by authors concerned by a perceived over-centralism in the UK political system. It is a long-standing perspective and enjoyed something of a renaissance in the mid-1990s (see Commission for Local Democracy 1995; King and Stoker 1996; Pratchett and Wilson 1996).

Writers associated with this perspective tend to take the democratic basis of local government, and the politics that stem from it, more seriously than the other perspectives covered in this thesis. Rather than simply outlining the constitutional position of local government and its functions, its inherent political nature is emphasised. Local council service delivery is viewed not as an apolitical, administrative task but one that is inherently political. As Stoker (1996: 10) notes, according to the orthodoxy of the post-war local government reform debate, local government has been justified more by its ability to 'deliver' rather than 'involve'. As discussed in chapter three, the traditional way of thinking about local government tended to neglect democratic concerns. Magnusson (1986: 2) refers to a 'tendency to understand local government in economic terms and to make economic welfare the main criterion for assessing political arrangements', rather than see local government as a political unit.

In contrast, the local democracy perspective tends to emphasise issues of politics and democracy. Its focus is on the theory and practice of local

democracy. According to this line of thinking, the study of local government involves the same question posed in Laswell's (1936) classic definition of politics of 'who gets what, when and how?' The processes and institutions of local politics and democracy are specifically designed in order that the collective answers to these questions may be established. It is these local collective and democratic processes that should be the focus of analysis, according to this analytical perspective.

The other perspectives - in emphasizing public service delivery, managerial and governance tasks of local councils - tend to downplay democratic concerns. This perspective places local government as a key unit of local democracy in the British polity. The emphasis is on *government* as opposed to *local*. Local government is not simply seen as existing because it is functionally efficient to deliver certain public services at a localised level (the traditional municipal view). Its role is seen as much broader than that, which takes it beyond the role of simply providing efficient and effective local public services.

Those viewing local government in the democratic perspective are distinguishable from those in the NPM perspective because of their divergent assumptions about the nature of local government, and the political philosophy underpinning each. Whilst NPM places emphasis on the quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, the writings from a democratic perspective are more likely to ask questions such as those outlined by Frederickson:

To say that a service may be well managed and that a service may be efficient and economical still begs these questions: Well managed for whom? Efficient for whom? Traditionally public administration assumed a convenient oneness to the public. (1980: 9)

This perspective draws more heavily from normative strands of local government theorizing. There is a long tradition in local government studies of placing questions of democracy at the forefront of analysis. In the tradition of John Stuart Mill (1972 reprint) it emphasizes local democracy as the base for democratic participation that provides the foundation in a polity for citizenship and the legitimation of governmental authority. Local government is the lynchpin through which the pluralism of political, civic and social life is established. In Britain, these accounts tend to emphasise the importance of strong, well functioning sub-national units of local government to act as a counter weight to the excessive centralism in British politics (see for example Blunkett and Jackson 1986; Gyford 1985; Pratchett and Wilson 1996).

In UK local government in the 1980s, 'New Left' councils and theorists emphasised the importance of mobilisation and participation of local communities - grass roots socialism (see Gyford 1985; Blunkett and Jackson 1987). They argued for an opening up of the corporatist policy-making practices in town halls with more involvement, and thus accountability, of locally elected politicians and council officials. They had a broader interpretation of local government's role than that of being simply a service provider (Stoker 1991: 41).

From the local democracy perspective central government, in their concern for equity and uniformity in post-war social policy, had focused in the institutionalisation of standards of service provision across the UK as the welfare state was created and expanded. The effect of this however, was a certain alienation of local people with the localist ideal of 'local solutions to local problems' lost, as uniformity of service provision amongst and within local areas dominated the UK public services agenda.

Although frequently presented as attempts to revive participatory democracy Hoggett argues that the strategies of the municipal left in the 1980s amounted to:

little more than an attempt to disperse services spatially into districts and neighbourhoods. Management control often remained quite hierarchical, comparatively little progress was made in devolving managerial decision-making. (1991: 248)

This perspective is in essence a localist one. It tends to challenge the centralist notions of democracy in the UK. Accounts of government and politics have tended to be dominated by unitary conceptions of the UK political system and an exclusive focus on the politics of Westminster and Whitehall. However, as Rhodes (1988) has argued, in order to understand UK politics it is necessary to look beyond these arenas. Numerous Scottish political scientists have also challenged this unitary view (see Rose 1982; Kellas 1989; Midwinter et al.1991; Brown et al.1998; Mitchell 2003). Both local government and territorial politics scholars have established that understanding British politics involves extending the scope of analysis beyond the narrow confines of Westminster and Whitehall.

There are numerous such analyses of politics in Britain. Gyford, was amongst the first in the modern era, to express concern about the 'health of democratic local government' (1976: 121). In the 1980s, Jones and Stewart were two primary exponents of this democratic view. In recent years they have carried on the tradition of expounding the democratic, educative and participative value of local government. Its educative role is of course closely linked to its legitimating role - an educated electorate is more likely to be aware of and

respect the roles of key democratic institutions (Wolman and Goldsmith 1992: 8).

Jones and Stewart in *The Case for Local Government* (1985) were key 'defenders' of local institution in the 1980s. Their emphasis was on the value of a political system that left scope for local decision-making, action and autonomy. This is not to say they did not recognise local government's weaknesses – they did acknowledge that electoral reform and a more proportional system may be beneficial. They also recognised inefficiencies and unresponsive local bureaucracies but argued that these weaknesses were revealed by the very openness of local government (1985: 8). However, in the main, their analysis represented an explicit argument for the democratic value of local government.

These authors have asserted the role of local government within the context of the broader political system. The importance of local government stems from the fact that it is the level of government 'closest to the people'. It provides opportunity for participation in civic affairs, deliberation and the promotion of values consistent with liberal democracy. Local government, it is argued, fulfills many key functions essential to maintaining the vibrancy of liberal democracy. Its local nature enhances its responsiveness and accountability (Jones and Stewart 1985: 6). Jones and Stewart are of course not alone in expounding such views.

The *Commission for Local Democracy* was established in 1993 as there was a fear 'the "local" element in our democratic mix had withered and was in danger of extinction' (Pratchett and Wilson 1996: 1). The theme of local government 'in

crisis and decline', (Butcher et al 1990: 19-22) and 'under siege' (Pratchett and Wilson 1996: 1-19) because of the actions of central government attacking local democracy, is a recurring one of literature in this vein. Other advocates of local government's democratic basis include Young (1986) who refers to local government as justified because, 'it provides for a healthy division of political power in a society ... enhances public participation (and) ... enables the responsive and appropriate provision of public services' (cited in Wolman and Goldsmith 1992: 8). Yates (1977: 18) makes the point that local government is the one aspect of the state that the local citizen will routinely come into contact with.

In the 1980s a new strand of thought emerged in this perspective with more emphasis being placed on the virtue of wide local participation and an emphasis on local authority decentralization (Hambleton and Hoggett 1987; Gyford 1986; Burns et al 1994). Recognising that after the reorganization of the 1970s many councils had become so large that the 'local' label was becoming less appropriate, the argument was that these councils should try to decentralise decision-making and service delivery to a more community based level. The implicit assumption was:

that 'decentralisation' is at the very least a necessary condition for 'democratisation', because it should allow users to gain easier access to professionals and encourage greater openness to professionals and encourage greater openness to community and user pressures. (Cochrane 1996: 202)

This new decentralisation strand to the local democratic perspective possibly emerged as a reaction to the 1970s debates on local council reorganisation

which were dominated by efficiency criteria, leading towards an emphasis on the economies of scale (see, for example, Wheatley 1969).

This perspective can also be found informing 'official' accounts of local government. Even central government seemed to rediscover the benefits of local democracy whenever reform (of whatever variety) enters its local government policy agenda. For example, prior to the local government reorganization in the 1990s, the Scottish Office placed heavy emphasis on the fact that a key part of the rationale behind the movement towards unitary local government was a concern with the democratic status of the two-tier structure. The Scottish Office (1991; 1992; 1993) argued that the public found it difficult to identify with the larger 'remote' regional authorities, and that there was overlap, duplication and confusion because there were two tiers. It was argued that the new 32 unitary local councils would be more democratic because of their smaller scale and unitary basis.

Underlying each UK Royal Commission and other committees established to look at local government was an underlying commitment to the virtues of local self-government with academic theorising feeding directly into policy debates (Stoker 1996: 7). For example, Sharpe (1970) was a former Director of Intelligence to the Royal Commission on Local Government. In a re-working of the themes of earlier work on local government he argued for its value:

as a co-ordinator of services in the field; as a reconciler of community opinion; as a consumer pressure group; as an agent for responding to rising demand; and finally as a counterweight to incipient syndicalism local government seems to have come into its own. (1970: 174)

British Centralism and Local Government

Writers in the democratic perspective tend to express concern about the weakness of local government, this could be in constitutional, political and democratic terms (see for example Cochrane 1993; Pratchett and Wilson 1996). Cairns (1996) places the concerns expressed by local councils about the excessive centralism in Westminster and Whitehall over the Conservative years in office, in the context of their own failure to build up sufficient support in their own areas for local councils as democratic institutions. It is this weak democratic basis in the population's perception of their function in the polity that makes the institution vulnerable to the whims of central government.

In the 1990s opinion polls tended to show a general cynicism as regards government and politics generally i.e. at both local and national level. The UK Government's 1998 *Modern Local Government* White Paper suggested there was ignorance (only 5% of the public could name the Leader of the Council), apathy (60% of the public had little or no interest in politics and criticism (59% of the public thought that local government did not provide good value for money) (DETR 1998).

It would appear that the general post-war optimism about the ability of political actors to exercise control over society's destiny and effect change had been replaced by a more pessimistic stance by the 1990s. In the Scottish local government context the growth of the welfare state and social services in local authorities was largely predicated on the assumption that government could make a difference. Some have suggested that the impact of local politics is, at best marginal; for example Peterson's (1981) argument that local governments

are structurally unable to play a role in redistributive politics due to the constraining pressures of socio-economic forces and higher tiers of government.

Other literature points towards the reasons for the weakening of public optimism about the potential role local councils can play, for example, see Dunleavy's (1979) account of the failure of high-rise housing as a housing 'solution'. He cites the paternalism and complacency of professionals, the perceived dominance of central government in its relations with local government or the lack of funds and effective policy choice available to local government. A similar observation is made in the Widdicombe Report (1986b: 108):

Increasingly the professional claims of planners, architects, road engineers, social workers and teachers began to be called into question by a sceptical public informed by a combination of more widespread educational opportunity, investigative journalism in the media and – sometimes the most crucial – their own lay experience of professional solutions.

The policy agenda impacting on local government in the 1980s was dominated by the theme of privatisation. Key policy initiatives, such as council house sales and compulsory competitive tendering, resulted in a declining local authority capacity in policy areas where the direct provision model was previously dominant. The residualisation of council housing in particular was a development which fundamentally changed the basis of housing choice for many (see Saunders 1990).

However, in a perverse way, the failures of local government may in fact have acted as a precursor to increased concern with democratic processes in local government. In the 1990s many questioned the top-down nature of central government's approach to central-local relations (see for example Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Rhodes 1997; Stoker 1999). The suggestion in these studies is that centralization actually made the occurrence of policy failure more likely due to inherent implementation difficulties likely to emanate from it (see also Dunleavy 1995). According to this line of thinking the key to successful implementation is a bottom-up strategy, freeing the local service deliverer to innovate and interpret policy goals to suit local circumstance. This, of course, is not unlike the oft-cited principle behind local government and democracy: local solution to local circumstance.

A more sceptical line as regards this rationale is provided by Cochrane (1992: 112). Citing Cockburn (1977) he viewed decentralisation initiatives of whatever form as being more about encouraging incorporation and integration of the troublesome, marginalised classes rather than autonomous action. Cochrane's suggests such decentralisation schemes are about the management of potential conflict, with the real substantive decisions of local councils are being taken by management groups and local party political leaders. It is difficult to disagree with Gyford's analysis of the decentralisation schemes of the 1970s and 1980s: 'The decentralisation of services has on the whole been a more common objective of decentralising political influence or power' (1991: 113).

There is also the suggestion that lip service has tended to be paid to the need for greater public participation. While central government official reports (e.g. Redcliffe-Maud 1969) emphasise democracy - most of the changes which took

place in the 1970s were more concerned with questions of efficiency (Cockburn 1977; Hambleton 1979).

A concern for the democratic basis of local government also stems from accountability concerns. Writers in this perspective emphasise that local government is not the same as other decentralised units of the public sector. There is a direct link with local communities through the electoral mechanism and all of its services and activities are locally based. There is an element of 'closeness' to the people with periodic elections enhancing its democratic legitimacy. In any liberal democracy accountability of government is fundamental – all acts of a public administration, 'are supposed to be, in the final analysis, acts of the citizens themselves through their representatives' (Hughes 1998; 225). There is a line, no matter how convoluted, running from the most mundane act of a public administrator to the electorate. This is crucial in ensuring the legitimacy of local public administration.

In this perspective, local government becomes a democratic cure for many ills of UK democracy – for example, un-elected quangos, centralized government and excessive bureaucratic power. If local government was a truly effective democratic unit it would act as a counterweight to each of these. However, as Dunleavy (1980: 9) points out:

The effectiveness and value of 'local democracy' is widely taken as read in this literature, and detailed evidence to support this view is rarely thought necessary. Indeed, this body of thought at times seems to deny the possibility or existence of criteria of democracy in local politics other than the existing practices of local politicians.

Local Government as political and democratic institutions

As noted above the dominant emphasis of writers in this perspective is of local councils as political and democratic institutions. As Dunleavy (1980) suggests their democratic basis is, at times, taken as read. However, this perspective is useful in emphasising the political basis of local government and the procedures for collective action associated with local councils. Local political processes do tend to veer towards being pluralist in orientation. The starting point for many writers using this perspective is March and Olsen's declaration that 'democracy is built upon visions of civic identity' (1995: 38). It is through local councils and activities associated with them (e.g. education, libraries, social work) that many individuals tend to first learn about 'formal' politics and democracy. Viewed from the bottom-up rather than the top-down a more favourable image of local government tends to emerge. Stoker (1994: 10) argues that local government should be valued as a site for political activity, as politics allows for that essential flexibility required to cope with uncertainty and crises. These political processes lead towards a view of local councils as vehicles for pluralism and the dispersal of power within the British polity.

In the context of British local government probably the report that emphasised this way of thinking about local government most was the Widdicombe Report (1986b: 121-2):

Increasingly ... local authorities find themselves engaged in responding to the claims of a much wider variety of sectional interests ... the trend seems to flow clearly in the direction of according recognition to sectional interests as can be seen by examining the range of

consultations with such interests now being undertaken in various fields

The report goes on to identify 'social trends which are leading away from a rather quiescent and largely homogeneous mass society towards one that is both more assertive and more diversified'(1986b: 109).

The *Commission for Local Democracy* (CLD) also set out a series of reports in the 1990s informed by this perspective. The CLD's final report argued that British politics had 'become too exclusively centralist' (1995a: 1) with power concentrated in Westminster and Whitehall. The 'local' element in British democracy had declined and was in danger of extinction – it referred to 'the emasculation of local democracy since the war' (1995a: 2). The (1995a) report emphasized the encouragement of active citizenship and the intensification of political activity in localities as this would signal a healthy democratic culture. Central to the proposals of the CLD final report, 'is the reaffirmation of local government as the heart of local democratic processes, acting as the catalyst for democracy at the local level and the focus for political activity in localities' (Pratchett and Wilson 1996: 236).

In Scotland, it is difficult to identify reports with a specific local democracy focus in the mid-1990s. However, the McIntosh Report (1999) placed much emphasis on the role of local government as dispersing power in post-devolution Scotland. It argues local government has two central functions – serving the people and representing the community. Councils, it argues, 'have a democratic legitimacy. Whatever service delivery functions they have - and even if they had none at all - they would still have this representational function' (1999: para.14). McIntosh does acknowledge that, the

representational function, 'remains to a degree unrealised' (1999: para.16). It offers community planning – the leading of strategic networks of public, private and voluntary institutions involved in public service delivery as a way of emphasising the importance of local governments as the democratically legitimised civic leaders of local areas.

The problem, according to this analytical perspective, is that the other perspectives tend to ignore, or at least downplay, democratic features of local councils. However, it could be argued that few citizens recognise the inherent 'politicalness' of local authorities, few would regard them as symbolic institutions representing local areas and even fewer regard council leaders as their representatives in the wider polity. Local authorities tend to be viewed as merely vehicles for the delivery of local Welfare State services - other functions of local councils are ignored. As Stewart (2000) suggests:

Low turnout may reflect the role of local authorities as agencies for the delivery of a series of assumedly national services, rather than as a political institution, constituted for local choice and local voice. (2000: 132)

Turnout at Scottish local elections had been so poor that a decision was made in 1999 to couple them with the first Scottish parliamentary elections in 1999. This was subsequently reversed so that Scottish local elections will take place during mid-term of the Scottish Parliament.

Local Government as a vehicle for pluralism

North American perspectives on local democracy tend to be dominated by pluralist notions of local politics (see for example Dahl 1961; Banfield and

Wilson 1963; Stone 1989). The complexity and segmented nature of the arena of local politics results in many local groups competing for influence. In Scotland and the UK, pluralist notions tend to be more focused on the institution of local government and its contribution towards a dispersal of power within the Scottish and UK political environment (see Sharpe 1970). This pluralist tradition has a long history. Stoker (1996: 6) refers to mid-Victorian romantics who thought of:

local self government is a cherished tradition in opposition to a centralising drive to more efficient and democratic government. The historic involvement of local elites in running local affairs was a means of safeguarding their interest and fostering responsibility. Localness was itself to be valued as a bulwark against centralism. (Stoker 1996: 6)

Sharpe (1970: 170) also emphasised local government as a check in the political system against domination by producer groups and its capacity to speak for the unorganised and those with less political muscle. He also highlights local government's capacity to keep a check on the power of professional groups, with increasing specialisation and technological advancement resulting in an increase in their discretion and power.

Stoker in voluminous writings tends to place weight on the role of local government as an institution able to reconcile different strands of community opinion and for agreeing priorities (see for example Stewart and Stoker 1988; Stoker 1989).

Officially the UK Government committed itself to the values of pluralism when it signed the *European Charter of Local Self Government* in 1997. This states 'the principle of local self-government shall be recognised in

domestic legislation, and where practicable in the constitution' (Council of Europe 1985, Art 2 cited in Wilson 2004: 13).

In contrast to the minimalist vision of an enabling local council envisaged by Ridley (1988), the democratic perspective tends to focus on council 'enabling' activities focused on the community. Rather than seeing local government as an institution focused on service delivery it tends to view it more as a key unit of politics and democracy. Why? Because within local government there are certain values that are fundamental to any liberal democracy. These were outlined by Sharpe (1970) and include the celebration of pluralism and diversity. Local councils both highlight and respond to societal differences. This creates a linkage between the state and citizen that otherwise may not exist.

A more expansive view of local government?

Another point to be made about this perspective is that it naturally veers towards a wider conception of local government's role in society and the polity. This view has been expressed in some Government commissioned Reports, for example, in the opening paragraph of the Bains Report:

Local government, in our view, is not limited to the narrow provision of a series of services to the community ... It has within its purview the overall economic, cultural and physical well-being of the community. (Bains, 1972, para 2.10)

Local government in this perspective is not simply some sort of effective transmission mechanism through which public services are delivered locally, rather it is the upward expression of the local people themselves. Local

councils are 'community governments' or possibly more accurately given their scale in Scotland 'governments of communities'. The dynamics of elections, accountability, transparency, deliberation, participation, pluralism and politics tend to be emphasised in this analytical perspective.

As Hill argues, 'To be the effective provider of services local authorities must be more than efficient. They must still be judged by that justice, fairness, equality and openness by which democratic society as a whole is judged' (Hill 1974: 236).

The definition of local government emerges from the people rather than from a higher tier of government. Local politics and democracy are viewed as crucial. For example, the Bains Report notes suggestions that extensive delegation to officers was in some way undemocratic – key decisions with local political institutions should be taken by directly elected politicians rather than the permanent bureaucracy (1972: para 3.38).

Bains is not the only government commissioned report to make observations consistent with this analytical perspective. For example, the Widdicombe Report in the 1980s argued:

the case for pluralism is that power should not be concentrated in one organisation of state, but should be dispersed, thereby providing political checks and balances, and a restraint on arbitrary government and absolutism. (Widdicombe 1986a: 48)

The reforms emanating from the Widdicombe Committee in the late-1980s required that all committees and sub-committees should be comprised of

groups that as closely as possible reflect the party groupings in the full council chamber. This reflected a concern that closed, secretive groups of established majoritarian parties were too often making policy behind closed doors (see Copus 1999 for a review of local party approaches to representation).

The municipal tradition, as discussed in chapter 3, emerged before the widespread impact of party politics in local government. With the democratic perspective, it is more difficult to detect a consistency in analysis of the role of political parties. Stemming from the traditional perspective there is a school of thought which emphasises the prudent and efficient administration of local council should be the overarching priority of councils, rather than making decisions on the basis of party ideology and political conflict (Bulpitt 1967: 19). This school of thought, or what could be termed an apolitical stance, has historically found expression in some independent and Conservative Party candidates (see Holliday 2000). As the Widdicombe Committee (1986c) noted, party politics was 'often regarded as an alien presence'.

However, writers adopting the local democracy perspective tend to veer towards more positive assessments of the potential role of political parties. Widdicombe (1986a: para 4.12) suggests parties provide the electorate with clear policy platforms allowing them to make better informed choices on elections, and give clarity to electoral choice allowing the electorate to retrospectively judge the performance of the local ruling administration and vote to re-elect them improving the accountability of the council (1986a: para 4.12). Widdicombe (1986a) argued that party politics was both inevitable and

desirable. It provided for more contested elections, clearer democratic choice, greater policy consistency and more direct accountability.

However, Widdicombe (1986a) also expressed concern about the domination of a majority party and its monopolization of committees. In 1998 the DETR (1998: chapter 5), noted the reality that in most councils key decisions were made in party groups, behind closed doors, with little open democratic scrutiny possible, whether from opposition parties or the electorate. Formal democratic processes merely served to rubber stamp decisions taken 'internally' by the party. The Kerley (2001) analysis also emphasized that the 'democratic' reality on the floors of council chambers was that decisions whilst formally taken there, were often decided by the internal machinations of ruling parties beforehand.

Moreover, an elector's choice in a local election contest is just as likely to be made on the basis of national party identification and political issues, rather than a rational judgement on the performance of a party locally. Similarly, Newton (1976) referred to local elections as being treated like 'annual general elections'.

The impact of political parties on local democracy therefore can be viewed both positively and negatively. They can improve the clarity of choice available to the electorate but they can also monopolise local political processes inhibiting the pluralism and transparency of local political decision-making, especially if a local party machine maintains control of the levers of power for a sustained period of time. In situations such as this the

boundaries between the local party and the 'local state' can sometimes become rather blurred and fuzzy.

The new localism

Writers in the new localist perspective emphasise that democratic processes can act as a counterweight to unnecessary elitism within local political institutions. Open inquiry, discussion, deliberation and enlightened understanding not only allows for increased participation but may also serve to protect local civil and political liberties. It is unlike the NPM perspective which is more likely to talk about economic consumers – 'the notion of democracy is being reconstituted – based on community representation as being reflected predominantly in customer "elites" representing the interests of consumers, rather than political elites representing the interests of a citizenry' (McConnell 2004: 59). The democratic perspective, on the other hand, has at its centre notions of politically active citizens.

It is the democratic and political concerns that tend to come to prominence in accounts of local government associated with this analytical perspective. The accounts tend to be embedded and form the views of local government representative associations and have what could be termed very 'localist' connotations. This academic view is reflected in the views of practitioners in the local government community. For example in 1987, Blunkett (then leader of Sheffield Council) and Jackson titled their book *Democracy In Crisis*. The thesis running through the book was that the reforms initiated by the first two Thatcher Governments amounted to an attack on local democracy in Britain.

At the UK level, the establishment of the Commission for Local Democracy (CLD) in 1993 reflected concerns about the lack of democratic activity in local government. As Pratchett and Wilson argue, 'In a nutshell there was a fear that the 'local' element in our democratic mix had withered and was in danger of extinction' (1996: 1). Of course there have been critics of this 'localist' perspective in academic writings. Dunleavy (1980: 1-5) argued that too many academic commentators have adopted an uncritical idealistic view of local government. Local government, on its own, should not be equated with local democracy.

The conception of local democracy that informs the discourse of politicians, both at a local and central level, is shaped by the British conception of government. Historically, British politicians have tended to favour strong governments. Britain's representative democratic mechanisms are designed to produce a strong central government with local councils constitutionally subordinate to it. Local democracy tends to be equated with strong local government. For example, a Conservative Government White Paper in 1971 argued:

A vigorous local democracy means that authorities must be given real functions - with power of decision and ability to take action without being subjected to excessive regulation by central government through financial or other controls. (cited in Blunkett and Jackson 1987: 143)

Local democracy is defined as giving councils the 'power of decision and ability', there is no mention of the role of the local citizenry in this process.

Modern variants of this new localism have tended to be closely related to the new local governance perspective (see chapter 6). The consensus amongst such authors appears to be that the tackling of social problems requires a

multi-agency approach with the institutions of civil society working together with local government. The capacity of government to affect change on its own is, at worst, non-existent and, at best, minimal. As March and Olsen note:

even powerful nation-based polities have only modest ability to control several things that are of great concern to their citizens: employment, peace, financial markets, health, environmental quality. (1995: 123).

Politics today therefore involves elected representatives fusing a capacity to act amongst a range of institutions and brokering between these bodies to achieve agreement on resources, processes and objectives (March and Olsen 1995: 12-13). The role of local government in this context is to inject an adequate dose of local democracy into local policy processes and ensure the voice of 'people' and their elected representatives is heard. In other words, local policy agendas should not be dictated by higher tiers of government or local elite interests.

One of Sharpe's (1970) arguments in support of the value of local government was its ability to keep professional groups in check. He recognised that in the post-war era the discretion and power of professional groupings in government had increased. However, local government had the ability of holding these groups democratically accountable:

It does so by creating an additional focus of loyalty for professional group members - the local authority itself - on a scale that makes political control feasible and subjects the group to the moderating influence of a face-to-face relationship with other comparable and competing professional groups. (1970: 174)

Representative, Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

Three strands of democracy tend to be seen as important within this analytical perspective: representative, participatory and deliberative democracy. Writers from this perspective tend to be a bit more sceptical about the strength of representative democracy and more willing to challenge its present health. For example, Beetham (1996) makes a distinction between the concept of representative government and a commitment to representative democracy. As Stoker notes, 'The former may be more or less democratic, but the latter assumes government conducted according to democratic principles emphasising the requirement of an active citizen body' (Stoker 1996: 22)

Local democracy is also weak because of the inadequate way in which its representatives mirror the public they are representing. As Philips (1995: 6-7) notes:

Adequate representation is increasingly interpreted as implying a more adequate representation of the different social groups that make up the citizen body, and the notion of 'typical' or 'mirror' or 'descriptive' representation have then returned with renewed force.

Moreover, the capacity and ability of locally elected representatives to influence decision-making is open to question. Skelcher (2004: 26) suggests, for example, that councillors have only the lightest touch over significant areas of local public policy.

Overall, whilst acknowledging some of the virtues of representative democracy, writers from this analytical perspective are more likely to see it

only as one strand of the accountability link between citizens and local councils – participatory and deliberative democratic mechanisms are also given emphasis.

In contrast the municipal traditional view of local government has tended to stress that locally elected politicians act as representatives and are the transmitters of local public wants, needs, aspirations and options into local policymaking. The input of the public tended to be limited to the ballot box. To the local democratic analytical perspective this is a rather limited notion of local politics – other democratic mechanisms and innovative approaches for deciphering and understanding the needs of local populations are required. A broader conception of local government as a political unit is necessary:

without an active citizen body, governments will not be representative, responsive or accountable; nor will they enjoy the full legitimacy that comes from popular authorization. (Beetham 1995: 33)

If a council is interested in local democracy, it should inherently value citizen involvement in policymaking. The municipal traditional view tends to conceptualise councils as the sole representative body within their communities and the focus is on internal matters. The democratic perspective, on the other hand, shifts the emphasis away from managing internal relationships to a focus on the council and its citizens in the wider polity. This wider polity includes other public sector bodies, private companies and their representatives, voluntary groups and central government but most importantly, the local populace. This approach is more outward looking in contrast to traditional inward looking approaches. Stoker (1999a: 245-6) suggests, active consent for particular policy measures

need not be limited to reference to mandates or the ballot box. Consent needs to be sought also by methods of public participation, consultation and deliberation. This will involve a wide range of stakeholders in localities.

The role of local government officers, in this conception of governance, changes. He or she is required to participate in a system of democratic governance in which public values are continuously debated and recreated amongst the institutions of local governance. In this view interest groups are not external to the policymaking process instead they are seen as 'an active, resourceful and fundamentally useful part of the policy process ... the general change in orientation towards the outside world improves the bureaucratic process' (Hughes 1994: 233).

As noted in the introduction there is a long tradition of theorizing about the purpose of local government. The John Stuart Mill strand has emphasized the promotion of participation as educative to the individual as well as building up a sense of community, promoting efficiency in resource allocation and offering 'a nebulous form of power for local residents by constituting a bulwark between them and the central state'(King 2006: 219). However, the reality in recent decades is that democracy, to the extent that it has impinged on the workings of local councils, has tended to be delivered through the representative democratic mechanisms of political parties. Local government has been 'justified more by its ability to deliver rather than involve' (Stoker 1996a: 10). In the 1970s, Hill (1974: 235-6) argued that for the majority of people, the participatory democracy argument for the justification of local government was not convincing.

In the 1980s there was the suggestion that increased participation in local democracy may bias local politics in favour of the already advantaged. Newton and Karran (1985: 65) note:

The wealthier sections of society appear to make particularly heavy claims on local services such as roads, education, environmental control and consumer protection, and may well do so for things such as parks, libraries and museums and art galleries.

However, by the 1990s discussion of participatory democracy come more into focus with this analytical perspective. The emphasis changed to analysis of how the broad pluralist diversity of interests in society are expressed in the local political process. More consultation in local policy processes rather than more participation in democratic processes is probably a better description of trends in local political processes in the 1980s and 1990s. The Widdicombe Report (1986c: 146) noted, 'a more overt commitment to the principle of consultation in local government'.

Consultation is usually associated with attempts to inject participation and deliberation into local policy processes. Deliberative democracy can be defined as 'a conception of democratic government that secures a central place for reasoned discussion in political life' (Cooke 2000: 947). It involves, 'unconstrained exchange of arguments that involves practical reasoning and always potentially leads to a transformation of preferences' (Cooke 2000: 948). In an environment conducive to deliberative democracy the general features of politics such as power and strategy are absent with exchange conducted in an uncoerced, egalitarian manner. The lack of a strong formal political executive and the committee system in local councils created a potentially more decentralized character to policymaking in local councils than that

which exists in central government. However, the role of political parties (and formal party discipline) has tended to negate any potential for these committees to be powerful forums of deliberative democracy.

The establishment of some forum of deliberative democracy is deemed to be useful because of the growing distance between the lives, experiences and attitudes of citizens and decisions made in their name:

When individuals lack the opportunities, incentives, and necessities to test, articulate, defend and ultimately act on their judgements, they will also be lacking in empathy for others, poor in information, and unlikely to have the critical skills necessary to articulate, defend and revise their views. (Cooke 2000: 948)

Cooke outlines five arguments for deliberative democracy. First, it has educative power. As John Stuart Mill argued, participation in public affairs is a good in itself. According to this argument it has the potential to improve the moral, practical or intellectual qualities of those who engage in it. Second, it can be community generating. Individuals can become aware of and consolidate co-membership in a collective form of life. Third, it improves the fairness of democratic procedures. If there is deliberation during procedures it can increase the legitimacy of the outcome – it can make them seem more just and fair. Fourth, it contributes constructively to the democratic rationality of democratic outcomes. It allows the public to find the best way of regulating matters of public concern.

However, Cooke argues that the most important argument for deliberative democracy is that it elucidates an ideal of democracy that is most congruent

with 'whom we are'. In the world in which we live there are no authoritative standards independent of history and cultural context to adjudicate claims to epistemic validity. Without such standards, citizens are likely to see public policies as more valid if they are the outcome of a process of public deliberation.

The aspirations of exponents of deliberative democracy are consistent with the much cited work of Putnam (1995). His general thesis that social capital networks and the norms and trust generated by them are required to make democracy work. What a more local democratic deliberative environment also tends to do is create new stakeholders in the evaluation of change. There are numerous interests – councillors; senior management; professions; audit bodies; inspectorates, civil servants, central politicians, service users, community groups. This pluralistic environment is viewed to be good for generating better quality public policy outputs (see Wildavsky and Tenenbaum 1981).

Deliberative democracy is different from pressure group democracy – the emphasis is on the citizen as a reason giver/deliberator rather than a bargainer. This fits in more neatly to the notion of the local authority as a consensus builder and broker between different interests. The vision is of local government:

As a conductor, facilitating and leading a complex range and variety of organisations in civil society. The active civil society needs to be sustained and nurtured, and local authorities would have a key role in establishing a framework for interest expression and co-operative problem-solving. (Stoker 1996: 24)

Conclusion

In summary, the local democratic perspective of local government challenges the orderliness of traditional and managerial visions of local politics. Politics and democracy are by their very nature disorderly, sometimes even chaotic. Democracy, if it is working properly, requires participation, engagement, deliberation and discussion of issues. Politics and policymaking often do not fit into the neat discrete categories or stages of traditional policy or management processes. Politics may often take place within local political institutions and statutory power may reside there. However, to focus exclusively on the traditional institutional locus of power (the local council), ignores how this body relies on democratic mechanisms in order that its political legitimacy be attained (and retained).

In the 1990s this local democratic analytical perspective enjoyed something of a revival. Hill refers to 'a renewed concern for the vitality of local communities and local democracy' (2000: 95).

However, the perspective is not without its critics. Prominent amongst these is Dunleavy who suggests, 'the dominant picture of local government as electorally responsive, effectively representative or indeed locally orientated in any democratic sense is misplaced or unfounded' (Dunleavy 1980: 5). For him the effectiveness and value of local democracy is too often and too widely taken as read by academics writing about local government - with empirical evidence to support this view lacking (1980: 9). His picture of local authorities downplays the influence of local democratic processes:

local authorities are insulated from electoral influences ... representative roles within local government have become highly fragmented and accentuated ... policymaking at the local level can be

understood more in terms of general organisational ideologies than in terms of locally directed responses to the needs of particular areas or citizens (Dunleavy 1980: 5)

However, in the contemporary context, Dunleavy's criticism appears rather unfair. Theorists in this vein have increasingly tended to have an underlying message of failure in their description and analysis of local government, with some suggesting that local government institutions have become disconnected from local communities. For example, Pratchett (2004) outlines how political institutions and their procedures have become overly sophisticated and complex leaving uninterested and indifferent citizens with little incentive or inclination to participate.

However, like the other perspectives, the democratic perspective often has difficulty separating 'what is' and 'what should be'. The orientation is towards making politics more democratic, more representative, more participatory, more deliberative. There is thus a natural underlying inclination towards favourable assessments of processes designed to achieve this end.

From the local democratic analytical perspective a series of hypotheses can be tested:

- New democratic codes of accountability to supplement, or even displace, traditional bureaucratic and professional codes become more relevant to understanding local political processes.
- New mechanisms of democratic engagement which emphasise participation and deliberation impact on local political processes.
- A belief in the utility of democratic processes is likely to be evident amongst leading council officers
- Local democracy as expressed through the ballot box, elected council chamber and committees is not viewed as the sole democratic basis of the council.
- The council views one of its primary roles as engagement with its local community and the creation of a vibrant civil society in its area.

Chapter 6: The Local Governance Perspective

'Local governance' is a relatively new analytical perspective. It emerged in the early 1990s and has almost gained the status of orthodoxy, as a tool for understanding recent structural change in local government (see for example Goss 2001; John 1997; Leach and Percy-Smith 2001; Newman 2001; Rhodes 1997; Stoker 1999, 2000, 2004). It should be acknowledged however that not all contemporary work falls under the local governance paradigm. Thus, for example Byrne's (2000) seventh edition of *Local Government: Everyone's Guide To How It All Works* mentions the term local governance only once in 800 pages of text. However, the UK Government itself has largely accepted this concept in its own understanding of recent developments in local government (see for example Blair 1998; DETR 1998).

At a UK national level, Rhodes refers to governance as, 'the defining narrative of British government at the turn of the century' (2000: 108). Hill (2001: 144), in a similar vein, claims that 'research into local politics and government remains vibrant and eclectic' and notes that the 'dominant paradigm' is governance. According to Hill, 'Since the 1980s the plurality of local power has changed and now incorporates a wide range of appointed bodies, quangos' (2000: 122). Citing Stoker (1999) she refers to governance as 'a concern with governing, achieving collective action in the realm of public affairs, in conditions where it is not possible to rest on recourse to the authority of the state'. As the new 'dominant paradigm' it constitutes an important strand of the analytical perspectives under review in this thesis.

The new local governance perspective moves the focus away from the formal actors or institutions of government to an emphasis on wider civic society and to the importance of the private and voluntary sectors. The local governance narrative in effect deconstructs the traditional municipal model. It extrapolates trends taking place in local government and suggests that a

fundamental transformation is taking place in the way councils operate. In the words of Stoker and Wilson, 'the post-Second World War form of local government has passed on' (2004: 247). Broadly speaking, local government is less involved with the direct provision of public services, and increasingly functions instead as a regulator of networks of service provision rather than a direct provider. The limited executive capacity of local government in a number of policy areas is reflected in a move towards a mode of governance where its primary function is to establish a series of policy and resource frameworks within which a vast number of semi-autonomous networks provide services. The traditional municipal analytical perspective, whilst relevant to the bureaucratic/professionalised organisational world of local government embodied in the post-war settlement, has been challenged and overtaken according to this perspective.

As both explanation and prescription, the notion of government through bureaucracy has been rejected by many analysts from this new perspective. The older conception of local government neither explains how the UK is governed nor has it any normative appeal. In the words of Stoker and Wilson: 'The inward-looking, service-focused and party-dominated form of local government has passed its sell-by date, even if some of its producers are not entirely aware of the position' (2004: 247). Like other perspectives, the notion of governance, often moves quite seamlessly between description and prescription. It tends to suggest that the shift towards local governance is happening *and* that it should be embraced.

Although usually flagged up by its advocates as 'new' it could be argued that these 'new' notions of governance are in fact reassertions or reconstitutions of 'government' with some change in language; for example, 'direction' has become 'steering'.

Numerous strands of academic literature link in with the local governance perspective. Each strand is based around the consensus that the traditional municipal form of government no longer exists as it has been challenged by new modes of governance which emphasize management, regulation, markets and networks. This consensus includes policy network conceptualisations (Marsh and Rhodes 1992a; 1992b; Rhodes 1997; Smith 1993), theories of governance (Stoker 1998; Rhodes 1996), the idea of the hollowed out state (Rhodes 1997; Foster and Plowden 1996) as well as literature which more directly addresses the themes of regulation (Hood et al 1999; Moran 2003). On a more global scale there is the influential 'reinventing government' idea associated primarily with Osborne and Gaebler (1992). However, in the UK the reinventing government notion has primarily been associated with the concept of new public management (see chapter 4). It should be noted, however, that the NPM and governance perspectives do overlap to a degree – though the latter analytical framework broadens its focus beyond public management.

Some strands of the governance perspective emphasise the idea that governing systems should be conceived of as 'centreless'. In the local governing context it assumes that an understanding of how localities are governed entails a shift in focus away from town halls. Stoker (2000c: 3) argues that local government cannot be studied as if it is a 'stand alone' institution divorced from wider societal forces. Power has seeped away from town halls towards new networks of service provision that involve non-governmental actors. Moreover, different levels of government have assumed greater importance with new devolved bodies, the UK Government and the EU more active in policy issues that directly impact on local authorities. This creates the need for a much wider conceptual lens through

which to view local government, and one that is not limited to the councillors and officers of the town hall bureaucracy and chamber. Other bodies such as the commercial sector, voluntary organisations, other government departments and agencies, community groups and other interest groups in civic society assume greater importance in local politics. These groups in the wider environment of local politics have to be included in the scope of analysis of local politics if an accurate picture is to emerge.

The term 'local governance' refers to a change in the meaning of local government, referring to a new process of governing a locality. There is now a blurring of the traditional distinction between the public and private sectors, with state and civil society merging seamlessly into one, within many different policy and service delivery areas. Stoker (1991b: 13) suggests that local councils in Britain, by working through and with other public, private and voluntary organisations, are moving closer to the dominant tradition and norm of European local government. On the continent the division between 'public' and 'private' has never been quite so clear cut.

For Rhodes (1997: chapter 1) there is not one mode of organisation in government but instead a reliance on a combination of markets, hierarchies or networks. For Rhodes (1997: 5), this creates a series of self organising, inter-organisational networks at a local level. Local councils today operate in the context of these self steering inter-organizational networks. The channels of democracy and accountability in this context are not clear cut. In this environment policymaking is not linear but recursive (Rhodes 1997: 4).

It is not only Rhodes who has employed the governance notion as a useful one to encapsulate trends in government. Guy Peters suggests its usefulness is not limited to Britain, 'Conventional command and control

conceptualisations about governing are no longer either fully descriptive nor fully acceptable, and provide a very incomplete notion of how governments function in contemporary advanced democracies' (Peters 1997: 51). Throughout the western world it is now accepted that:

Governance is now conceived as being possible without government, with the capacity to control assumed to be exercised equally well through social organizations as through formal government institutions. (Peters 1997: 52)

New Language of Governance

Before further clarifying the local governance perspective it is useful to clarify some of the terminology behind the term 'governance'. As Bevir and Rhodes (2003: 4) note, governance can refer to a new process of governing, a changed condition of ordered rule, or the new method by which society is governed (see also Finer 1970: 3-4). Numerous authors have noted the term has different meanings and has been used in different ways in both academic and practitioner circles. As Richards and Smith note, 'The multiplicity in defining the concept of governance has led to confusion, misunderstanding, and inappropriate application of the term' (2002: 16).

There is no need to rehearse the various meanings that have been ascribed to the term in recent years, as others have already done so (see for example Rhodes 1996; Stoker 1998; Pierre 2000). Instead it is worthwhile to clarify how the term is being used in this thesis.

'Government' has been used in general to refer to the conventional institutions and processes of the public sector while 'governance' is a more general term for providing direction to society. According to this

perspective, capacity in governing institutions such as local councils is being diminished:

It would seem that governance has too many meanings to be useful, but the concept can be rescued by stipulating one meaning and showing how it contributes to the analysis of change in British government. So, *governance refers to self-organizing, inter-organizational networks*. (Rhodes 1997: 52-3 original emphasis)

The governance perspective calls to attention various factors such as: the increasing privatisation/commercialisation of public service delivery; the loss of functions by local councils to alternative service delivery agencies; the loss of functions to higher levels of government; and the increasing limitation of discretion of council officers due to management reform (Rhodes 1997). It refers to the informal authority of networks as constitutive of, supplementing or supplanting the formal authority of government (Bevir and Rhodes 2003: 6). It offers, according to Richards and Smith, a much more pluralistic conceptualisation of power (2003: 19).

So what explains the emergence of this new 'analytical perspective'? In many ways it has similar roots to NPM. It emerged out of the Thatcherite period during the 1980s. During this era, legislation requiring the compulsory competitive tendering of local services in 1980, 1988 and 1992 forced local councils into inviting the private sector to work with them in various areas of service delivery. In the fields of housing and urban regeneration policy frameworks were adapted to make it almost impossible for local authorities to work without involving the commercial partners in some way. Even in those councils without significant private sector involvement the movement towards contracting disaggregated previous monolithic bureaucracies, with

legislation requiring that the client and contractor sides in CCT specified areas be separated.

Other developments include the loss of functions in recent years. Water and sewerage functions are now carried out by quasi-autonomous agencies rather than councils; and other bodies such as local enterprise companies, housing associations and the voluntary sector operate in areas previously the sole domain of councils. Councils have also had their autonomy in various areas increasingly called into question. Bodies such as the Accounts Commission (now part of Audit Scotland) and Inspectorates keep a more careful watch over council activities than they have in previous years. The auditing of accounts is no longer a straightforward task of checking propriety but also ensuring there are arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Linked to this is the increasing emphasis on new managerial ideas that effectively limit the discretion of local councils by imposing one managerial blueprint for all (see chapter 4). 'Local solutions to local problems' are acceptable as long as they take place within the prescribed managerial framework.

'Control' is limited, as the basis for trust and co-operation is underdeveloped - thus creating the need for new local authority management styles which emphasise facilitation, accommodation and bargaining. These factors together, according to the governance perspective, create a weak centre in local authorities and erode their capacity to co-ordinate and plan policy and services. Councils are thus faced with a series of self-organising networks. They find it difficult to steer and hold these networks accountable as they are loose configurations of bodies and the councils' capacity to regulate them is undeveloped.

For Rhodes the best way to describe these new structures of local governance is a 'differentiated polity':

Differentiation refers to the process of functional and institutional specialisation and the consequences of that process. A differentiated polity is characterised by functional and institutional specialisation and the fragmentation of policies and politics. (Rhodes 1997: 7)

Non-public institutions

This 'differentiated polity' means that local politics in numerous areas more often than not incorporate non-(public) institutional actors. At the local level it refers to what Stoker (1988: 116) calls 'the opening-out of local authorities'. Stoker points to numerous trends and considerable evidence of local councils opening out to encourage a strengthening and widening of local interest group activity (1988, 1991: ch.5). He cites research that noted, 'a more overt commitment to the principle of consultation in local government' (Widdicome 1988a: 146).

In an early exposition of the local governance perspective, Stoker (without using the new terminology) argued:

Local authorities are no longer the sole service providers or strategic organisations for their areas. These responsibilities are shared with other agencies. Local authorities have increasingly had to work through, alongside, or in competition with a range of non-elected organisations ... (this) has undoubtedly increased the complexity and fragmentation at the local level. (Stoker 1991: 87)

Leach et al. neatly summarise the key argument of this new perspective:

The role of local government as an institution within the governmental fabric of the country is changing fundamentally. The key element of this is the move from being the direct provider of services to acting as agencies which specify and purchase services rather than providing them directly. This direction of change is captured by the term, '*enabling authority*'. (1994: 2 original emphasis)

Originally the term 'enabling' was associated, in local government circles, with the late Nicholas Ridley's infamous suggestion that 'his ideal council is one where members turn up once a year, have lunch, approve the private contractors and go away for 12 months' (1987: 163). However, in the early 1990s a more expansive definition of the term was embraced by writers in the local governance field. Rhodes actually refers to governance as part of the discipline of Public Administration's fight back against the New Right. It is a description of the unintended consequences of the policies of corporate management and marketization (see Rhodes 1997: chapter 7). Thus, although the roots of the NPM and governance perspectives are similar, their analyses of the impact of Thatcherite public sector reforms are significantly different.

To re-cap, the general thrust of this new emerging perspective was to minimise the role of the formal institutions of local government as the key focus of enquiry for researchers. This translated into a general presupposition that local governance is less about the direct intervention of local councils and more about the way in which the domain of activity of local private, voluntary and public actors can be shaped. The term local governance is used to highlight the increasingly differentiated range of agencies and organisations that have strategic and service delivery responsibilities within a local area (Stoker 1996a: 2).

According to the local governance analysis the managerial and market reforms resulted in a disaggregation of the public sector and an increasing

reliance on networks of service providers that are out-with the traditional boundaries of the state. As Quirk notes:

In this new era, all public sector organizations have unclear boundaries. Issues for which they used to have sole responsibility, are now the responsibility of partnership arrangements between agencies. Goods or services they used to provide directly, they now provide through contract or in a new network of relations with other providers. (Quirk 1997: 577)

However, for Stoker, local governance is not viewed as simply about facilitating service delivery. It should be a, 'conductor, facilitating and leading a complex range and variety of organisations in civil society. The active civil society needs to be sustained and nurtured and local authorities would have a key role in establishing a framework for interest expression and co-operative problem-solving' (1996: 23-4).

For Stoker (1998) this aspect of governance raises a number of critical issues. One key issue is the divorce between the complex reality of decision-making associated with governance and the normative codes to explain and justify government. Local government had traditionally drawn its democratic and political legitimacy from the accountability linkages derived from the processes of representative democracy and bureaucracy. The horizontal and networking features of governance arrangements do not sit easily with such codes.

Networks/Partnerships

Another key feature of the local governance perspective is its emphasis on networks and partnerships as being the new key arenas of power, politics and

policymaking. It places emphasis on the study of networks and the power relations within them. According to the governance perspective a large part of restructuring of local councils in the past 30 years has involved the creation of new mechanisms of public service delivery. Many of these mechanisms bypass or diminish the traditional authority of local government. New agencies, civic institutions and special purpose bodies are becoming the new arenas of local public service delivery and the task of local governance is no longer about managing a public bureaucracy but instead managing, steering and influencing these new networks.

This aspect of the local governance perspective is closely related to the policy network approach to understanding UK governance. As with the policy network approach it tends to be rooted in public policy-making and service delivery processes. The policy network approach, reflecting its focus on policymaking as opposed to public sector management, narrates similar themes - most notably a rejection of traditional notions of government and public policymaking (i.e. government and policymaking through line bureaucracy) and an emphasis on dis-aggregation in the public sector. According to the policy network model/metaphor (see debate in Dowding 1996) the UK is dominated by policy networks that act as a constraint on the development and implementation of radical policy (Marsh and Rhodes 1992a). These networks play important roles in agenda setting, defining the rules of policymaking, limiting participation in policymaking and most importantly, limiting the capacity of government to control.

Focusing on the UK national level, this theme has been developed around the notion that the UK has moved towards a system of governance. This conceptualisation of the UK's governing arrangements suggests that these policy networks have significant autonomy from sovereign governing

authorities (Rhodes 1997: 109) – and is linked to the notion that there has been a ‘hollowing out of the state’ (Rhodes 1997). The notion of ‘hollowing out’ suggests a loss of capacity on the part of government to control and manage the public sector with ‘a growing trend towards multi-organisational forms of policy implementation’ (Gray 2000: 284). Pierre and Stoker (2000: 32) argue, ‘the essence of governance is its focus on governing mechanisms which do not rest on recourse to the authority and sanctions of government’. For Rhodes (1997: 100) hollowing out, ‘is a revealing expression which helps to tease out what is happening to British public administration’. It draws attention to institutional fragmentation, the erosion of central capability, the erosion of public accountability resulting in an increased propensity for policy failure to occur.

The literature of policy networks and hollowing out emphasises the state of transition in governing structures in the UK with competing modes of governance co-existing simultaneously, broadly speaking bureaucratic, market and network modes. Like the policy network approach, the governance perspective grew out of neo-pluralist approaches that emphasise policymaking as occurring in sub-governments, with, small groups of governmental and non-governmental political actors who specialise in specific policy areas (Ripley and Franklin 1980). These approaches emphasised a decentralised concept of social organisation and policymaking, the interdependence of individuals and groups in politics, the (usually) limited number of participants in policymaking and the insider/outsider pressure group distinction.

Rhodes’ (1988) book *Beyond Westminster and Whitehall* is based around the subject. Much of the discussion is based around inter-organisational

networks between local government bodies and other organisations. It was what Marsh and Rhodes (1992) have referred to as a 'meso' perspective – it does not deal specifically with micro-level issues within specific council services. However, it would be difficult to argue against the notion that Rhodes' ideas were influential in acting as the forerunner to the multitude of local governance studies that proliferated in the 1990s.

Rhodes' key themes of shifting the focus of analysis away from Parliament (Westminster), government and the civil service (Whitehall) towards non-formal institutional arrangements within policy networks became replicated in this new school of local government studies. At the national level party politics, manifestos and parliamentary behaviour were deemed to be secondary concerns by policy network scholars. Policymaking is seen to be sectorised in a series of specialised networks inhabited by key interest groups. At the local level local party politics, member-officer relations and committees and the council chamber are deemed secondary concerns. The primary concern becomes relationships out-with the traditional boundaries of local government.

The narrative of politics told in policy network accounts is one of consultation with interest groups with marginal adjustments in policy, informality, routinised relations, regular interactions, accommodation, pragmatism and incremental policy change. The most stable policy networks have a sense of community where shared understandings establish guidelines and set a stable policy agenda. Jordan and Richardson (1979; 1987) speak of the 'institutionalisation of compromise'. Such policy communities are more likely to develop when government is dependent on groups for implementation and groups have important resources they can exchange.

As an organising perspective, policy networks are consistent with the idea of incrementalism – policy change by small steps. The concept emphasises evolution as opposed to revolution in public policy processes. Jordan and Richardson (1987) use the metaphor of policy community, emphasise the hum-drum nature of the British policy process and the incremental nature of policy change. They emphasise the importance of negotiated order which emphasises policymaking taking place within norms of agreement and the avoidance of conflict. Rhodes' (1988) alternative approach emphasises that the types of relationship varies across time, policy sector, and that the type of policy network that exists affects the ability of government to implement its preferred policy. Rhodes also notes that often government is fragmented not unified. The emphasis is on networks as constructions of past policies, ideologies and policy processes.

One of the most striking aspects of such accounts of politics is the neglect of the institutions and processes of representative democracy. The legitimacy of networks is not political, but resides in their claim to superior expertise and/or to increase effectiveness in service provision. Parliaments and the representative institutions are deemed to have little impact or influence on policy processes. Writers such as Jordan and Richardson tend to emphasise the pluralist benefits of such interest group politics. Others such as Lowi (1969) see the situation as much more problematic suggesting that such policy networks reinforce existing inequalities, destroy political responsibility by their lack of transparency, are conservative and favour established interests and thus corrupt democratic government by eroding the formal mechanisms of representative democracy. Policy networks are a system of private government subject only to the most tenuous forms of accountability.

Similar arguments were put forward in 1980s accounts of local government. For example, Henney (1984: 380-1) argues networks in local councils are best viewed as vested interests that 'undertake deals when it suits them, blame each other when it suits them; and cover up for each other when it suits them'. They 'institutionalise irresponsibility by operating behind closed doors and assuming that their own interests can be equated with that of the wider public in the locality'. Henney, like Lowi, although writing in a different context, has concerns about the impact that networks have on representative democracy.

Stoker (1998) refers to this problem as one of the 'critical issues' associated with governance. He notes that governance identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibility for tackling social and economic issues. This, in turn, leads to the potential problem of blame avoidance or scape-goating in the delivery of public services. The more actors become involved in local public service delivery the more potential there is for these problems to develop.

In summary, the local governance perspective emphasises networks as the key unit of analysis in understanding governance. Networks are the space in which trust and policy learning takes place. The existence of such networks reflects the increasing complexity and specialisation of economic and social life. Policymaking and public service delivery in many policy areas is technical and practical which necessitates close relationships between local government and interested parties. Such associational relationships are deemed key building blocks for understanding local politics.

Interdependency/game-like interactions

As noted above, a key aspect of network relationships is mutual interdependency. Stoker (1998: 18) argues that the governance perspective identifies 'the power dependence involved in the relationships between institutions involved in collective action'.

Local government is reliant on other organisations, while they in turn are reliant on the local authority. Rhodes writings on policy networks stem from his original (1981) work on, what he termed, the 'Power Dependence Model'. This was based on five propositions:

- Any organisation is dependent upon other organisations for resources.
- In order to achieve their goals the organisations have to exchange resources.
- Although decision-making within the organisation is constrained by other organisations the dominant coalition retains some discretion.
- The dominant coalition employs strategies within known rules of the game to regulate the process of exchange.
- Variation in the degree of discretion is a product of the goals and relative power potential of interacting organisations. This relative power potential is a product of the resources of each organisation, of the rules of the game and of the process of exchange between organisations.

Interdependency is a key theme in the local governance perspective on local politics. One of the consequences of the shift towards governance is that the capacity of local councils to co-ordinate and plan is by necessity eroded. These networks have developed while the council's capability to steer and

hold them to account remains under-developed. A minimum basis of co-operation is required if the trust necessary to ensure effective service delivery is to be established. As Rhodes (1997: 104-8) argues, networks require a distinctive managerial style based on facilitation, accommodation and bargaining. The art and craft of diplomacy is an important skill for public sector managers in the new structures of governance.

Another writer who emphasises interdependency is Kooiman (1993). He suggests social-political- administrative interventions and interactions:

are based on the recognition of (inter)dependencies. No single actor, public or private, has all knowledge and information required to solve complex dynamic and diversified problems; no actor has sufficient overview to make the application of needed instruments effective; no single actor has sufficient action potential to dominate unilaterally in a particular governing model. (Kooiman 1993: 41)

He describes such socio-political governance as being designed to create patterns of interaction in which political and traditional hierarchical governing and social self-organization are complementary, and in which responsibility and accountability for interventions is spread over public and private actors (Kooiman 1993b: 252). Kooiman distinguishes between the process of governing (or goal directed interventions) and governance, which is the result (or total effects) of social-political-administrative interventions and interactions. He suggests that it is possible for the latter to function effectively without the former. That is, governance may exist without government when there are regulatory mechanisms in a sphere of activity which function effectively even though they are not endowed with formal authority. Where government has no authority it may still be possible to

identify a multiplicity of interdependent political actors with shared goals operating with blurred boundaries under conditions of multiplying and new forms of action, intervention and control.

More sophisticated conceptions of bureaucracy were also beginning to acknowledge that even within local councils there were many complex political relationships. For example, Stewart and Ranson (1988) argued:

Although in practice organisations in the public domain are in a co-operative relationship they can in practice be in competition. Different parts of the same organisation are in competition for public funds. The purposes of one organisation do not match another. Bureaucratic and political ambitions compete. Professional ideologies clash. (1988: 9)

The interdependency between actors, according to Stoker (1999), exacerbates the problem of unintended consequences for government. The more services that are pushed out from the core bureaucracy the more knowledge transfer takes place and eventually this leads to a situation where the council loses the necessary expertise to adequately supervise and regulate such service provision. It is not only within localities that this interdependence has become more apparent. Numerous UK studies have recorded the deterioration in relations between central and local government since 1979, and the increased reliance on mechanisms of control rather than understandings or conventions (Stoker 1999; 2000a).

Accountability

In the governance model the impact of management reform, markets and networks erodes traditional notions of accountability in the public sector (Rhodes 1997: 54). Lines of accountability in the public sector are no longer

clear cut. In a managerial and bureaucratic sense there are now fewer public bodies and employees who follow orders and are closely supervised on a day-to-day basis. It is claimed that networks and markets are increasingly challenging Weberian type bureaucratic arrangements (Rhodes 1997: 58).

Moreover, the 'institutional complexity created obscures who is accountable to whom for what' (Rhodes 1997: 54). The apparent simplicity of the political and administrative topography associated with the public bureaucratic state is gone forever. Traditional notions of public accountability were shaped within this framework. Today, however, the map of government is much more complex and uncertain. However these new arrangements bring with them increasing concerns about public accountability.

Also the increase in the number of arm's length agencies and quangos within government has created what has been termed the 'new magistracy'. Payne and Skelcher (1997) suggest that such bodies, 'are subject neither to election nor to the extensive probity and transparency standards required of local and central government' (1997: 207). They also point towards a reduction in the extent to which local public policy decisions are open to public scrutiny and influence. Despite the political rhetoric and innovations such as the Citizens Charter the reality is that users of public services are relatively powerless in holding quangos to account.

The outputs of the ESRC local governance programme in the 1990s told the story of the changing nature of accountability in new structures of governance (see Stoker 1999; 2000). John and Cole refer to, 'the more open character of governance poses challenges for democratic institutions. The new way of doing business undermines the existing patterns of chain and command and

transfers decision-making into interpersonal relationships and into semi-institutionalised politics of partnerships' (2000: 87).

This, according to Jessop (2000: 22), creates a dilemma of accountability versus efficiency – there are problems of attributing responsibility for decisions and attempts to do so can interfere with the efficient pursuit of joint goals within these networks. Those involved in such networks can establish monopolies of expertise in particular policy areas. Heald and Geaughan (1999) highlight how private companies involved in the Private Finance Initiative often claim commercial confidentiality that undermines public accountability. In the same book, Reid (1999: 138-9) notes how the requirements for public managers to develop 'new entrepreneurial and "intrapreneurial" skills' is challenging traditional public sector management conventions. ('Intrapreneurial' skills supposedly being those focused on internal government dynamics). Benyon and Edwards (1999) in their research into the local community governance of crime control, highlight how the focus of partnerships established in this policy area was in the main upwards to police boards and central government as they have struggled to develop bottom-down modes of accountability.

Community Leadership

Another aspect of the governance perspective is its linkage with what is referred to as the 'community leadership' role of local authorities. In the late 1980s and 1990s, academics, with sympathies to what would now be termed the modernising wing of the Labour Party, put forward the argument that local government had to re-invent itself in response to the changed environment in which it operated (see, for example, Stewart and Stoker 1988).

Stoker notes how, 'various writers have suggested that in the future local authorities can have a key role in building a network among local organisations and interests to achieve a purpose beyond the ambit of their immediate statutory responsibilities. In this way, local authorities express an overall concern with the welfare of their area' (1991a: 266).

A new emphasis was placed on community leadership and strategic management roles of local authorities (Cochrane 1994; Wilson and Game 1994; Stewart and Stoker 1995). It was emphasized that local councils were in a privileged position in their localities deriving increased legitimacy as the only directly elected institutions. In *Local Government in Europe* Stoker (1991b: 15) suggests community government is the dominant theme and trend for local government across the continent. Leach and Wilson's (2000) book examines local leadership and argues that strategic direction has become an increasing criterion of success in the local government arena.

Governance is, according to Stoker (1998: 17), 'ultimately concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action'. Local councils have a key role in their localities in creating this, due to their elected status. The potential problem, however, still remains that even where governments operate in a flexible way to steer collective action governance failure may occur.

Stoker (1999) narrates a story of how the Conservative central government inspired marketisation and financial reforms had unintended consequences such as fragmentation, loss of accountability and a decline in the public sector ethos. These are usually classified as negative effects but Stoker suggests there were other more positive side effects of the reform programme. The disruption created by these reforms to the traditional system of local

government resulted in councils increasingly being forced to account for their actions; and the sense of crisis created a dynamic which helped create a rich environment for new policy ideas in local councils. As Stoker argues:

It is in some respects ironic that the pressures unleashed by new management have encouraged local authorities to rethink and redefine their role. The vision of the New Management reformers aimed at a more efficient and customer-orientated service delivery by local authorities has been challenged by a broader vision of a new community governance. (1999: 15)

When it was initially used, the term governance was what Stoker referred to as 'the acceptable face of spending cuts' (1999: 18) and a pragmatic response to wider political and economic pressures. Whereas previously it was a phrase used to encapsulate ideological preference for less government it is now much looser and more associated with a learned response to the 'realities' of governing in a complex rapidly changing environment.

Writers in this vein tended to emphasise local councils' new role as the strategists in new networks of service provision. In their role as community leaders councils had to accept an end to the tradition of direct, in-house service provision and recognise the legitimacy of other bodies within their environment. The development of a strategy would involve the local council in partnership with other local groups and agencies moving towards a shared vision of the future. The Scottish Branch of the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) (1994: 7) set out a vision for the future of Scottish local authorities with the centre of the authority dealing with strategic management, monitoring and review, and with responsibility for:

- Making sure that the organisation is capable of handling those big issues which do not fit inside organisation boundaries.

- Working with councillors and officers to ensure that the local authority is properly leading community government.
- Integrating the work of the council in its various services and preventing fragmentation from being destructive.

An example of an argument for strategic management is the Scottish Branch of SOLACE set out the position as follows:

Many of the key policy issues facing local government - the needs of young and old - urban and rural regeneration, the environment, issues of poverty, community well-being - cross boundaries inside and outside the organisation. Traditional departments and committees cannot make sense of them and often the council cannot act alone. New patterns of working are needed. (1994: 2)

The local authority, due to the range of services it provides and its democratic mandate, is viewed as the galvanising strategic centre of a network of service providers in the local area.

The Local Government Management Board (1993: 6) noted that there was widespread agreement that those authorities viewed as most successful were those which had embraced the concept of strategic management, which gave them the chance to manage change successfully. Four characteristics of such authorities were outlined:

- They are likely to recognise in their organisation and management structures the integrated nature of many functions and establish mechanisms such as working groups to deal with such issues.
- A concern for performance management and the quality of service delivery.

- Procedures are in place for dialogue with local residents- the service users.
- Working groups and forums are established for partnerships with other public, private and voluntary organisations in the area.

Wilson et al. (1994: 312), note links with the corporate management reforms of the 1970s. However, they emphasise a distinction: '(Strategic management) is a reinterpretation, on a more selective basis, of corporate management but with a sharper policy focus and with a far greater emphasis on values and culture'.

Linked with this is a changing view of the role of local government noted by Cochrane (1994: 141), 'Some have begun to argue that, far from becoming residual or marginalized, councils will take on a pivotal role in the new world of fragmented and decentralized service delivery through multiple agencies' (1994: 141). Stoker (1996a: 206) outlines a similar argument when he suggests that local government 'should be promoted because of its capacity to undertake the political tasks of regulating competition, making choices and integrating human activity to cope with unexpected change and to achieve common purposes'.

Regulatory relations

Another strand of the governance literature – regulation - looks at what governmental bodies have been doing to respond to a changed landscape. Whilst the governance perspective raises questions concerning accountability – it also points towards the new regulatory devices the government has used to ensure accountability. Faced with these new networks of service provision

it is argued that the governmental response has been to use regulatory tools. Governance by regulation offers a solution to the two key problems identified by Rhodes (1997) – control and accountability. Regulation offers the centre of a local authority the capacity to steer self-organizing networks as well as institutionalise mechanisms of accountability.

In essence these new regulatory devices can be seen as the centre's response to the loss of control it has suffered as new modes of governance have emerged across the public sector. As the interventionist state has declined a new regulatory state has replaced it. There is 'more emphasis on the use of authority, rules and standard setting, particularly displacing an earlier emphasis on public ownership, public subsidies and directly provided services' (Hood et al. 1999: 3).

There is a shift away from the tradition of 'high-trust' towards a 'low trust' arm's length relationship in government (Hood 1994: 131). The UK government delivers few public services directly to the people, 'but regulates other bodies responsible for provision' (Hood et al. 1999: 93-4). Numerous types of regulator inside government are identified such as public auditors, professional inspectorates and ombudsmen. External bodies such as the Auditor General, Accounts Commission, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, the Education Inspectorate and similar public sector bodies help to focus the responsibility in the hands of local government,

This moves the focus of accountability away from monolithic public bureaucracies with hierarchical line-management relationships, to the regulatory oversight arrangements that exist. This has resulted in a whole new range of accountability documentation for public agencies e.g.

corporate/strategic plans, public service agreements, values, mission statements, business plans, annual accounts and reports, performance plans, performance indicators, strategic plans, evaluation reports etc. As Hood, has noted the accountability metaphor underlying this type of change is, 'that of a principal dealing with a potentially untrustworthy agent, aiming to spell out goals with maximum precision and setting up monitoring and incentive schemes to induce the agent to follow the principal's wishes' (1994: 131-2).

Moreover, in these dis-aggregated policy networks, local 'government inevitably finds itself sharing power, which requires it fundamentally to rethink not only how it manages but how it governs' (Kettl 1993: viii). More emphasis is being placed on the upward accountability requirements of services. Regulatory capacity ties in quite neatly with the needs of local democracy – within elected government retaining the capacity to steer the government machine in the appropriate direction as well as ensuring public agencies are accountable in some way to elected politicians. As such regulatory activity means old notions of electoral accountability are not wholly obsolete. Regulatory activity allows the government to establish mechanisms of accountability to supplant more traditional ones.

Regulation is also consistent with notions of accountability in local public services. It establishes a framework of management reporting and controls. Conventions of the council chamber as a corporate body with direct accountability chains to front line local services can still be invoked. One could view such regulatory relations as a throwback to the traditional model within the governance perspective. The needs of democracy and legitimacy require the imagery of elected local politicians at the apex of the democratic accountability chain and in control. The maintenance of these regulatory

devices highlight the legitimacy that the new arrangements for service delivery still derive from the elected council chamber. Inspection, reporting, auditing, scrutiny and quality assurance mechanisms mean that senior officers have access to details of the performance of front-line services which are not part of the bureaucracy – they, in turn, remain accountable to the council chamber.

Regulation is also consistent with transparent government and the dissemination of information becoming an ever-increasing aspect of public accountability. More and more, public bodies are required to produce documentation about their activities and performance. Such documents include strategic plans, which set out aims and priorities and are complemented by Annual Reports which set out summary information in formats for a wider audience. This allows public bodies to give account of their activities. In reality, the documentation associated with regulation forms the basis for informal discussion, negotiation and judgement (i.e. politics) (Midwinter and McGarvey 2001). Government is always in the final analysis a political process, not a managerial one.

New Labour

It is not difficult to see the connection between governance ideas and New Labour's post-1997 modernisation programme. Governance has been used as a blanket term redefining the extent and form of public intervention and the use of markets and quasi markets to deliver 'public' services (Rhodes 1997). Governance is taken to represent a pragmatic response to wider political and economic pressures. At the same time 'modernisation' has been defined as involving a recognition of these new realities (Stoker 1999a: 241).

Concentrating on the UK as a whole, Stoker (2000a) cites Horton and Farnham (1999) and John (1998) as suggesting Labour's reforms are just an extension of the Conservatives' New Public Management programme. There is no doubt that, in a managerial sense, there are many similarities. However, Stoker rightly argues that Labour's local government modernisation programme is different in that it also focuses on political organisation and the democratic legitimacy of local government. There is a positive embrace of the notion of partnerships of organisations working together to achieve improved local services and policy outcomes. Modernisation emphasises political as well as managerial outcomes. There is less hostility towards local government – indeed one of the first symbolic gestures of the new Blair Government was to sign the European Charter of Local Self-Government, something the previous Conservative Government refused to do. The post-1997 modernisation of the Blair Government clearly acknowledged the changing environment of local councils and would appear to have largely subscribed to many of the notions that form part of the local governance framework of enquiry.

Conclusion

Local governance perspectives in local government studies tend to suggest that bureaucratic modes of governance have been displaced. However, any analysis of changing modes of local governance in the UK should emphasise evolution rather than revolution in governing structure. Indeed it might be argued that the 'regulatory response' to the changed governance environment of local councils represents the local bureaucratic tradition response. That is

new regulatory structures, targets and rules are akin to old bureaucratic conventions, handbooks and rules.

New local governance perspectives have heuristic qualities in that they ask different questions and generate alternative insights from others. They have challenged the prominence of traditional and managerial perspectives in the academic analysis of local government. For example, there is no doubt that the new governing arrangements erode traditional Weberian notions of accountability in the public sector with institutional complexity obscuring who is accountable to whom for what. By neglect, a traditional framework of analysis may gloss over such questions – its focus being on internal operations.

The irony, of course, is that as the public sector becomes ever more complex the normative appeal of the old codes of accountability increases. Traditional legalistic and constitutional notions of public accountability still retain significant appeal for politicians, officials, the media and the public. There remains a normative preference in favour of the ballot box and other democratic mechanisms working effectively to ensure accountability in public administration.

It is undoubtedly true that the bureaucratic mode of government has been challenged by new modes of governance in the 1980s and 1990s. Hoggett observed the development of three fundamental but interlocking strategies of control:

Firstly, there has been a pronounced shift towards the creation of operationally decentralised units with a simultaneous attempt to

increase centralised control over strategy and policy. Second, the principle of competition has become the dominant method of coordinating the activities of decentralised units. Third, there has been a substantial development of processes of performance management and monitoring (including audits, inspections, quality assessments and reviews). (1995: 9)

In the 1980s and 1990s there was much reference to the downsizing, outsourcing and privatisation of government activities. From an NPM perspective, this reflects a rolling back of the state and a change in public management style. However, from a governance perspective, such acts do not necessarily reflect disengagement of the state from particular areas. What the state has done is change the character of its involvement in specific areas. It has reformulated its role to meet with changing circumstances.

However, accumulated together the local governance perspective argues that reforms have fundamentally altered the basic character of local government.

Loughlin suggests:

The tradition of the self-sufficient, corporate authority which was vested with broad discretion to raise revenue and provide services has been directly challenged... Local councils have been stripped of governmental responsibility for certain services which continue to be public services but which are now provided by agencies which are funded directly from the centre. (Loughlin 1996: 56)

Overall, the approach adopted here concurs with Stoker's (1998: 18) observation that:

The contribution of the governance perspective to theory is not at the level of causal analysis. Nor does it offer a new normative theory, Its value is as an organising framework. The values of such frameworks can be found in their identification of what is worthy to study

The governance perspective on local government studies does generate a number of hypotheses to be tested:

- A differentiated local polity characterised by functional and institutional specialisation and the fragmentation of policies and politics emerged in each council area.
- Actors beyond the institutional boundaries of local government are becoming more important actors in delivery, operation and management of local public services.
- Networks and partnerships became more important arenas for local politics and policymaking with interdependent relationships becoming the norm in all policy areas.
- Fragmentation erodes local government accountability because institutional complexity obscures who is accountable to whom and for what.
- In responding to the changed environment local councils use new regulatory tools to steer and guide local policymaking in their chosen direction.

Chapter 7: The Traditional Municipal Perspective in the Three Councils

This chapter, is the first of four to examine the research data derived from interviews, analysis of primary and secondary documentation as well as participant observation at each of the three case study councils. All three councils were in some way trying to move their councils away from what they perceived as the old organisational cultures of local governments towards new methods of governance and new managerial and democratic cultures. However, in all three councils evidence of the continuing relevance of the 'traditional municipal' perspective was not difficult to detect. As this chapter will outline, many senior council officers commented on how they had inherited staff from the pre-reorganisation councils who were imbued with this traditional way of thinking about local government organisation. It was also noticeable that the same senior officers suggested that the attitude and behaviour of a significant number of councillors in each of the authorities was also reflective of this perspective. The focus of the research was, however, on the officer – rather than councillor -side of each council's organisation.

This chapter will highlight both changes and challenges to traditional municipal working practices as well as evidence of continuity. The evidence does suggest a significant change in the language used to describe local council organisation. There is less evidence, however, of change penetrating working practices in the councils. There remains ample evidence of traditional bureaucratic practices, departmentalism and inherited council procedures and cultures informing the post-reorganisation councils.

The evidence in this chapter will be used to show that some of the academic claims that a decline in the traditional municipal perspective (in both practice *and* analysis) may be somewhat over-stated and that conventional attitudes, structures and processes were more durable than local government reformers

envisaged. Conventional incremental theories in public policy and organisational theories would not find this finding particularly surprising. According to these theories, such structures would reflect an existing accommodation with established political interests – and significant change may be politically difficult. Decision makers do not look far and wide for policy solutions. Rather, their values limit their search and their decisions reflect decisions already taken in the past. They adopt a ‘bounded rationality’ approach as the inherited structure has become established and increasingly difficult to change over time (see Lindblom 1959; 1979).

Public policy research into policy change and development has tended to highlight the importance of inheritance and legacy in shaping public policy-making (e.g. Rose 1990). Radical change tends to be the exception rather than the rule in government with public bureaucracies able to soak up and dilute reform initiatives. The words of one council chief officer interviewed summarised this well: ‘councils are like super-tankers in the sea - trying to turn one around is a hell of a job, once they’ve been going in one direction for so long it’s difficult to change it’ (B16 1997).

As outlined in chapter 3, the traditions of local government are embedded into its statutes, professional associations as well as the department and committee structures of councils. The legislative framework for local government and the statutes that govern the operation of councils were written in an era when new structures of governance - such as public-private partnerships, working groups and networking approaches to service delivery – had not yet been considered.

Statutory responsibilities, considerations and requirements have often acted as blocks on change in local authorities. There was evidence of this in each of

the councils. In Stirling, an officer noted how one option in a review of the structure of the social work service was ruled out because of the potential legal problems that could be encountered (B1 1997). Similarly in Fife, the Head of a Service was willing to list a host of statutory obligations that the council had to perform, many of which limited the scope for organisational innovation and change (A1 1997). In Highland, three area managers when asked to outline how they would describe their role, listed the fulfilment of statutory obligations as a key requirement of their job with one commenting, 'before I even consider new agendas I had to make sure I got the basics right ... I had to make sure that we're doing what we are obliged to by law' (C15 1997). The 'basics' of local government are the statutory responsibilities. Significantly, for all the talk of change and innovation many officers were keen to impress that these requirements still occupied considerable amounts of their time and energy.

Chapter 3 outlined a series of hypotheses that would be utilised to test the durability and continuing relevance of the traditional school of thought:

- The direct delivery of public services through a line management of accountable bureaucracy remains an important part of what local councils do.
- Local councils are still organised in a departmental manner with professionals dominant within their relevant department. Departmental boundaries are fiercely defended.
- Inherited council procedures and culture inform significant parts of what councils have done since reorganisation.
- For officers and councillors local democracy is expressed through the ballot box and the elected council chamber and its committees are the key expressions of that democracy. Committee systems are regarded as sacrosanct.

- Councillors are the key policymakers, with officers working through bureaucratic structures delivering these policies.
- Mutuality and professionalism are key parts of the ethos of the council, that is firmly rooted in the public sector.

This chapter will now review and analyse the research evidence with these hypotheses in mind. Analysis will follow the structure of chapter 3 with the concluding discussion focusing specifically on the hypotheses outlined above.

The historical legacy

Each of the three new councils (Highland, Fife and Stirling) can be readily identified with a traditional spatial area of Scotland. Both Highland and Fife councils covered areas that replicated the regional council boundaries of their namesake regional councils between 1975 and 1996. One Fife officer noted how in terms of layout and buildings it appeared to be like 'Fife Region Mark II' (A7 1997). Similarly, Stirling Council took over the boundaries of the previous Stirling District Council.

The new councils thus did not appear out of a vacuum – each had an easily identifiable fore-runner. This point is an important one as much of the discussion in the mid-1990s was conducted as if each new council had a blank slate on which to design new structures. The reality in both Highland and Fife was that the campaigns for the establishment of each council (supported by the previous regional councils) were underpinned by commitments to retain features of the two-tier region/district structure. The councils were new but they inherited legacies from their fore-runner councils which meant their structures and processes were circumscribed by their historical inheritance. The legacy of the previous regional councils in both areas was

apparent in many obvious ways (e.g. personnel, signage, buildings). In other words, the new councils all inherited the pre-existing structures and processes of pre-reorganisation district and regional councils in their areas.

It should also be remembered that, in terms of estate, each council inherited existing council buildings. During fieldwork in each area visits were made to council offices at various locations, each was imbued with a clear sense of local identity and interviewees out-with 'head offices' (Viewforth - Stirling, Glenurquart Road - Inverness, and Glenrothes - Fife) were, more often than not, keen to emphasise this. In each area there were buildings that displayed local coats of arms, decoration and other paraphernalia that acted as physical representation of the long history of local government there. This was particularly true in the decentralised localities of Highland and Fife where these offices were the former district council headquarters, many of which had roots in the 19th century. Reflecting on this structure more than a decade later, one Fife officer suggested, 'In retrospect using the previous district councils was a major error - it reinforced instead of lessening the divisions between the old councils' (A7 2008).

The councils may have been new in the legal and formal sense but there could be no denying the awareness that they represented the legacy of past councils in the area.

It was possible to identify such historical inheritance by identifying many existing practices in councils that could be termed 'traditional'. For example, in Highland, officers still referred to councillors by their full title (e.g. 'Councillor Peacock'). A formality and separation between members and officers was evident. Councillors and officers may do things in a certain way without thinking about the effect they have. In interviews no officer pointed

this out, it was only through participant observation at council meetings that this became apparent.

The new standing orders of each council were not written on a clean slate – each council acknowledged that its rules and operating procedures reflected those of its predecessors, and in some instances were a direct reproduction of existing rules and procedures. Despite the emphasis on ‘new’ in each council the officers acknowledged that, due to the pressures of time and resources, there was a need for a degree of conservatism in their approach to deciding on new rules and operating procedures. One chief executive outlined how he had been appointed so late in the day that the organisational structures on which the new councils were based were very much a ‘fait accompli’. In these circumstances, there had been little time for discussion of fine-tuning, far less going in for wholesale change (C9 1998). Another chief executive suggested that his focus had been at the top of the organisation, he had been careful that any change for those at the frontline was postponed until after the initial trauma and upheaval of transition had been dealt with (A10 1997). The other chief executive outlined how ‘visioning’ sessions had been scheduled for councillors and officers in order that a clear sense of where his council was going could be identified. However, he did acknowledge that any change in structure was always going to be within certain parameters and would reflect the conservatism of a significant bloc of elected members (B20 2008). In this manner each council, whilst new in name and statute, acknowledged its inheritance and was careful to adopt an approach to its organisational structure that took account of the pre-existing councils.

The traditional municipal perspective and local democracy

All three councils made conscious efforts to change the democratic outlook of their council. These efforts found reflection in a variety of documents:

- Fife Council has six aims the first of which was 'To Strengthen Local Democracy' (Fife Council 1997).
- Stirling Council's vision was that 'Stirling should be an area in which people have control and influence over their lives' (Stirling Council, undateda: 1)
- Highland Council declared one of its aims for decentralisation was to 'allow the public to take part' (Highland Council, undateda).

In one form or another each council declared itself to be taking local democracy seriously (chapter 9 will outline further details).

Section 23 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 placed a duty on the newly created councils to prepare draft decentralisation schemes for their areas by 1 April 1997. These schemes tended to form the basis of each council's approach to local democracy. However, on closer examination it became clear that each council's decentralisation scheme, rather than being a clean break from the past, had a legacy rooted firmly in its historical structural inheritance. Both Highland and Fife's decentralisation schemes were based around identical boundaries to those inherited from district councils. Highland had eight, and Fife three. Fife suggested that its development of decentralisation would be 'a long term evolutionary process' (Fife Council 1997: 2). Although presented in public relations terms as radical decentralisation schemes, the reality was that they were incremental and rooted very much in previous council practice.

What was particularly striking in interviews was that local democracy was viewed by some councillors and officers as something apart, almost divorced, from council structures and operations. For example in Stirling an officer

argued, 'The democratic thing is messy ... it's like being on a river it could flow you in any direction, it slows decision-making and in this council ... I detect a degree of sceptism from some members' (B5 1997). Similar sceptism was noted in Fife,

The problem with participation and local democracy is that too many of the councillors feel threatened especially the old guard. However, the idea is not to undermine them but to enhance their capacity to represent their wards. (A13 1997)

Democracy was not viewed as essential to the council's operations. In Highland one community councillor defined the role of the council as, 'to provide services in tune with requirements and use tax money sensibly' (C3). This definition is essentially one of local public administration. An officer in Highland argued:

Too much democracy in any organisation is not necessarily a good thing. It can get in the way of making decisions fast and it's not the best or most efficient way to make decisions. Sometimes the council does know best You've got to remember that the people making decisions in the council are usually the best informed. Many people screaming for more democracy ... well they're just crazy ... giving more power to these people is not democratic. (C8 1997)

Nonetheless there is evidence to suggest that conventional representative democracy remained the dominant paradigm in each council. The new schemes of participation were spoken of as 'add ons' and experimental. There was anecdotal data of councillors and officers being locked into a Schumpeterian conception of democracy. Councillors had been elected on mandates to follow particular policies and it was their job to follow these through - success or failure would be measured retrospectively at subsequent elections. One councillor outlined this in stark terms:

I was elected on the Stirling Labour Group's manifesto and that is my reference point for this term. If I can point out to my voters that I have done what I said I was going to do then I can ask them to re-elect me. That is how local democracy works. (B19 1997)

Organisational structure

The Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 gave no guidance about the internal structures that the new councils should adopt. Final decisions about structures were taken by the shadow authorities during 1995 in order to allow for appointments to senior management positions and staff transfers to be made and budgets set by the end of March 1996. Ian Lang (1994), the then Secretary of State for Scotland, acknowledged that there had been no managerial blueprint for all councils, arguing that it was inappropriate.

The prevailing mood of the time, however, was that the reorganisation represented a significant window of opportunity for councillors to challenge traditional structures. The *Scottish Local Government Information Unit* suggested, 'The reorganisation of local government in Scotland provides an opportunity to develop radical new models of decision making structures' (SLGIU 1995: 2).

There is little doubt that many local council politicians and chief officers thought likewise. Indeed, as outlined in chapter 2, when judged by their peers, the chief executive officers of Fife, Highland and Stirling were identified as the most progressive and innovative in this respect. In other words, the empirical data on which this research draws is drawn from those councils *most* likely to have engaged in significant organisational reform. By

the same token it is these councils that are most likely to have moved away from the traditional model of local government.

All three councils did show significant innovation in their internal organisation. As noted above, Fife Council introduced a new system of strategic directors designed to drive forward the strategic objectives of the council while the Heads of Service were there to take care of the day-to-day operational responsibilities of services. This was a clear effort to separate the strategic from the operational aspects of management within the council. A new scheme of locality management was also introduced shortly after reorganisation.

Highland Council's structure was decentralised into the areas of the previous district councils. Highland is significantly different from all other councils in terms of scale – its land-mass covering the area of a small country such as Belgium. Given this, decentralisation in Highland was more of a necessity than actual choice.

Stirling's Council's structure was not decentralised in any radical way – reflecting the small size of the population it served. There was, however, experimentation with the service and committee structures being de-coupled and area committees established in different council areas.

The internal regulation of councils traditionally tended towards what Hood et al. (1999) have described as 'mutuality'. To the extent that regulation existed in Scottish councils it tended to be informal. Nowhere was this more clearly highlighted than the North Lanarkshire Direct Labour Organisation crisis in the late-1990s, when it emerged that a major shortfall had occurred after insufficient council oversight of its Direct Labour operations. Whilst the head

offices of Inverness (in Highland) and Glenrothes (in Fife) set broad policy parameters and strategic objectives, and let operational and decentralised services have responsibility for service delivery, there was a creeping formality in terms of targets and performance indicators. There was no evidence of the type of problems encountered in North Lanarkshire. External regulatory institutions such as the Accounts Commission and HM Inspectorate of Education for Scotland were compelling councils to produce more 'hard' data about service standards, quality and improvement. However, mutuality was still evident with politicking around targets commonplace. As one manager in Fife suggested, 'Yes we have targets, however I tend to view these as guides and yardsticks – it is usually easy to explain why our performance may not be the same as another area due to local circumstance, staffing problems or something like that' (A12 1997). Another suggested, 'It's not like we're running a sales operation here. I have targets - some I meet, some I don't. I try to meet them all but it's not always possible' (A3 1997). The impression given was that although documentation existed that suggested a clear formalised regulatory approach from the centre, the reality was quite different.

In interviews public sector trade unions were identified frequently as institutions reinforcing the continuance of traditional organisational structures and approaches. One of the education directors suggested that the Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS) - the main public sector teaching trade union in Scotland - had an in-built conservatism and was sceptical of change. He argued, 'In education change can only happen locally within clearly defined boundaries otherwise the unions and professional associations can act as blocks' (B9 1997). Another DLO manager emphasised that a significant part of his operational management responsibilities involved liaising with the

union, and if the union was not agreeable to policy change its implementation would probably not be achievable (B3 1997).

Another barrier to change commonly cited was the notion of 'departmentalism' and/or professionalism. A Stirling Head of Service noted, 'The main barriers to change in Stirling Council are professions and departments. We need to get individuals thinking about generic working far more' (B17 1997). In a similar vein a Fife senior officer argued:

Only when people start to map out their careers out-with their professional boundaries will Fife Council be a truly different organisation. What we have at the moment are people in senior and middle management positions with a working life within one background and it is that one that has shaped their attitudes and approach. (A10 1997)

He suggested that 'professions remain the bolt-holes for traditional structures' and remained a significant underpinning for 'conventional' department structures in local authorities. He viewed the new locality management scheme as an alternative career route for young 'up and coming' professionals within Fife council.

Power and policymaking in each council

It was difficult to detect a notion of a clear dichotomy between councillors and officers from the interviewees within each council. Each council had a clear connection between the chief executive officer and the leader of the political administration. In Fife and Stirling (but less so in Highland) it was by no means clear cut that councillors were the only source of power in councils, with the chief executive officers in charge exhibiting significant power. In both phases of fieldwork, interviewees in both Stirling and Fife,

suggested that the key axis of power was between the elected council leaders and the chief executive officers. In Highland the picture was somewhat more complicated during the first phase of fieldwork with independents dominating. However, by 2008 officers were reporting that councillor-officer relations were 'moving closer to the lowland Scotland norm' (C5 2008). This is consistent with McConnell's analysis that suggests the formal picture of policymaking in local councils may not be altogether accurate:

Despite the fact that formal power resides with the full council as a corporate body, evidence suggests that actual decision-making power is much more complex than this. The traditional practices of the early post-war period masked the domination of officers. (2004: 90)

Officers are undoubtedly more important than a strict reading of the statutory picture would suggest - as one chief executive commented:

The shadow year of operation allowed the political leadership and myself and the other leading officers to establish close working relations as well as develop a clear vision for where we want to go. Discussions have been frank and open with both members and officers feeding in their thoughts on the direction of the new council. (B20 1997)

The notion of a clear demarcation between the policy and administrative tasks of a local council simply did not inform this statement. The only council where a sense of division between politicians and officers was readily apparent in 1997/98 was Highland. This remained in 2008 though, as noted above, there was some evidence of its dilution. During the initial post-reorganisation phase Highland had a formality that did not exist within the central belt councils. One Fife officer (with previous experience of the rural Borders Regional Council) noted being struck by the informality of the relationships between members and officers compared to Borders where 'at

meetings people addressed each other with formal titles' and 'councillors interacted with officers through the chief executive' (A2 1997).

However, the hierarchical nature of each council should not be over-stressed. Probably the most hierarchical was that of Highland – reflecting a more traditional culture that still permeated the operating practices and procedures there. However, each council had moved significantly down the route of taking on a more networked form of organisation, with officers working in groups across different services. Working groups whilst not holding any formal executive authority over subordinates, were important decision-making forums in many policy areas. For example, one officer in Stirling (B6 1997) had been asked by the chief executive to map out the number of cross-service working groups created in the post-reorganisation period and stopped counting at 220. These included groups on wide and varied things such as street crime, school truancy, community safety, health and lifestyle, decentralisation and engaging with citizens.

In each council, officers noted distinctions between ex-region and ex-district councillors. An officer in Stirling noted a distinction that was common in each council, 'We still have councillors from the district council who want to become involved directly in decision-making, the ex-regional councillors are not so much of a problem as they are more used to focusing on policy' (B14 1997). After 2007 this division had disappeared – as one officer put it, 'The 2007 (STV) election will be seen as a watershed with the old guard retiring and a new breed of councillors emerging' (C5 2008).

In Highland five officers 'in one way or another' made reference to the 'cost of democracy' (C2 1997, C5 1997, C8 1997, C15 1997, C16 1997). This was interesting because this line of thinking was not as apparent in Stirling and

Fife. It suggests that 'democracy' was seen as being in some way separate from the 'normal' efficient workings of the council and was an 'add on' with additional cost implications. In Fife and Stirling on the other hand officers were more comfortable referring to local democracy as integral to the operation of the council.

The traditional chair/director axis of power in the councils - while being questioned by the new structures in Fife and Stirling - had not disappeared. In Fife council three officers placed emphasis on the fact that the 'old' chair/official axis still existed, one argued that this needed to be 'tackled' if the culture of the council was to be changed. Even by 2008 it was acknowledged:

The initial structure was trying to break away from the old service head-committee axis. This was successful in most areas, but probably the least successful in education and social work, but maybe that won't surprise you?' ... It's a tough one to crack that but I think if you look across the board we certainly moved away with the worst excesses of the previous regional structure which was strongly kind of fiefdoms (A7 2008)

In Stirling one officer noted how some leading officers 'sought out' allies on the political side in order to reinvent this old axis in another form:

We had seven directors and set up five committees with the idea that each one would have two or three directors reporting to it. It was an obvious attempt by me to stop the chieftans where you had a director and a chair totally dominating. It partially worked though one negative side effect was that directors spent time at meetings when matters of no particular relevance to them were being discussed. There is a significant opportunity cost to that in terms of their time. (B20 2008)

In 2005 Stirling completely revolutionised its political decision-making process moving from a committee structure to an executive system. This

model formalised the position of a political executive with portfolio holders and a scrutiny committee run by members from the political opposition. Since that date, officer B20 reported that he has detected new axes of power whereby the portfolio holders are 'being captured by their directors'. So the situation in 2008 was that, 'we broke down the silos between the chieftans. I think we did, I think it made a breakthrough ... but one of the curiosities now is that some individual leading councillors are now closer to directors than they have been since 1996' (B20 2008). In other words there was a danger that the new decision-making structures *could* replicate the old traditional committee chair (now portfolio holder) – director axis.

Possibly the clearest statement about the nature of power and policymaking in modern day Scottish local government came from the same officer:

maybe this is really a controversial statement but part of the myth of local government is that it's councillors who are taking all the crunch decisions. And actually an awful lot of the decisions on a day to day actions that are taken on local government are actually nothing to do with councillors. It's just that the management of public services and councillors come in and they sort of dance around on the icing of the cake rather than actually having a real impact what's going on underneath. Although the good councillor will find the thing that is going wrong and will challenge and ask questions about policy and make the change to policies, but a lot of councillors it is quite marginal and they get the feel good from the constituency meetings, trying to help someone individually and sort or feel that they have actually done that (B20 2008).

The bureaucratic culture in each council

As outlined in chapter 3, critiques of local government bureaucracy have been a common feature of the literature in recent decades. Bureaucratic failure is usually tied to the 'disease' of 'departmentalism' that was endemic in

traditional local authority structures. For example at a COSLA Decentralisation Conference on 28 November 1997, the then local government minister in the Scottish Office, Malcolm Chisholm, spoke of, 'putting the needs of people beyond any traditional department structure'. There was an emphasis on putting the needs of service recipients before the interests of those that deliver the services. This was consistent with the previous Conservative's emphasis on the recipients of local services as consumers and customers (see Gyford 1991).

The previous reorganisation in Scotland occurred in the mid-1970s. One councillor suggested that this had reinforced 'traditionalism' in local council structures:

After the previous reorganisation and the move to boroughs, more power was vested in professionals, managers and the bureaucrats. The power bases of key groups in local government were cemented. (A13 1997)

All three councils stressed, to varying degrees, the bureaucratic mentality of some of the staff they inherited. In Stirling senior officers from the ex-Central Regional Council were consistent in their emphasis that officers from the ex-Stirling District Council had a more bureaucratic mentality. A few were careful, however, to point out that Central Regional Council was not immune to the 'curse of bureaucracy'. As one officer described it:

The culture Stirling has at the moment is the one inherited from Central Region and that is a bureaucratic one. There is a desire to attack it through initiatives that empower managers. (B14 1997)

At the time of the first phase of fieldwork, most officers were agreed that the bureaucratic mentality was alive and well in Stirling Council:

We haven't (gone) through the change process, nothing's changed here at all yet. Supervisors in my service feel very intimidated there is still a Stalinist attitude amongst some at the top. We're still in the fire-fighting mode here. The values and the vision of those at the top have not been pushed down yet. (B1 1997)

The pace of change that members expect is completely unrealistic here, if it happens, it will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. You've got to build to achieve. (B8 1997)

What we have had here is two cultures clashing and retrenchment rearing its head, it's just the way people are - they play it safe. (B14 1997)

The communication channels in the council are not in place at the moment so our employees are relying on past practice. (B18 1997)

Similar views were offered by officers in Fife. A strategic manager neatly summarised the psychological barriers to changing the bureaucratic culture in local councils:

Psychologically people do not like change. At uncertain times they look for certainty. In local government, jobs are traditionally defined in inputs rather than outputs. Fife is seeking to change that - managers are given resources and given targets/specifications, they can seek to achieve these in any way they see fit. (A9 1997)

There was also the problem of conservatism amongst front-line officers as outlined by another corporate officer: 'Remember not everyone is happy to be empowered, in one office staff were very uneasy after being told to sign their own letters' (A20 1997).

There was also a defence of bureaucracy from some council officers. For example one argued:

Bureaucracy does have advantages and these should not be ignored but in an environment of change where speedy reactions are needed it has inevitable downsides. The thing about councils nowadays is change seems to be continual. (A1 1997)

He also emphasised that the council's main obligation remained the provision of statutory services. Another officer noted that when he first arrived at Fife shadow authority there were Thursday morning senior officer meetings and when he asked the chief executive 'what are the rules?', he replied that there were none and everything was very informal. However, in the end the meetings degenerated because of the lack of existence of rules - 'the institutionalisation of structures and rules is inevitable in any organisation it could not function without them' (A2 1997).

However, it was in Fife that the senior management exhibited most commitment and desire to change. Several officers identified politicians as a key driving force for movement away from departmentalism. One argued that this was common-sensical, after all, 'a network of individuals with commitment and expertise is surely better at dealing with social work problems than eight layers of management?' (A4 1997). The argument was also made that:

The fact is in any organisation it is informal networks and contacts that make things happen. People have got to trust each other. The less barriers that are put in place between people the better. (A9 1997)

Another argued that change was occurring,

It was different from the region: flatter structures, the move away from defined jobs, more examples of joint working, working groups have done the groundwork in human resource development. (A4 1997)

In Highland the main bureaucratic concern was the sense that reorganisation had essentially been a Highland Regional Council takeover of the ex-district councils. Various officers and community councillors expressed this view:

Bureaucracy tends to be linked with centralisation here. The Inverness headquarters of the council is the 'bogey man' with faceless people from a faraway place imposing stupid decisions on local people. (C12 1997)

The form Highland Council has taken has been shaped by the former regional council. Like the Highland tourist board it is centralised, bureaucratic and alienating. (C7 1997)

Inverness is getting involved in things that should be left to people based more locally. They want to hold that pot of gold in Inverness. (C10 1997)

All three councils were committed in one form or another to lessening bureaucracy. That commitment was particularly vivid in Fife and Stirling which went to great lengths to instigate a more networked horizontal pattern of working. In Fife a matrix management structure was designed with the deliberate intention of blurring the hierarchical lines of traditional bureaucracy. The commitment was possibly not as manifest in Highland where a formality - traditionally associated with large bureaucracies - was readily apparent.

The barriers that were alluded to, in interviews, that could act as blocks to the lessening of bureaucracy were departmental and professional boundaries, formalised service level agreements and legal contracts. Contracts and

formal agreements between different institutions tend to be the mechanisms that have been used to establish a framework for joint working. As one officer put it:

Working together is all very well but you stick five professions in a room to look at an issue and you'll get five different ways of looking at it. I'm not saying all of them will be wrong they'll just be different ... maybe working together over time will change that, who knows? (B11 1997)

This statement is consistent with McConnell's (2004: 60) insight, when he cited an illuminating quote that recognises the fundamental differences between professions as being like, 'an anthropologist, a hundred years ago, aiming to document and describe the confrontation between two widely differing cultures'. (Kendrick 1995: 627).

It was noticeable that in both Fife and Stirling there were no 'departments', only 'services'. However, it was also clear that notions of flatter management structures and 'horizontal working' - although being striven towards - were not yet reality. The transition in each council had created many internal staffing issues that remained to be resolved and there remained a preoccupation with internal matters. After reorganisation, extensive management tiers were still apparent in each council's structure.

Officers interviewed in 2008 argued that their council had lessened bureaucracy with each wave of reform creating flatter management structures. These interviewees also maintained that any increase in bureaucracy was more to do with councils responding to national policy initiatives than any locally initiated desire to expand (A7 2008, B20 2008, C4 2008, C5 2008).

The public sector ethos

As discussed in chapter 3 a significant bulwark of a municipal traditional model in the post-1945 period was the idea of a public sector ethos informing the attitude and culture of the staff within local government. In interviews for this research, officers were asked to consider this notion and assess its relevance within their council. There was almost unanimity – at both phases of fieldwork – that as a concept, the public sector ethos had a continuing relevance. In the case of Fife and Stirling this was not altogether unsurprising during the initial phase of fieldwork as each council was controlled by the Scottish Labour Party, a party whose ethos tended to reflect a commitment to the value of public service.

Stirling Council's attitude to compulsory competitive tendering (CCT), for example, was that, 'the council's aims could normally be achieved through direct provision of its own services' (Stirling Council Minutes May/June 1996). This reflected an 'in-house culture' that was prevalent throughout Scottish local government. As noted by Kerley and Wynn:

A Scottish Trade Unions and Local Authorities Joint Committee on Compulsory Competitive Tendering was set up with the support of SOSLA and the STUC. This committee helped to formulate the ground rules by which Scottish local authorities and the trades unions could co-operate to minimise the loss of employment and direct services, arising from commercial tendering. Issues such as how to avoid unwelcome cross-authority bidding, how best to provide information and training for affected workforces, and how to obtain reliable information on private contractors' methods and rates were discussed in detail ... The Joint Committee was the very embodiment of a co-operative and largely effective defensive strategy to mitigate the effects of the 1988 (CCT) Act (Kerley and Wynn 1990: 9)

Thus, in terms of the externalisation of services, CCT had a minimal impact on Scottish local government with most councils striving towards the retention of service provision and the defeat of private sector competitors in the contracting process.

In Fife one senior officer made a clear statement of his commitment to a public sector ethos:

I was recruited to local government in 1970 it was a conscious decision. ... I was naturally committed to public service - there was no need to write this down in the form of values. The current trend I see as seeking to reinvent the public sector ethos but it came naturally to me in any case – I have always believed in what we are trying to do here. (A1 1997)

In 2008 a Fife officer argued: 'I think the ethos of public service of serving communities in Fife is still very strong ... with that comes standards of ethics and public accountability which is still there' (A7 2008).

In Highland the commitment to a public sector ethos had an emphasis on community. As one officer commented:

OK we're not exactly your typical Scottish local council and we spend a lot less on social services than councils in Glasgow and other towns and cities but that is not to say we are not as committed to making a difference in peoples lives through some form of council intervention ... so, to answer your question, yes I think the public sector ethos is apparent in Highland. (C12 1997)

In Highland in 2008 one officer declared, 'The public sector ethos is alive and well in Highland because of the impact of community' (C5 2008).

Conceptions of accountability

Fife Council's initial post reorganisation structure was deliberately designed with a new conception of accountability in mind. It deliberately moved away from the conventional departmental bureaucracy model. At the top of the organisation it created three strategy directors who worked across a range of services within their domains but who had no operational management responsibilities. By 2008, after two waves of restructuring (initiated by two changes of chief executive), 'executive directors' existed.

At the bottom, a system of locality management was put in place. This reduced the number of managers in the organisation as it sought to move to a flatter organisational structure. The local office network consisted of 50 offices in 22 localities with a gross budget 1997/98 of £11.2 million.

As one officer noted: 'The term generic staff in local councils has tended to be said with a sneer in the voice' (A20 1997). In other words, professions dominate the landscape and those officers without professional training, background and standing tend to be looked down upon by the dominant majority. The same officer noted that the problem with this supposed professional ethos was that it was not always conducive to efficient working. A lot of professions in her opinion had engineered council structures deliberately to distance themselves from the 'grubby front line'. She argued Fife was trying to create a career structure for staff out-with the traditional professional boundaries (A13 1997).

'Enabling' was a theme that was clearly identifiable from the interviews conducted in all three councils. There was an outward rather than inward focus when conceptions of accountability were raised. When asked the

question, 'who do you view yourself as accountable to?' virtually all of the officers mentioned the public at some point in their answer. A surprisingly high number (almost half) made no reference to councillors at all, despite the fact that in legal terms, all officers are accountable to the council chamber. Virtually all officers mentioned their professional associations for the maintenance of quality standards and legal responsibilities. Most did mention their immediate superior in the council bureaucratic chain, though none mentioned this individual exclusively. An 'outward' focus was apparent - with other public, voluntary and interest groups mentioned. 'Client groups' (e.g. the elderly) were particularly mentioned by officers in the social services field.

Committee system

Some councils in Scotland did not operate a committee structure due to their small size (e.g. Clackmannanshire District Council with only 12 councillors). However this 'was and is so exceptional that it shows how deeply ingrained is the assumption of the necessity of the committee system' (Leach et al 1994: 18). All three case study councils operated some form of committee system during the initial phase of research. Although formally responsible for taking decisions in their prescribed areas, the reality was that the committees for much of the time merely ratified decisions taken by council officers, councillor party groups or by the chair in discussion with a chief officer (Leach et al. 1994: 19). Officers in Fife and Stirling frequently mentioned the hierarchy of the local political leadership (i.e. the local Labour Party group), as a key forum of decision-making. In contrast, in Highland, the committees were still deemed a key locus of decision-making. As one Highland officer put it, 'Our system is actually unlike the central belt, where I suspect some old Labour councillor will say, "That's what's happening son, and just write your

report on that basis", the reports here are the officers' reports and we're clear about that' (C4 2008).

After the 1970's reorganisation, many councils appointed a chief executive and established a policy and resources committee which brought together senior councillors. Although not always formally recognised, most councils also had a senior management team of officers from various departments. For Saunders (1979) these new structures enabled senior councillors and officers to grasp control of policymaking.

Of the three case study councils the commitment to reform committee structures – during the initial phase of research - was most evident in Stirling. However, even with the new structures, regression to traditional methods of working was evident:

We need to be clearer about our committee arrangements because some members are still thinking of themselves as chairs of service committees and seeking to establish links with a particular service (A20 1997).

Emphasis was placed on committees' policy related roles with a move away from operational concerns. However, as one council officer noted: 'It's not easy to make an experienced councillor stick to policy-related matters when they view themselves as the bosses' (B14 1997)

Many Stirling Council officers were keen to point out that the committee system did not conform to the traditional model. They were also keen to note, however, that the ex-district and ex-regional councillors had differing conceptions of the committee system. The former wanted virtually to

manage a service while the latter were more comfortable gaining a one-to-one relationship with the service director and feeding into strategy.

In all three councils, despite the emphasis on public participation, there was little evidence of this extending to committees. It was noticeable in each council that meeting rooms, when they did accommodate the public, often did so within clearly defined spectating boundaries. The layout of council rooms and buildings often reinforce the 'us' and 'them' mindset in both officers and the public. There was no evidence of public engagement and participation with committees.

In Fife, four officers noted that the council structures had failed to tackle the traditional committee chair/head of service axis. However, the area committees had obviously disentangled any notion of a cosy relationship between officers and councillors – one of the officers commented on how a visit to North East Fife area's committee was intimidating and made her feel like the 'opposition' (A5 1997). She was seen as the bureaucrat from headquarters who was 'parachuting' in to one of the outlying peripheral areas of the Fife Council (it should be noted that all of the elected councillors in this area were from out-with the ruling Labour administration).

By 2008, two of the three councils retained their committee structure with only Stirling moving toward the executive/cabinet model, first suggested in the McNish Report. In Highland abandoning the committee structure was deemed 'a step too far' (C4 2008) by its members, in Fife the committee structure was retained in 2007 by the Liberal Democrat/SNP administration, though the Labour Group did campaign at the 2007 election with a cabinet model in their manifesto.

Impact of party politics

Since the 1970s party politicisation in Scottish local councils has introduced more formality into strategy and policy formation in council administrations. The notion of an elected administration being 'mandated' via the ballot box to pursue its manifesto commitments was evident in interviews with elected councillors from political parties. The literature has tended to suggest that often councils would have informal leadership in the shape of the council leader, chief executive and other leading councillors and officers (see Wilson and Game 1994 chapter 15).

In local councils in Scotland, increased party politicisation has seen parties organise into cohesive and disciplined party groups in line with the UK parliamentary model. The groups usually meet before council meetings to discuss the forthcoming agenda and decide on the party line. Business is 'managed' by an elected member whose function is to ensure that the party maintains unity and supports the leadership who 'run' the administration. Dissent may be voiced at such meetings, however once a line is decided, members are expected to support it. If they do not, they may face sanctions such as suspension or expulsion from the party group. In other words the situation locally, although not directly comparable, has come to closer resemble the position nationally with tight party discipline and cohesive party blocs.

However, only since the 1970s have the major political parties become a significant part of the representation in Scottish local councils. As late as 1988, the Widdicombe Committee reported that 'party politics is still often regarded as an alien presence' in UK local authorities (Widdicombe 1988a: para 4.17). In 2009 party colonisation of Scottish local government remains incomplete with

significant areas of rural Scotland retaining the independent tradition. In this study this was most apparent in Highland which was run by an administration made up of independent councillors during the initial phase of fieldwork – although, significantly, the 2007 elections resulted in party political presence on the ruling administration for the first time.

In recent decades the injection of party politics into Scottish local government has heightened the powers and authority of councillors as they have sought to transmit party political policy preferences into the bureaucratic and administrative structures of local councils. Rampant ideology, despite journalistic exaggeration, has been notable for its absence in the actual policy and practice of most councils in Scotland. Councils that could be considered as ideologically driven (e.g. Lothian Region and Stirling District in the 1980s) have been the exception rather than the rule. There is an innate conservatism within Scottish local government that seems to be capable of absorbing reforming party zealots. In fieldwork in the three case study sites there was no detection of any political discourse that would warrant the label 'extreme'.

In each of the case study councils party politicians were present, though there was variation in their influence. From 1995 to 1999 Fife and Stirling were run by Labour administrations. The local political leaderships were instigators of reform. In Stirling, McChord and in Fife, Rowley, worked closely with leading officers (in particular the chief executive) and set a clear agenda. By 2008 Labour had lost control in both councils – Stirling was under SNP minority control (after a brief period of Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition) and Fife Council was controlled by an SNP/Liberal Democrat coalition.

As an interesting aside, many officers were not altogether complementary about the abilities and capacity of their elected members. Some were quite openly critical. An interesting observation was made by an officer in Stirling:

The problem with the politicians that run local councils in Scotland is that they all got there by buying people off and horse-trading, from what I've experienced of them they do not experience politics outside 'the party' and that creates an inward focus they may be useful to them in terms of gaining power is not a lot of use to leading a council (B17 1997)

Conclusion

In summary, municipal local government has an underlying innate traditionalism or conservatism; and the approach to reform tends to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary with caution and practicality evident.

McConnell (2004) suggests that the traditional approach to local government was based very much on Lindblom's (1959) concept of bottom up 'incrementalism' – change was slow and piecemeal. For all the talk of 'big bang' changes, there was evidence in all three councils of the actual implementation of changes being heavily influenced by inheritance and legacy.

However, this did not mean that change did not take place. As one council officer argued, that would be, 'a bit like when as a young teenager you take a new girlfriend home to your mother and she says 'she's the same as the last one' - on the surface. She's too lazy to look for differences' (A2 1997). However, if anything, the opposite is true in these councils. On the surface the story was one of change – new council, new unitary status, new chief

executives, new logos, new organisational structures. Under the surface there was, however, much continuity that could easily be overlooked.

Each officer interviewed was able to identify change in their local council. Commonly cited changes were the disappearance of 'a jobs for life' perspective on local council work, more openness and participation in decision-making amongst staff through team-working, a movement away from command and control conceptualisations of management, a questioning of long-held beliefs or in more management jargon (and in the words of one council officer) 'attacking comfort zones and power bases' (B16 1997).

There was also a change of rhetoric. However, the extent that the aspiration to change was reflected in the empirical reality is at least questionable. One officer referred to his council as 'juggling balls but with the carpet continuously being moved' (A7 1997). Another noted how 'the depth of penetration of our new values is a problem with services distrustful of the corporate centre' (A20 1997). Other barriers to change included the seemingly everlasting professional-department link, distrust in the organisation, the lack of member experience and the existence of 'empire builders' in individual services. Many officers identified the existence of cynics and sceptics amongst their colleagues.

There was a detectable increase in networking and bottom-up patterns of working in all three councils but the extent to which these impacted on key power bases is questionable.

As outlined in chapter 3 the durability of the municipal traditional perspective in local government studies was examined through a series of hypotheses directly flowing from this line of analysis:

- The direct delivery of public services through a line management of accountable bureaucracy remains an important part of what local councils do.

Reflecting on the structures of each council the answer to this hypothesis would have to be in the affirmative - in each council there remained a significant bureaucracy with clear structures of accountability flowing through its management. This was particularly true in Highland. Each council was a large organisations that had been created through mergers with human resource issues, such as conditions of service, comparative pay increments, leave entitlement, hours and personnel policies still in evidence during the initial phase of research.

However, in Fife and Stirling in particular, there were clear post-reorganisation aspirations and indeed a clear trend towards moving the locus of decision-making away from the established line-bureaucracy and into other arenas. Networks, partnerships and working groups proliferated in these councils - making the policy and decision-making processes appear much messier than an organisational chart could ever represent. Both councils established notions of generic working across traditional bureaucratic boundaries. In Highland and Fife the creation of localised networks of officers at a decentralised level helped professions cross over traditional boundaries and made them appear less relevant in a localised service delivery context (though the boundaries remained evident at middle management level).

- Local councils are still organised in a departmental manner with professionals dominant within their relevant department. Departmental boundaries are fiercely defended.

The answer to this hypothesis (particularly the second statement) would have to be less affirmative. Some departmental boundaries, far from being 'fiercely defended', were positively broken down by Fife and Stirling. The new managerial, organisational and political structures were deliberately designed to ensure that these boundaries became clouded. Whilst professions were still dominant within specific services, institutional structures were devised to ensure that the professional viewpoint was under challenge from both above and below. This was particularly true in Fife - the strategic directors were not necessarily recruited from the professions for whom they had strategic policy responsibility for (although Heads of Service were). From below, new mechanisms of democratic engagement, participation and consultation meant professional decisions would not necessarily go unchallenged and would at least have to be justified in some public forum. Thus the dominance of professions and departmental silos has come under sustained attack in both Fife and Stirling.

- Inherited council procedures and culture inform significant parts of what councils do today.

Rose (1990), noted that all politicians inherit before they choose. The same can be said of individuals in charge of any organisation. The fieldwork data is littered with examples of traditional working practices and procedures that informed the work of each council. The values, culture, operations and procedures of the two-tier councils the unitary authorities had superseded were all still apparent and were constantly referred to in interviews during the first phase of research. The Scottish Office Central Research Unit (1997) reported that council organisation and management structures remained relatively stable with marginal change from previous practice. This conclusion, reflected that of Rhodes and Midwinter (1980) who, when

examining the attempted move from traditional to corporate management structures, argued that in most councils change was only 'skin deep'. There was structural change but the impact on behaviour was minimal as local authorities continued to work in traditional ways. The conclusions drawn from interviews for this thesis would have to be similar – although 'big bang' language was common during the reorganisation period, the reality was that each council was careful to accommodate, at least initially, the past practices of the inherited councils. By 2008, more change was evident but it was incremental and built upon existing structures.

- For officers and councillors local democracy is expressed through the ballot box and the elected council chamber and its committees are the key expressions of that democracy. Committee systems are regarded as sacrosanct.

Senior local government officers who regarded the committee systems as 'sacrosanct' numbered zero during the fieldwork. That is not to say, however, that the benefits of committee working were not expounded by officers. In Highland in particular the formalities of the chamber and committees were still apparent and 'defenders' (amongst officers) of conventional organisation structures were more numerous. Individual committees were not necessarily sacrosanct but – during the initial phase of research - there was no great appetite for wholesale reform of the committee system in each council. However, by 2008 Stirling Council had gone down the route of the executive/cabinet model and the political opposition in Fife favoured this route. In Highland no appetite for reform of the committee system was evident.

- Councillors are the key policymakers, with officers through their bureaucracy delivering policies.

The evidence from interviews is mixed. In Highland there was much evidence that the formal legal position that councillors make policy and officers administer still had continuing relevance. In Fife and Stirling there was evidence both for and against the hypotheses. During the initial phase of fieldwork, it was acknowledged by numerous officers in Stirling that the Labour council leadership was the key driving force behind the new democratic initiatives. However, evidence provided in interviews was that senior officers were just as, if not more, important in designing and pursuing particular policies. One senior officer talked of councillors 'missing things that are really important', questioning their 'added value' and 'sometimes elected members just get in the way' (B20 2008).

In this respect, notions of officers as disinterested bystanders in council policymaking processes can be challenged. Key policymakers in each council sat on both sides of the councillor/officer divide. The chief executives in all three councils were closely aligned to their respective council leaders – the strategic policymaking dynamic was probably best described as a joint one between officer and politician.

- Mutuality and professionalism are key parts of the ethos of the council, that is firmly rooted in the public sector.

In all three councils there was evidence that mutuality and professionalism were challenged by new codes of conduct, particularly managerialist and democratic inspired doctrines. However, there was also evidence of the continuing relevance of notions of a public sector ethos. Some officers openly declared their commitment to it. Defenders of professionalism, although not

so much in evidence in the very top tiers of management, were still very much in existence in the tiers below.

In summary this chapter has reviewed the continuing relevance of 'traditional' local council structures and organisation. Based on data from Scotland's most progressive councils (as judged by their peers) it has concluded that although each council made some innovation the legacy of pre-existing organisational structures was very important to how each council chose to organise itself. This chapter has suggested that the municipal traditional perspective should not be dismissed out of hand – it continues to have relevance to an understanding of contemporary Scottish local government.

Chapter 8: New Public Management in the Three Councils

As outlined in chapter four much of the academic literature on both public administration and local government was dominated in the early to mid 1990s, with the notion of New Public Management (NPM) in the public sector. The fieldwork assessed to what extent this language and practice had penetrated each of the three councils. As with all new ideas there are enthusiastic adopters and others who have been more sceptical. By identifying those three local councils that were deemed by their peers to be the most innovative (Stirling, Fife and Highland) the research sought to identify 'enthusiastic adopters' and provide some evidence of the impact of NPM thinking upon Scottish local government. The organisational design of the councils will be assessed against the NPM 'template' to assess its significance.

Three years before reorganisation, the Scottish Office had set up an Internal Management Working Group because there was a similar exercise taking place in the Department of Environment (DoE) in England. The DoE was then responsible for English local government and the Scottish Office did not want Scottish councils to be seen to be part of the DoE's sphere of influence (Alexander 1995 interview). The Group's remit was 'the identification of statutory obstacles to management innovation' (Alexander interview 1995). There was thus not an open agenda on the topic of local authority internal management. On the Group there was no support for radical recommendations to change the organisational structure of local councils (Alexander 1995 interview). This is an important point to note – for, despite the academic literature at the time repeatedly emphasising the public sector movement towards NPM management structures, according to Alexander (1995) those charged (i.e. the Scottish Office Internal Management Working Group), with recommending managerial change of the new Scottish local councils showed no appetite for change along NPM lines.

Prior to the previous re-organisation in the 1970s, the Scottish Office commissioned the Paterson Report (1973) which outlined recommendations for managerial change in councils. However, the Internal Management Working Group of the Scottish Office decided it would be inappropriate to produce a Paterson type report for the 1990s. The consensus amongst the officers, who participated in the Working Group, was that it was better that local authorities be presented with the possibilities of doing things differently (Alexander 1995 interview). A Paterson type report could act as a barrier to innovation given the tendency for organisations which were under pressure to go for 'ready made' solutions (Alexander 1995 interview). The Working Group's emphasis was very much 'local solutions to local problems' i.e. a non-prescriptive line was taken. This is in line with what Jeffrey (2002) described as the 'embedded tradition of local autonomy' in Scottish governance.

However, as noted in chapter one, during the reorganisation period, a new Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) (Scottish Branch) (1994) Report outlined new management thinking in Scottish local government. This report, *The New Management Agenda*, emphasized that the new authorities had a unique opportunity to establish new organisational and managerial methods of working. The 1994 Report maintained that this was a 'window of opportunity' that the new councils should utilize. The Report emphasized the potential for change and innovation in how new councils could approach their managerial task. Indeed the Report came closest to providing guidance on how Scottish local councils should be structured after reorganization.

This chapter proceeds by outlining these new structures and the managerial rationale behind them. Establishing a new management culture was a dominant theme in the initial round of officer interviews in Fife and Stirling. The chapter will then move on to assess the extent to which NPM impacted on senior managers' thinking, under the headings outlined in chapter four: performance accountability mechanisms; decentralisation, disaggregation and devolution; private sector management styles; managerialism and competition.

Chapter four outlined a series of hypotheses that would be utilised to test the relevance of the NPM perspective:

- New managerial codes of accountability were becoming more relevant than traditional bureaucratic, professional and democratic codes
- Decentralisation, devolution and disaggregation were features of organisational reform within the councils
- Private sector styles of management were impacting on each council's strategic, resource and personnel management policies
- A belief in the utility and portability of the management function was likely to be evident amongst leading council officers
- Markets, competition and consumerism were playing increasing roles in the way the council approaches its service provision role.

The new council management structures and their rationale

'Departmentalism', as discussed in chapter four, has been a continual theme in critiques of local government management and organisation. Two of the three councils – Fife and Stirling - made some effort to incorporate this aspiration in their structures. Both councils tried to design cross-cutting

services with an emphasis on services working together in broad strategic areas.

Both Stirling and Fife chief executives in 1996 (Yates and Markland) and council leaders (McChord and Rowley) identified a significant part of the rationale behind the new structures was the aspiration that services could more easily deal with cross-cutting issues. In more modern 'New Labour' terminology references are made to 'joined-up' government and 'holistic governance' (see Fairclough 2000). In the first round of fieldwork such phrases were not heard, by 2008 they were common currency. Issues like crime, drugs, social inclusion and focusing on the customer were amongst the most commonly cited reasons for the requirement of more co-ordination between services. Stewart (1996) in a public participation seminar for Fife Council referred to these as the 'wicked issues' for local councils – those that were not amenable to a singular professional or departmental approach for their resolution. It was suggested by Stewart that these were amongst the most significant public policy problems facing local councils and some reconsideration of management structures was necessary if they were to be successfully tackled (Stewart 1996).

Numerous mechanisms in the councils were utilised to improve 'cross-cutting' working – the merging of services, the creation of special units, working groups, more locally (rather than sector-based) management structures and decentralised service delivery. However, as one officer pointed out, there must also be a consideration that sometimes the public does not like 'joined up working' (Interview B1). A possibility was raised by one officer – that an individual with rent arrears may be reluctant to visit a generic council office to see his/her social worker because he/she may face questions about rent arrears (Interview A20).

However, viewed in aggregate, the structures of the three councils still highlighted the durability of the idea of services delivered through professional groupings. At the margins new cross-cutting reforms were taking place but routine council service delivery remained dominated by professionals delivering services through a department (or 'service' as they tended to be called in Fife).

Fife

Fife's initial post 1996 structure was based on a separation of strategic from operational management tasks. In NPM language this is often referred to as the separation of 'steering' from 'rowing' (Osborne and Gaebler 1992). The theory and rationale behind this is not unlike the traditional policy-administration dichotomy found in studies of public administration (see chapters three and four).

In Fife, the activities of the council were divided into three strategic areas with a director responsible for strategy in each. These three individuals joined the chief executive and the three area co-ordinators as the seven-person management team of the council (see table 8.1).

The strategy/operation split is consistent with policy initiatives such as compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) and the Private Finance Initiative (now renamed Public Private Partnerships) that have been designed to facilitate more private sector influence in the public sector. As one officer (A3 1997) noted in passing, the emphasis on the importance of strategy at the centre inevitably involves a de-emphasis on operational matters and increases

the likelihood of externalization i.e. passing the work on to another organisation to undertake. It has been suggested that the agencification of the civil service in the 1980s and 1990s created a structure more amenable to privatization (see Gains 1999)

Table 8.1 Fife Corporate Organisational Structure: Three Strategy Approach

Chief Executive (Corporate Policy, Communications, Area Co-ordination)

Social Strategy (Social Work, Housing, Community Services, Education)

Environmental and Development Strategy (Transportation, Economic Development, Planning, Trading Standards, Environmental Health)

Competitive and Technical Strategy (Property, DSOs & DLOs, Roads)

Area Co-ordinators (East, Central and West)

Other services (IT, Finance, Law & Administration, Corporate Procurement, Human Resources)

However, as McConnell (2004: 98) has argued, 'the traditional divide between policy and administration is simply not as pervasive as we might think'. Likewise the split between strategic and operational management tasks is not always so clear cut. Indeed numerous officers (A5 1997, A7 1997, A9 1997, B7 1997, B14 1997, C16 1997) noted in interview how those technically in charge of the council (its members) often struggled to grapple in practice what this distinction meant. Examples were cited of councillors bringing constituent *operational* concerns to the desks of the *strategic* directors of the council.

One senior officer was also cautionary about its implications over time in terms of the internal managerial politics of the council – ‘At the moment things are fine, but I can envisage, unless we’re careful, a barrier emerging between the Glenrothes (head office) centre and the rest over the years’ (A18 1997). When asked to elaborate why this might happen, the officer cited the possibility of the ‘Glenrothes super-managers’ (the words of another officer) losing touch with what was going on ‘on the ground’ and so making strategic decisions without a knowledge of contemporary ‘goings on’. This reflected a concern with the theory of the Fife strategic sector approach, which placed these managers above the traditional departmental heads of service. It is worth emphasizing here that underneath the strategic managers the services were continued to be organized along traditional grounds with a head of service responsible for the operations of each. When questioned on this in 2008, a senior Fife manager acknowledged that the initial structure had been an error:

The three areas in cultural terms was not a good decision. It allowed this notion of district versus region, them and us, centre and districts. That took a while to get away from – there were all sorts of issues associated with harmonisation of terms and conditions, symbols of the old (A7 2008).

The officer actually suggested that it was as late as 2007 that there was a ‘decisive move away from all that’. As table 8.2 shows the corporate organizational structure had changed to a more conventional format by 2008.

Table 8.2 Fife Corporate Organisational Structure 2008

Chief Executive

Education Directorate

Environment & Development Services

Finance and Resources

Community and Housing Services

Performance and Organisational Support

Social Work

Stirling

Stirling's councillor and officer leadership deliberated for some time during the shadow year upon the most appropriate structures for the council to adopt. 'Away days' involved long deliberations and 'visioning' exercises and the use of external consultants about what type of councils they were looking to create. The shadow year was utilised by the council hierarchy to think 'deeply and fundamentally' about the type of council they wanted Stirling to be (B20 2008). The outcome of these deliberations was an approach that emphasised eight strategic services which brought together previously unrelated services such as housing and social work (B20 2008) (see table 8.2).

Table 8.3 Stirling Council Organisational Structure 1996 - Eight Strategic Services

Chief Executive Services (policy and research, personnel and communications)

Corporate Services (IT/Financial) *Services* (IT, revenues, internal audit, accountancy and payroll)

Civic Services (committee support, legal services, commons services, elections, registrationm local area support)

Education Services (primary, secondary, special schools and support services)

Community Services (community education, youth services, sports development, community centre management)

Housing & Social Services (social work, housing, community care)

Environmental Services (planning, economic development, tourism, development/building control, environmental health, trading standards, licensing)

Technical and Commercial Services (street care, building, engineering and transport, architecture, surveying, DLOs/DSOs)

The structures were informed by five principles set out by the council (Stirling Council undateda). The first principle was to build structures that best served the public. The council argued it 'should not use departments as the building blocks for the new Council but should reflect on the type of services that are required by the public and how they are delivered' (para. 3.2). It suggested services should be organised into families of related services.

The second principle was to distinguish between the strategic management of the services and the operation or provision of services. It was suggested that this required a 'specification of policy objectives ... and effective performance management' (para. 3.3). It was then suggested that strategic directors would

have a 'commissioning role' within the council and would facilitate the transmission of the overall values and goals of the council and ensure that they were translated into action by service providers. In other words, they should translate the council's strategy into operations.

The third principle was decentralisation and the delegation of responsibility to local managers. The emphasis here was on 'local solutions to local problems', enhancing the local members representative role and ensuring consultation, accountability and accessibility (para. 3.5).

The fourth principle was to produce flatter and more open structures. The recommendation was made that there should be no more than five levels for any service. It was claimed that this would 'harness the ideas and potential of everyone' and 'empower employees to be innovative and more flexible' facilitating increased accountability and responsiveness (para. 3.6).

The fifth principle was that of collaboration between all managers and employees and a clear commitment to the values of the Council. It was suggested that 'the issues faced by local government cannot sustain conventional departmental boundaries and requires working across services and with outside partners' (para.3.7). While structures should encourage horizontal, as well as vertical relationships and open communication, it was also recognised that trust and a focus on agreed outcomes would be necessary.

By 2008 the structure had been rationalised down to four directors with one assistant chief executive. It was acknowledged that he had to move to this structure in a piecemeal way 'to carry the members with me' (Officer B20). He also admitted that underneath his 1996 'rationalised structure' there were still

26 heads of service – by 2008 he had reduced that number to 14. The changes were made by ‘a process of incremental change and adjustment’ over 12 years.

Table 8.4 Stirling Council Organisational Structure 1996 – Five Strategic Services

Chief Executive's Office - Emergency Management, the Corporate Complaints Scheme (Talkback), Policy and Planning, Community Planning, Research and Information, Communications and Marketing and Performance Management.

Corporate Services – Customer services, Resources, Governance.

Childrens Services – Planning/Resource. Learning, Support.

Environment - Roads, Transport & Streetscape Planning, Regulation & Countryside Housing Services, Economic Support & Development, Performance, Resources & Waste

Community Services – care, Ilcc, support for people, performance, sport

Highland

Highland's structure, reflecting the late appointment of the chief executive officer, appeared to be driven primarily by councillors. It reflected only marginal adjustment to the inherited structures of Highland Regional Council and the eight district councils in the area. Of the three councils under study it was undoubtedly the most closely aligned to what would be considered a traditional departmental based organisational structure. Of the three councils, Highland retained the largest number of departments/services (15) and at the strategic level the key officers were the traditionally titled chief executive and depute chief executive (see table 8.5). Unlike Fife and Stirling,

there was not the same attempt to create strategic director posts to oversee groupings of services.

Table 8.5: Highland Council Organisational Structure 1996

Chief Executive
Finance
Law and Administration
Personnel
IS
Property & Architectural Services
Housing
Education
Social Work
Cultural & Leisure Services
Protective Services
Transport Services
Planning
Economic Development
Depute Chief Executive + Eight Area Managers

The corporate centre of the organisation was in the old Highland Regional Council Offices in Inverness while the eight decentralised areas had the same boundaries as the eight previous district councils (Inverness, Ross and Cromarty, Sutherland, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Caithness). In order to seize the transition in terms of staff deployment these areas retained many of the same offices and services which were previously the function of the district councils in these areas. The depute chief executive was responsible for overseeing the activities of the eight area managers. Of the three councils Highland undoubtedly adopted the most cautionary, incremental approach to organisational change.

However, by 2008 Highland had significantly rationalised its structure, 'to meet the Scottish Government's drive for more efficient working within tighter budget guidelines' (<http://www.highland.gov.uk>). The number of services was reduced to seven and the number of decentralised operational areas reduced to three:

- Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross
- Ross, Skye and Lochaber
- Inverness, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey

Each of these operational areas have a corporate manager.

Table 8.6 Highland Structure 2008

Chief Executive's Service
Education, Culture & Sport
Finance
Housing & Property
Planning and Development
Social work
Transport, Environmental and Community Services

Changing management culture: a dominant theme

During the initial phase of research each chief executive interviewed in Fife, Stirling and Fife at some point made reference to a cultural problem in their organisation. One referred to 'thinking out of bureaucratic boxes'. Another referred to inheriting staff from a previous district council that had an 'in-built bureaucratic culture' that had to be challenged. While the third, suggested many services could learn from the approach adopted by managers in his commercial services department. In other words, each one believed

themselves to be engaged in an exercise that was attempting to change the culture of the council.

This notion of changing the culture of their organisation was mentioned in interviews with some leading officers in the corporate centre of Highland Council (C9 1997, C12 1997, C16 1997). However, in practice there was little evidence on which to base a judgement of cultural change at area level. Indeed if anything the dominant theme of area managers was of incremental adjustment and the ease of transition, with continuity being emphasised rather than change (C2 1997, C6 1997, C15 1997).

The NPM analytical prescription tends to emphasise that bureaucratic barriers to a more managerial-orientated culture need to be broken down if genuine cultural organisational change is to occur. The perspective of NPM is not that public sector managers are inherently bad, but that the culture of bureaucracy constrains and inhibits human nature's natural entrepreneurship, in the words of Frederickson, they 'believe bureaucrats are good people trapped in bad systems' (1996: 267). Public choice critiques (e.g. Niskanen 1970) take the NPM analysis a stage further and emphasise how the incentive structures of bureaucrats must be changed so that their natural impulse – behaviour that is in their own rational self-interest – is also reflective of the interests of the public sector organisation.

One senior officer in Stirling council did outline a similar line of thinking amongst some senior staff. He (B20 1997) referred to the inheritance of excellent young staff with dynamism and new ideas who had too few outlets (within traditional council structures) for displaying their skills. One of his

human resource staff referred to psychological, not bureaucratic, barriers as the key barrier to overcome to effect organisational change (B16 1997). Another officer referred to the fact that despite all the talk of appointments being based on merit there were still plenty of what he described as 'time-served traditionalists' who were in key roles within the council (A2 1997). He suggested that these people had natural allies among many 'time served councillors' who had similar views on the appropriate organisational structures and management styles for the council.

The reality is that in each of the councils, whilst there was a lot of talk of cultural change, there was little evidence of wholesale new incentive structures operating that were changing the incentives, far less behaviour, of officers. Traditional modes of bureaucratic thinking were alive in each council and, whilst not exactly flourishing, were by no means in their final throes. Some of the senior officers openly admitted that change was a long way down the line, one suggesting:

we're at the start of a long and winding road all we're doing at the moment is making sure we've got the vehicle set up properly so we don't break down halfway there. (B15 1997)

In Fife one senior officer commented:

Do we have a bureaucratic culture? Yes. Are we trying to change it? Yes. Will we? Well that's the six million dollar question and one I'm afraid I don't think I'll be able to answer for a few years yet. (A14 1997)

An example of a programme designed to effect and facilitate change was Fife Council's locality management training programme. It was established for locality management staff, in line with the council's customer care policy. Locality managers were all involved in induction training with key managers from all of the council's strategy sectors. The council also sought to effect change through the use of new symbols and logos as vivid manifestations of the 'new' style of management in the council:

It is accepted, with the use of the Council logo, standard letterheads etc. that to create a corporate identity is desirable. It can convey the values and quality standards of the Council. It would seem desirable, therefore, to have some corporate identity features as part of the Local Office Network. This is especially desirable if the Local Office Network is to become the 'flagship' for the Council's Decentralisation programme. (Fife Council 1996 Part II: 21)

All three councils adopted new logos and identities in an attempt to differentiate themselves from the previous councils. However, whilst such surface changes were easy to identify there remained significant empirical evidence that any change that was occurring was doing so slowly. The legacy of the old working and operational practices of the two-tier councils continued to resonate and inform the procedures and outlook of personnel in the new councils. This ties neatly into incremental theories of the policy process which emphasise the importance of inheritance before choice in policymaking (Lindblom 1959, 1979; Rose 1999). Essentially the councils were so busy investing time and effort into coping with the day-to-day realities of the reorganisation and the issues thrown up by it that there was little inclination or effort to engage in wholesale changes. There is also the path dependency literature (see for example Hayes 1992; Hall and Taylor 1996; Pierson 2000; Greener 2002) which emphasises how commitment to a policy has been established and resources devoted to it, over time so that it becomes

increasingly or relatively costly to choose a different policy. This creates an almost inherent stability in policymaking.

In 2008 all three councils did claim that the culture of their workforce had changed. In Fife, it was suggested, 'there are illustrations in the shared services agenda of a mind-set having changed and people being less concerned about the how and a sharper focus on outcomes' (A7 1997). In Highland, it was argued 'management has become a more accepted part of things ... I think it's changed over the past five years' (C5 1997). In Stirling it was emphasised how the culture of performance improvement in 2008 was radically advanced from that of 1996 (B20 2008).

The ideology of managerialism

As noted in chapter 4 the ideology of managerialism was one that has had much impact across the public sector in the UK during the last thirty years. The emphasis of this ideology was that local councils were under-managed, bureaucratic, 'rule-bound' organisations dominated by administrators rather than managers. The solution was to create new managers, or accentuate the power of existing managers, by giving them new powers and influence within the council's organisational structure.

Dearlove was amongst the first to note the influence of this ideology of managerialism in local government:

The organizational experts concerned to introduce the corporate approach speak a language which hides the ultimate meaning of their actions from ordinary citizens at the same time as it places them beyond easy critique. There is the presumption that knowledge, information and experts can transcend ideology and interests ... The

entrenchment of this perspective on reorganisation is crisply situated within the prevailing ideology of science and technology. (Dearlove 1979: 254-5)

Although not 'all-pervasive', this managerialist ideology was undoubtedly influential in both Stirling and Fife Councils. Initially, both placed much emphasis on the roles of new strategic managers and their ability to bring together functions and services to focus on policy problems and service delivery. Strategic management in the 1990s was what corporate management was to the 1970s. Corporate management was very much the dominant management idea during the reorganisation period in local government during that era:

Corporate management is an integrated approach to the management of local authority affairs. It aims to transcend all the various departmental, political, planning and public interests in order to bring order, priorities, strategy, planning and suitable resource allocations to the decision-making and governance of local communities. (McConnell 2004: 75)

Both corporate and strategic management vested increased power and authority in the managers. In both Fife and Stirling Councils such managers were an integral part of the core management team and within their assigned policy domains were the authoritative lead managers responsible for developing a vision for services with their strategic areas. The theory was that their day-to-day activities would remain detached from operational matters in order that they could concentrate their minds on the medium to longer term. Strategic managers in interview were, of course, keen to emphasise this aspect of their role. However, many of them did acknowledge (as did other officers) that some officers 'below' them, and councillors, continued to bring operational problems to their desk. It might

have been that this reflected a natural occurrence during the transitional phase of the organisation being set-up but as one manager commented:

unless we nip it in the bud, we'll be in danger of setting dangerous precedents that quickly become part of the natural operating practices of the council, and I'll just be another line manager, albeit the one at the top. (A9 1997)

By 2008 Fife was on its third chief executive with each one instigating his own reform of organisational structure – whilst the emphasis on 'strategy' on the part of directors was not changed, the council did move closer to a conventional council managerial structure.

The NPM emphasis on efficient council service delivery, it could be argued, amounts to more than cosmetic change in council services. McConnell (2004: 131) refers to a subtle redefining of the term democracy, citing the Adam Smith Institute (1989) who define it as being 'about delivering low-cost high quality services'. As one more officer noted, 'central politicians seem to want us to be all things to all people while working within budgets that never seem to grow, or if they do the growth is wholly consumed by staff wage increases' (C15 1997).

In truth neither phase of fieldwork identified any committed managerial ideologues. Most officers placed more emphasis on the wider organisational and political realities which placed constraints on the extent to which they could engage in any radical organisational re-engineering.

Decentralisation and management

Another strand of NPM thinking noted in chapter 4 was the emphasis on decentralisation, devolution and disaggregation. When asked about decentralisation, officers in Fife and Highland were more likely to emphasise its service delivery rather than democratic aspects. The purpose of decentralisation, whilst multi-faceted, was more often than not chiefly defined as being about improving the accessibility and quality of council service delivery. The interviewees noted for example:

Decentralisation will hopefully improve the feedback we receive from recipients of key services. This can be fed into council decision-making and help us be more effective in delivering services. (A12 1997)

I'm quite comfortable with the idea of the people we serve as customers. If we were as good at serving customers as retailers like say *Next* and *Safeway* then I'd be very happy. (C16 1997)

In 1997 when Officer C16 was asked if he viewed the local authority management function as comparable to that of a manager in a retail environment he suggested that in terms of the principle of serving customers it was, but his particular function in the council was not necessarily comparable to someone managing social work services.

More than one senior officer in both Highland (C12 1997, C16 1997) and Fife (A9 1997, A10 1997, A14 1997) were keen to highlight the possible tension between the councils' schemes of decentralisation and issues of service equity and provision throughout the councils' borders. Perhaps reflecting their corporate position at the strategic centre in the council's organisation, some officers (particularly A9 1997, and C16 1997) were keen to emphasise that whatever emerged in decentralised areas was subject to central regulation of discretion if it resulted in major differences in service provision. The areas

would be expected to follow the corporate policy albeit with scope to influence it at the margins.

In Stirling decentralisation had a more democratic orientation. One possible explanation is that this reflects the difference in scale, although covering a significant land-mass Stirling Council, in population terms, was far smaller than both Fife and Highland. Moreover, its population was concentrated in the town of Stirling with the rest of the council area having a more rural profile. In management terms the areas beyond Stirling lacked the necessary populations for significant devolution of managerial authority to be practical or efficient.

Fife's Locality Management Scheme

This section of the chapter examines the managerial aspects of each of the council's schemes of decentralisation. The most developed decentralised structure was that of Fife Council which advanced beyond its inherited district council structures.

Centrally, on the political side, Fife – like most other councils - had a Policy and Resources Committee (made up of elected members) responsible for overall policy direction, resources and council-wide policy and initiatives. This was the centre of the organisation on the political side.

On the management side it had a strong central core of the organisation responsible for managerial strategy, corporate standards, communications and support services. In 1997 this consisted of the chief executive, three strategic directors and three area managers. These three sectors were

designed to bring services together and promote joint working and planning between services to meet people's needs.

One of the reasons Fife Council argued that decentralisation was necessary was closely related to its management arrangements:

The Council itself is a large and complex organisation which is having to work within increasingly tight resource constraints. If it is to work efficiently and effectively and make the best use of its resources, then each part of the organisation must be clear about its own role in helping to fulfil the overall aims of the council and how it relates to the rest of the organisation. That means striking the right balance between setting overall policy and standards and enabling services to innovate and respond more flexibly to meeting local and community needs. (Fife Council, undated^a: 3)

When Fife Council took over operational responsibility of services in April 1996 it inherited a diverse range of existing local offices from the four former authorities. Committed to the idea of one-stop offices as a basis of decentralization, the council undertook a major review of its office network – the review was completed in September 1996. These one-stop offices were to be the basic building block of the council's decentralised approach to service delivery. The purpose of the local office network was to make the council closer to local people and communities and make services more accessible. These offices were based in 22 localities with each having a manager responsible for the coordination of services at a local level. Each locality had one main office which in some areas was supported by a number of sub-offices.

These offices were designed to promote generic working arrangements between services as well as improve customer service, information and access.

The aspiration was that these offices would provide a focus for local communities as well as act as a resource for access to council information and staff. The offices were to provide local communities with access to specialist advice on matters as diverse as planning, environmental health, consumer protection, welfare rights as well as debt and money advice.

At the level of its 22 localities Fife Council defined elected member responsibilities as revolving around scrutinising and monitoring local service delivery, developing responses to local issues, ensuring constituent issues were resolved and developing a relationship between the council and the local community. Elected members were also to assist the community participate and make an input in council decision-making and policy development.

These locality offices also linked with other localised council services such as libraries, community centres, leisure centres and schools. Information on services provided by community planning partners such as GP surgeries, health centres and post offices was also available in these offices.

After one year Fife rationalised its Area Committee structure to a structure based on three different committees within each area:

- *Area Local Service Committee.* Monitoring and review of local service delivery, supporting the localities, expressing local and area priorities.
- *Area Development Committee.* Area planning and building control, development, roads and environmental issues

- *Area Regulation Committee.* Area regulation and public protection issues such as licensing, environmental health and community safety.

This was after an internal review of the local office structure. It was decided that such a structure provided a coherent separation of the council's localized services. The Locality Office Review in Fife concluded that 'further work is required on defining the relationship between Social Work Enquiry and Information staff, customer services officers and 'patch based' staff' (Fife Council 1997: para 2.4).

Amongst the functions carried out within the Local Office Network there were some which were administrative in nature, such as the employment and monitoring of School Crossing Patrol Officers and financial support to those in the Council's residential homes. A 'locality' meant one major local office, one main office with a number of sub offices, or a number of sub-offices spread around an area. The Local Office Review Working Group referred to the need to 'find flatter management structures' (1997: para 4.0). The local offices were seen as part of a broader council strategy to collapse the grading structures of traditional council bureaucracy.

There were two main types of core local staff:

- *customer services officers* – dealing with frontline customer services, administration and registration.
- *area officers* – patch-based staff working mainly outside the office delivering the local Housing Service, monitoring and delivering. Service level agreements with other services, supporting regeneration initiatives and community liason.

In 1997 the Local Office network operated with 23 full-time and 29 part-time offices throughout Fife. It employed 622 individuals, 270 of those being in manual occupations. The Local Office Network was part of Chief Executive Services. Its total revenue budget in 1996/97 was £10.2 million with 68 per cent of that going towards employee costs.

The Local Office Network provided a one-stop access to the council and its services. It was designed so that members of the public or community groups could go to their office and receive help with an enquiry or a problem.

The specific services provided are listed below:

- Cleansing and Waste Management
- Community Services (entertainment, leisure tickets)
- Education (administration of school clothing grants, meals, board elections etc)
- Housing (allocations, estate management, grants, sales etc)
- Law and Administration (circulation of committee agendas)
- Planning (local planning enquiries)
- Roads (street lighting and roads reporting, disabled parking bay applications etc)
- Social Work (Financial assessments, weekly allowance payments)
- Trading Standards (consumer advice)
- Transportation (Administration of travel/mobility cards)
- Network Services (Registration of births, deaths, marriages)

Each locality had a group of council services officers who provided frontline services with a lead officer and assistants to provide clerical support. Localities also had area officers who provided the frontline service out-with the office, predominantly in housing. Locality Management is a completely new role. The Council's aims for more effective community participation and involvement would not be realized unless the Locality Manager was able to facilitate cross-service working and involve individuals and groups with in

the locality (A20 1997). The Locality managers had regular meetings in their locality which involved the appropriate elected members and they were able to bring other services into discussions at a senior level. Their two main roles were service delivery and community involvement.

The work of staff in local offices was supported by a small management team headed by an Area Co-ordinator in each of the three Areas in Fife Council (East, Central, West) who was both Head of Service for the Local Office Network and also has corporate responsibility for bringing services together throughout the area. Each area also had a Local Offices Manager who was the line manager for the various Locality managers in that area and who takes forward Area initiatives for the Local Office Network. There is also the Office Network Support Manager who has a Fife-wide role in providing support for the network such as employee development, IT, customer care and the capital programme and ensuring consistent service delivery procedures in the network.

The enquiries at the local offices (as highlighted in a monitoring exercise) were dominated by housing related issues such as rent and council tax payment, repairs and housing benefit – the most notable other issue was bulk refuse uplifts. The most used facility tended to be cash payments. The review also noted that those using the offices were not representative of the population at large – 60 per cent were female, half were either unemployed or retired, 61 per cent were council tenants (Fife Council 1996)

The functions that users considered the most important were information on services, availability of services and free-phone numbers to services that were not on-site. The type of information users were routine: who to contact with

different problems (62 per cent), local events (56 per cent), health services (58 per cent), times of councillors surgeries (47 per cent), job vacancies (46 per cent), local planning (42 per cent) (Fife Council 1996). It was noticeable that there was a difference amongst age groups in the manner in which they wanted to receive information from the council. Although the vast majority (76 per cent) preferred to receive information from a member of staff, those under 18 were more comfortable in using new ICT devices such as TV information screens.

Highland Council

Highland Council's decentralisation scheme, as described previously, was based around the inherited structures of the previous district councils. It had numerous aims reflecting a mixture of managerial and democratic concerns.

Those related to management were:

- provide local access to services, advice and information.
- locate management responsibility for services close to the point of delivery
- make the best use of resources at the local level

There was a practicality and pragmatism underpinning the decentralisation scheme in the Highland rather than an underlying rationale driven by NPM ideas. Around 90 per cent of the council staff working in the Highland area before re-organisation were based out-with Glenurquart Road – the headquarters of the old Highland Region and the new unitary council. In those circumstances a fairly extensive scheme of decentralization was a logical option. However, a one year review of the scheme identified a lack of

flexibility of staff within, and between, services in these local areas with more co-ordination required (Burns 1998)

Highland Council also had a limited network of Service Points but it emphasised their service delivery/customer focus. Each Service Point was a multi-functional office with Service Point staff trained to resolve any enquiry concerning the Council. Where it was not possible to resolve the enquiry using the resources available in the Service Point, immediate contact was made with a council official to resolve the problem. The Service Points had cash collection facilities, in some areas it was also the registrar's office for civil marriages, births and deaths. Many of the Council's 36 Service Points operated as shared facilities. Traditionally this has involved close liaison with the Council's Housing and Finance Services and all Service Points had an integrated approach to the delivery of these services. However, given the geography of Highland and the relative remoteness of so many communities, the council had aspirations to develop partnerships with other agencies and services such as the Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board.

Overall, rather than being driven by NPM ideas the impression (particularly in Highland and Stirling) given by officers was that the new decentralisation schemes were driven by practical considerations relating to the scale and geography of the new councils. The legacy and inheritance in terms of the organisational structures of the old councils were also very important in shaping each council's approach. Functional, pragmatic and practical considerations rather than a NPM rationale, appeared to be more important in shaping decisions about decentralisation.

Stirling Council

Reflecting its smaller scale and the fact that its boundaries were not the same as a previous regional council (unlike Fife and Highland), Stirling's decentralisation was less well developed. As will be discussed in chapter 9 Stirling's scheme of decentralisation had more emphasis on local democracy than the other two. The council was keen to emphasise the limits placed on potential managerial decentralisation by the requirements of CCT, restrictions on the use of capital receipts and the 'increasingly restrictive expenditure limits/controls being imposed by the Scottish Office' (Stirling Council 1996 para 4.5.2). It was also keen to emphasise that an adequate service infrastructure had to be in place to support devolved management structures (para. 4.5.3).

Overall the perception gained in Stirling was that 'management delegation' or 'devolved management' as it tended to be referred to in interviews (B8 1997, B17 1997) was less of a priority than the broader local democratic concerns that were driving the council's approach to decentralisation. The council did have local offices but their functions did not extend beyond information provision, cash collection, housing repairs reporting and the like. These offices were located in local communities or high streets for functional reasons. Reflecting on these offices in 2008 one officer was very critical:

Things like local offices, you know in 1996 we say hey one of the things local government should do is add local offices for the last 8 years we have taken the view we don't need them all, we would be far better using the contacts centre, using telephone contact, and do we need 30 local offices which is costing us the best part of a million and a half a

year and in some of them you are lucky if you get two customers a day! (B20 2008).

Accounting for Performance

Another feature of NPM noted in chapter 4 was the new performance accountability mechanisms that were being introduced in local government.

As one local government officer (with responsibility in the field noted):

A few years ago councils would create a performance review sub-committee and assume that it would take care of performance but it never did, but today the performance culture and orientation must permeate every service so every manager is taking responsibility for their own targets. They all know the performance and best value agenda won't go away and most have now bought into it. (B14 1997)

An officer in another council noted how councillors were using external reports to question officers:

Recently our council was shown to be far down the table for performance in a particular service and our councillors used press reports to raise the issue with the managers in that service. The figures in the tables were pretty blunt but they at least raised the issue in the council and instigated the members to question managers about what our council was doing. (A10 1997)

Officers appeared, in the main, to be perfectly comfortable with the notion that they should be held to account for their performance. Performance accountability mechanisms were visible and evident in each of the three councils. Performance indicators were collected in all three councils and there was evidence in one of the councils of benchmarking against other councils for similar services. Officer A3, indicated he could produce data about how his direct service organisations compared to other councils.

However, performance accountability was not always exclusively management focused. For example, in Fife one of the roles of area-based committees was to monitor and review service delivery and policy implementation. These committees reviewed the activities of coordinators and service managers at an area level.

In one council an officer referred to:

There is a very different culture in the organisation in that people are much more focused on their performance and the detail of that performance. I think this is a very much healthier thing. Formally we are much more accountable – for example I to HM Inspectorate of Education when I first started out the thought of a Director of Education having his service inspected was just absolutely out the question and now it is just a fact of life – we expect to be inspected in the same way as schools are inspected. Members are also much more critically aware of their role and the need to work in a culture of accountability with us. (A3 2008)

Performance review was a part of all three organisations. However, the aspects of performance that were reviewed were often driven by external regulatory concerns such as CCT, the Accounts Commission and service inspectorates.

The influence of the private sector

Another feature of NPM noted in chapter 4 was the influence of private sector styles of management. The most apparent change in local government in this vein was the impact of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) legislation on the internal organisation of local councils. Client/contractor splits, new procurement divisions and direct service/labour organisations became

commonplace in Scottish council organisations. Each of the three councils had such features. As one officer noted:

CCT did not result in commercial companies taking over council operations in Scotland ... but it did have a big impact. Councils had to re-organise themselves and separate client and contractor functions. This increased transparency in terms of costs, but in some services this was at the cost of lower staff morale with reduced conditions of service. (A5 1997)

CCT did not involve any legislative requirement to adopt specific organisational structures (McConnell 2004: 80). Moreover, a combination of councils committed to retaining services 'in house' and strong public sector trade unions in Scotland meant many commercial operators were disinclined to become involved in local council tendering. In Stirling and Fife the Labour controlled councils reflected this attitude, but even in Highland most contracts remained in-house reflecting the lack of commercial profitability in delivering services to such a dispersed population. Having said that, Highland was forced to go down the route of outsourcing its IT services, due to problems of recruitment and retention of sufficiently qualified staff in the local area. However, again it was emphasised that this decision was forced on the council due to practical considerations rather than due to any underlying ideological belief that the private sector were inherently superior to the public sector (C16 1997).

Various officers showed awareness of the increasing 'commercialism' of local authorities. As a manager of commercial operations in a one council pointed out:

The job I do for Fife council is one that involves business plans, achieving rates of return and basically undertaking the type of

activities a manager of any commercial operation in the private sector would do ... Twenty years ago I could have been labelled a private sector manager in the public sector but today local councils are far more commercially aware bodies and I've no doubt there are many more managers here that would be as equally at home working for a commercial business. (A3 1997)

Contracting of course is not an altogether new phenomenon in Scottish local government, as one officer noted:

Local councils do not operate in a vacuum and never have. Councils have always employed contractors it's just that in recent years we have been compelled to do so. If I see one of our contractors doing something that we can learn from I would bring it up with other officers. Although I think the public and private sector are different that's not the same as saying we can't learn from them. (A11 1997)

Both Stirling and Fife councils structures had features which closely aligned political with management decision-making structures. It is these close ties, amongst other things, that serve to highlight the contrast between the public and private management function. Political and democratic considerations remained important influences on decision-making. The language of the officers reflected this and it was difficult to detect anything that could be described as an unalloyed commercial style of management. The only part of either organisation that came close to this was Fife's commercial services department, which is hardly surprising given its title.

One of the considerations Fife Council had to make in designing its locality management scheme was to ensure that its local office structure did not have a detrimental effect on its ability to compete for Housing Management contracts under CCT. This possibly highlights how CCT legislation (now repealed) may have indirectly circumscribed other council options and

activities, but even in this instance it was hardly a fundamental influence on the decision-making process.

Another potential barrier to private sector styles of management was the undoubted influence of public sector trade unions in local politics. This was particularly true in Fife and Stirling where the local Labour Party held a majority in the council chamber until 2003 and 2007 respectively. Doogan (1999) highlights that despite the welter of reforms impacting on local government labour markets the basic structure of UK national wage bargaining and trade union negotiation remained in place during this period in local government. This was definitely true in each of the three case study councils. Senior officers consistently highlighted the relevance of trade unions in terms of the council-employee relationship. For example, one noted:

In bringing together four different councils in Fife we have brought together staff used to working under different terms and conditions. The council and trade unions are trying to harmonise them so that the same offices have staff working under the same terms and conditions.
(A20 1997)

Conclusion

Given that the three councils topped the survey as the three most innovative organisations, if NPM had impacted in Scotland it should be evident in these three councils. However, much of the evidence collected in fieldwork after the reorganisation period suggests that changing council practice did not simply involve the wholesale adoption of NPM practices. The influence of NPM ideas was undoubtedly diluted by groups such as trade unions,

professional associations as well as the political and managerial leaderships of the councils.

So to what extent does the changing practice of Scottish local government reflect NPM ideas? Firstly, managerial changes help to highlight that NPM ideas did have some impact. However, in the three councils it would be difficult to argue that NPM was the sole driving force. There is no doubt that NPM aims – better managed and better quality public services – were shared by practitioners in the councils but this does not mean that it was decisive as an explanatory variable to explain the changes taking place. There was evidence of private sector influence, disaggregation and decentralisation and performance review but to suggest that the councils were influenced exclusively by NPM thinking, is to over-emphasise the significance of such ideas.

Nonetheless, an NPM rationale did impact upon parts of the changing organisational map of local councils; for example, the strategy/operations dichotomy in Fife and Stirling and client/contractor splits (as required by 1980 and 1988 CCT legislation) in all three councils. Even after CCT legislation was replaced with the requirement for Best Value review processes all three councils retained clear distinctions between the 'client' and 'contractor' side of their organisation for certain functions.

Thirdly, an NPM analysis highlights the intrinsic importance in contemporary politics of the effective management of service delivery and provision. NPM advocates would emphasise this as the ideology of managerialism. Organisations such as SOLACE were important in disseminating new management ideas. The SOLACE Report *The New Management Agenda* was

similar to an English report entitled *Fitness For Purpose* - an inevitable consequence of commissioning the same author, Michael Clark of INLOGOV to write it. In both Fife and Stirling, new categories of strategic managers were emerging with enhanced roles within the organisations. Management, and the role of managers was undoubtedly being enhanced.

Fourthly, the NPM perspective also calls to attention how the private sector can impinge on the public sector not through direct lobbying but by ensuring management 'best practice' impacts on the public sector as well as the private. Spender's (1989) concept of 'organisational recipes' for managers is relevant here. Officers frequently cited the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) or private sector sponsored conferences and networks as important for the exchange of new managerial ideas and learning. Often these events would be sponsored by private sector consultancy firms keen to sell new management ideas to councils.

However, what was one of the most striking findings highlighted by the interviews with senior managers in Scottish local government was the inconsistency of the penetration of NPM ideas. In practice NPM did not have the impact that much of the academic literature appeared to suggest at the time (see, for example, Hughes 1998). It is also worth pointing out that although the 'micro-language' of NPM (performance indicators, decentralisation, client/contractor etc) was evident there was no mention of the oft-quoted academic phrase, '*new public management*'. In not one interview between 1996 and 2008 across all three councils was this phrase voluntarily used by an interviewee.

As Hood and Jackson have noted, 'successful (i.e. those gaining favour) administrative ideas are often repackaged and relabelled versions of earlier

proposals' (1991: 11). Much of what has been, in academic parlance, labelled 'new public management' may in fact be familiar to public sector managers via previous initiatives of a bygone era. Two officers interviewed (A1 1997, C16 1997) noted the parallels between the supposedly new managerial ideas of the 1990s and those of corporate management in the 1970s.

NPM is consistent with the tradition identified in Dearlove's (1979) study of the 1974 local government re-organisation. He suggested that reform was inspired by a desire to ensure a more functional and compliant local authority where economic interests were more effectively represented through corporate government structures.

As outlined in chapter four, hypotheses were to be tested against the data outlined here

- New managerial codes of accountability became more relevant than traditional bureaucratic, professional and democratic codes

No conclusive answer to this hypothesis can be given. A concoction of all of these codes of accountability existed within the councils, often – it would appear – without any notion of inconsistency. Democratic notions of accountability to the elected democratic body of the council were evident in the behaviour and language of senior officers. Professional notions of upholding standards and quality were often espoused in interviews. Bureaucratic notions of accountability were less often referred to and/or defended, however one look at the organisational layers in each council would attest to their continuing relevance. Managerial codes that emphasised managerial devolution, responsibility and accountability for

performance were also in evidence. Managerial codes of accountability were more relevant than they possibly once were but they co-existed (with no great difficulty or contradiction) with each of the other codes.

- Decentralisation, devolution and disaggregation are features of organisational reform within the councils

Yes, yes and a qualified yes would be the answers to these propositions. However, each of these 'three ds' was carried out for reasons not always wholly related to managerial reform – or rather the impetus for reform did not stem from NPM ideas alone. In the case of decentralisation the rationales in each council were a combination of statutory obligation (the 1995 Local Government Reorganisation obliged all councils to submit a scheme of decentralisation to the Secretary of State for Scotland for approval), inherited commitment (in Highland the campaign for one council in the region was based around an assurance of decentralisation) and democratic concerns. The statutory obligation, of course, could be argued to be a reflection of the impact of NPM ideas in central government.

Devolution of managerial responsibility was also a theme of senior officers, but as noted, front line officers were not always the willing recipients of more responsibility. As noted above, some front-line officers (in Fife locality offices) were happy to carry out administrative tasks and were not necessarily comfortable with being asked to take on greater responsibility and being granted greater autonomy.

As regards disaggregation, this was not quite so apparent though there was evidence of it. Client-contractor splits, working groups, locality management schemes, decentralised areas existed but there was still a definite sense of each

part being part of an identifiable corporate council and the vast bulk of staff were still part of the bureaucracy.

- Private sector styles of management impact on each council's strategic, resource and personnel management policies

To a degree this was true, but more so in some councils than others. In Fife the establishment of a post of Director of Public Procurement was a new direction for any Scottish local authority and reflected the trend towards what has been variously called outsourcing, externalisation, partnership and contracting out. One officer suggested PPP had, 'changed people's landscape and mindsets ... they were there to provide a service. It starts to separate and provide a new mentality in peoples minds' (A7 2008). In personnel terms it would be fair to say it impacted more at the top than the bottom of the organisation. In the higher tiers there was evidence that fixed term contracts were becoming more apparent, but elsewhere in the organisation public sector trade union pressures were apparent to ameliorate the impact on more junior members of staff. However, the compulsory contracting out processes did result in staff members in these sections of the council becoming far more aware of commercial pressures and logic.

In terms of resource and personnel management, distinctive local government attitudes were challenged and more private sector practices adopted. There was greater flexibility in terms of pay and conditions. For example the chief executive of Fife council was employed on a five-year fixed-term contract. Such contracts have become standard in many private industries and many organisations in the public sector have adopted this practice.

- A belief in the utility and portability of the management function is evident amongst leading council officers

A key tenet of the ideology of managerialism – the portability of the management function – was evident amongst *some* leading council officers. All agreed on the utility of management, though it would be difficult not to, as one officer pointed out, ‘especially if the alternative to it is a picture of disorganisation and chaos!’ (A9). A clear-cut answer to this hypothesis is difficult to give as there existed a wide variety of attitudes amongst officers to this subject. One officer’s response summed up what was probably the ‘middle ground position’: ‘Yes I believe in managerialism, but I also believe in my professional standards and serving the public and I would hope my colleagues do to’ (C15 1997).

A belief in the portability of management was particularly evident in Fife Council. Fife’s chief executive created a structure in the organisation whereby three strategic managers (not necessarily from the services which they oversaw) developed strategy and remained detached from the operational management of specific services. There was also evidence of ‘managerialisation’ taking place among professionals – job titles were not changed but council professionals such as teachers, social workers and planners were all seen as potential managers. Traditional managerial tasks such as budget-holding, strategy and business planning were parts of their job if they move up the professional hierarchy. As one officer asserted, ‘Management has become a more accepted part of things, it’s not just a public sector ethos anymore’ (A7).

- Markets, competition and consumerism play increasing roles in the way the council approaches its service provision role.

It would be fair to say all three are playing 'increasing roles', but the extent of their increase is varied. 'Markets' were not so evidently on the increase. In an area like Highland the market for some council services is almost non-existent – if the council was not providing the service there is little viability for a local commercial contractor. In Fife and Stirling, there was evidence of councillor scepticism about the ability of the 'market' to deliver what the council wanted, or of open outright ideological hostility to the notion that public services should be delivered by private operators. In both councils evidence of what has been referred to as an 'in-house' bias is still evident. 'Competition' it would appear was not actively encouraged on the political side – one councillor openly declared his belief in the retention of public services 'in-house' and his ideological opposition to contracting out (B19 1997).

Chapter 9: Local Democracy in the Three Councils

As noted in chapter five, alongside the municipal traditional perspective for understanding local government, there has existed another one where the emphasis has been more on local government's democratic credentials. This perspective has a more community-orientated focus and a more explicit emphasis on the inherent democratic and political nature of local authorities. This chapter seeks to explore the relevance of this analytical perspective in understanding developments in Fife, Highland and Stirling councils.

As noted in chapter five, subscribers to the local democracy perspective tend to come from within the local government community (e.g. Commission for Local Democracy 1995), or be academics with close connections to it (e.g. Jones and Stewart 1985). Kerley argues,

Governments of all kinds like their own view to prevail, and see local government not as an expression of self government for the community, but a subordinate institution best equipped to follow encouragement and direction, failing which instruction and coercion will be necessary. (1994: 195)

Writers in this perspective often bemoan the lack of emphasis on, or the weakening of, democracy in local government. A figure often cited is the low turnout at local elections. However, as table 9.1 below shows, turnout in Scotland has not been falling to the degree that some may think. Indeed the coincidence of local and Scottish parliamentary elections since 1999 has resulted in an increased turnout (From 2011 Scottish Parliamentary and local elections will take place on different polling days). Prior to that, the turnout figures were actually stable – in the 41-47% band. Moreover, the number of uncontested seats in local elections has been falling steadily over the past 25 years. In 1980 over one quarter of seats were uncontested, but this figure has

been falling and the advent of STV and multi-member wards in 2007 meant all council seats were contested (see table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Turnout at local elections in Scotland 1977-2007*

Year	Turnout	% Uncontested seats
1977	47.8	22.1
1980	45.7	26.0
1984	44.4	21.7
1988	45.5	13.9
1992	41.4	13.1
1995	44.9	4.7
1999	57.9	3.8
2003	51.8	2.5
2007	58.3	n.a

Source: Rallings and Thrasher (2005) and www.electionresources.org

** Pre-1995 figures relate to district council elections*

As noted previously, the language of local government reorganisation in the early 1990s was couched in that of democracy. However, viewed from localities the procedures that instigated local government re-organisation were not particularly 'democratic'. Indeed an important point to stress about the mid 1990s re-organisation in Scotland, as opposed to that in England, is the top-down nature of its imposition. It was implemented by the Conservative controlled Scottish Office in a non-consensual, highly partisan political environment. During the reorganisation process COSLA, the umbrella group of local authorities, actively pursued a non-co-operation strategy (see Midwinter 1995).

It should also be acknowledged that although the reform was couched in the language of democracy, it was also 'sold' as a movement towards more

'effective' and 'efficient' local government (see Scottish Office 1991; 1992; 1993). As Elcock (1986: 51) notes, restructuring organisations has long been seen by British government as a means of improving their performance. The previous reorganisations of local government in the 1970s, as well as more recent changes in the NHS and central government have all had admirable managerial objectives. Ian Lang (1994) the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1994 evoked the efficiency criterion when presenting the local government reform proposals.

The main concern of the research in this chapter, however, is not with the Scottish Office's motivation for local government reorganisation but that of each case study council and how they approached democratic issues post-reorganisation. During the initial post-reorganisation fieldwork phase the leadership of all three councils declared that they were taking the democratic dimension of local government seriously (Fife Council 1996; Highland Council 1996 Stirling Council undated^a). They were, in their different ways, adopting new approaches to their relationship their local populations.

This chapter seeks to review the evidence of the impact of these initiatives. It will do so under the following headings:

- Decentralisation.
- Pluralist democracy.
- Participatory democracy.
- Deliberative democracy.
- Representative Democracy.

Chapter five outlined a series of hypotheses that would be utilised to test the relevance of the local democracy perspective:

- New democratic codes of accountability to supplement, or even displace, traditional bureaucratic and professional codes become more relevant to understanding local political processes.
- New mechanisms of democratic engagement which emphasise participation and deliberation impact on local political processes.
- A belief in the utility of democratic processes is likely to be evident amongst leading council officers
- Local democracy as expressed through the ballot box, elected council chamber and committees is not viewed as the sole democratic basis of the council.
- The council views one of its primary roles as engagement with its local community and the creation of a vibrant civil society in its area.

Decentralisation

Decentralisation has been discussed in the previous chapters. There is no doubt that the growth of departmental and corporate decentralisation in local government has made services more attractive and accessible to users (see Hoggett and Hambleton 1987; Elcock 1988 for reviews of English decentralisation in the 1980s). However, only where political decentralisation has been attempted, which includes the creation of local committees to oversee the work of neighbourhood offices and decide local priorities, can such exercises be regarded as enhancing local citizenship. Only if citizens are enabled to participate in the government of their communities can decentralisation be linked directly to 'democratic' initiatives (Elcock 1995: 45).

The many initiatives developed by (predominantly English) Labour local authorities in the 1980s to decentralise service provision were designed to restore and maintain public support for public services by making them more responsive, thus countering the attacks of the New Right (see Hoggett and

Hambleton 1987; Elcock 1988; Gyford 1991; Elcock 1995). However, it is important to note that these schemes were the exception, rather than the rule. In most local authorities it was the management concerns of quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness that were the rationale for reformist schemes. This was particularly the case as the 1980s progressed – Stoker (1991: 48) notes an ‘urban managerialist’ group which favoured a more ‘customer friendly’ style of service delivery and had more modest democratic aspirations.

As noted previously, Section 23 the Local Government (Scotland) Etc. Act required that all of Scotland’s new unitary councils prepare a draft decentralisation scheme for their area and submit it to the Secretary of State for Scotland by 1 April 1997. All three case study councils did so (see Fife Council undated^a; Highland Council 1996; Stirling Council undated^a).

The aims of the decentralisation schemes in each council were diverse. Broadly speaking they were designed to devolve decision-making and the delivery of council services as well as encourage citizens and communities to become more involved in local government. However, the findings here would suggest that none of the schemes in Fife, Stirling or Highland could be labelled ‘radical’ – each was based around and/or built on pre-existing council structures. There was no fundamental departure from the pre-existing democratic norms and processes. Management or budgetary control remained with each council, except on a very limited and restricted range of services (e.g. small grants to village halls). In the second phase of fieldwork in 2008, there was little evidence of any radical democratic development of these decentralisation schemes beyond what could be considered incremental development. In the case of Fife the number of decentralised areas was increased from three to seven, in Highland it was reduced from eight to three.

In both cases there was little evidence of democracy impinging on the reasons for restructuring – as officers tended to cite functional and managerial reasons for reform in both areas (A7 1997, C4 1997).

Also, all the councils adopted decentralisation schemes which conceptualised it as being about geography and specific spatial areas. As one Highland officer argued:

services in many councils could just as easily have been decentralised to specific groups such as the old, the young, the disabled, sports clubs and if we're going to be radical, ethnic and religious groups. Why not? Much of Scotland education in the central belt has been 'decentralised' to the Catholic Church. (C16 1997)

The Highland decentralisation scheme was the most conservative, in the democratic sense. The feedback from some community councillors interviewed during the first phase of research was negative (Note: Community Councils (CCs) stemmed from Wheatley's (1969) recommendation that bodies be created to represent grassroots opinion. CCs tend to be more active in rural, than urban, Scotland). For example, one community councillor argued, 'The council's decentralisation scheme pays lip service to the notion of democracy it is really more secretive and autocratic than its predecessors' (C7 1997). Another, suggested that, 'The area committee is autocratic and unresponsive to community wishes' (C3 1997). However, one should note that in both Highland (C1 1997) and Stirling (B20 1997) it was pointed out, at the time, that relations between elected councillors and community councils were not always what they could be and there was a general reluctance among councillors to stimulate community councils. In rural Scotland, the defeated independent candidate in a council election, often

utilises the community council as a power base through which to challenge the elected councillor.

Highland council itself was very open about the failure of its area committees 'We used to have Area Committees but no members of the public turned up' (C4 2008). C5, interviewed in 2008, suggested that, in retrospect, the Area Committees established in 1996 were much too large to be considered forums for local democracy, often covering vast rural areas where public transportation links were limited.

Reflecting on these failures, Highland has post-2007 set up ward forums based on the geographic boundaries of the new single transferable vote (STV) multi-member councillor wards. These, it was suggested in 2008 by both C4 and C5, have the benefit of being far more localised areas with real democratic meaning to the electorate. They allow for both engagement of the council and the relevant elected local councillors in each area. Participants include community planning partners, community council chairpersons as well as the general public. Officers cited two recent meetings they had attended in Fort William and Boat of Garden with healthy public attendances of 70 and 50 respectively. Other areas such as Black Isle and Loch Ness had average attendances of between 30 and 40. Whilst recognising that attendances at the newly instigated ward forums were variable, with Inverness struggling in particular (because of the electorate's lack of awareness of urban ward boundaries), these ward forums were now in their fourth round of meetings, post May 2007, and most were generating what the Council considered healthy rates of attendance.

Fife, like Highland, Council viewed geographic decentralisation as necessary due to the fact that it covered a large and diverse area with many

geographical communities as well as communities of interest. It also argued that confidence in local government and local democracy needed to be improved (see Fife Council undated*a*). Strengthening local democracy was of course one of Fife council's five key policy aims. The Council suggested its members should 'provide local leadership. They need to encourage debate about the actions of the Council and act as advocates on behalf of the local area and local people they represent' (Fife Council undated*a*: 16).

Decentralisation on the political side was to area-based committees based on the borders of the previous district councils. The area committees had a councillor membership as follows – East 12, West 24 and Central 27. The Fife Council standing orders allowed the appropriate 'Strategic spokesperson and the Leader of the Administration' to attend area service committees in a non-voting capacity but with the right to speak and otherwise take part.

The striking thing is that for all the rhetoric of decentralisation, budgets remained firmly in the control of the centre. The Leader of the Opposition Party in Fife (Liberal Democrats) in commenting on Fife Council's Scheme of Administration argued, 'The present over-centralisation of both the budget-making process and control of budgets requires to be addressed if the Area level is to have any realistic input into the monitoring and review of services' (Smith 1997). His party proposed that Area committees be involved in the budget-making process and that budget monitoring reports for both capital and revenue budgets were made available to the appropriate committees. He also expressed concern as to 'the balance of business at Area Committees leading to an inability of the Areas to properly carry out their monitoring and review functions' (Smith 1997).

In Fife one of the roles of area-based committees was to monitor and review of service delivery and policy implementation. These committees reviewed the activities of co-ordinators and service managers at an area level who were responsible for drawing services together at the local level, developing local access and promoting community participation. These arrangements were supported by working groups and select committees as a basis for developing and reviewing council policy.

In Fife, one officer (A5 1997) did suggest, that in one area of Fife (North East) (an area made up of predominantly Liberal Democrat councillors), she felt intimidated and was viewed by those on the committee as representing the 'Labour establishment' in Glenrothes. This does at least suggest that the scheme was viewed by those in opposition as a democratic forum to channel their grievances with the ruling administration.

The three-area decentralisation structure (based on the borders of the previous constituent district councils) was reformed into seven areas in 2006. An officer (A7 2008) suggested that, in retrospect, the decision to base the decentralisation boundaries around previous council structures was an error and contributed negatively to the creation of a single unified corporate culture in the early years of Fife Council (a similar point was made by C4 in respect of Highland's initial decentralisation scheme).

As noted previously Fife also had a locality management scheme. This was designed to assist in community development in four ways:

- in providing support to local groups and community activities within the Local Office area.

- in assisting local groups to link into the decision-making processes of the Council, particularly at local level through local partnerships, community councils or forums.
- in assisting local staff to develop ways of working which involve and take account of the views of the local community.
- in developing action and initiatives on locally-identified issues and priorities (Fife Council 1996: 23).

In reviewing the locality management scheme in 1998 Fife Council held 31 discussion groups involving a total of 196 staff. This review identified significant barriers in the way of generic and team working. Fife Council also conducted a user survey in its locality offices collecting 728 questionnaire responses. This review highlighted a number of things. Staff respondents were critical of what they referred to of a 'model of imagined demand' those at the centre seemed to have a view of specific services that were to be delivered in localities. Instead of being based on a rigorous assessment of need, services were being passed down to localities for which there simply did not exist any local demand!

The review also highlighted support for the development of locality offices as focal points for communities - with councillor surgeries being held there and well as their resources and facilities being made available for community use, if possible. As the Council argued,

the Local Office Network will be the key face of Fife Council, their perception of the Council and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the Council will primarily be determined for a large number of residents by the way they are treated and the response they receive to enquiries via their local office (Fife Council 1996 Part II: 15).

The locality management scheme remained in place in 2008 though there has been some consolidation of access points within it. New information and communication technologies have also resulted in a new Fife Contact Centre

dealing with telephone and electronic transactions being added to the structure. 'In a fundamental way the initial locality management scheme remains in place, though there has been some tweaking and refinement of the structure over the past decade ... and the Council was beginning to rethink its investment in facilities for front line services' (A7 2008).

Stirling's approach to decentralisation and democracy was quite different from Fife and Highland – largely reflecting its smaller population and geographical area. In preparation for the decentralisation, the council held meetings in all of its communities in May/June 1996 to seek views about possible models of decentralisation. Over 1,000 people attended 43 meetings (Stirling Council undated*a*). The Council also used an opinion-meter survey in local offices, libraries and supermarkets.

The key element of Stirling's scheme was the establishment of area forums whose purpose and remit was to provide a means for the widest possible consultation and dialogue between the Council and its citizens and communities. However, no decision-making powers were delegated to area forums initially; though the Council did outline a commitment to 'an evolutionary process of delegation of power and responsibility to areas forums as its relationship with each forum develops' (Stirling Council undated*a*: 27). It was anticipated that the forums would be given greater influence over spending priorities on a range of local amenity issues such as grass cutting and maintenance of open spaces, street cleaning, street lighting and repairs, public conveniences, bus shelters, local grants (Stirling Council undated*a*: 15).

The area forums were constituted on an informal 'open meeting' basis with local councillors, community councillors and any resident of the relevant local

community able to attend. However, a review in 1998 found a general lack of public awareness – 56% of residents had never heard of them (Stirling Council undateda: 15).

Initially some of these area forums were well attended. For example, 100 people attended one in Stirling town centre and 250 in Balfron to talk about the Council's budget deliberations (B20 2008). However, they suffered from a key problem – the key opposition party (the Conservatives) shunned them in favour of community councils. This acted as a major block on their development with councillors and community councillors utilising community councils as an alternative power base. There was also much media controversy in 2000 when the Labour Group made a decision to pay members to chair them:

This became a cause 'celebrare' so they were giving themselves £3,000 or £4,000 to chair it and they were doing four meetings a year and it just, it actually undermined the area forums which became editorial letter writing stuff at the time ... you know why is this person paid so much for this? You could have given it to the local community council. (B20 2008)

The area forums were disbanded in 2003, in the context of growing antagonism between them and community councils. Some were resurrected in 2004; but even four years later there remained an ongoing tension between area forums and what is happening at community level (B20 2008). Overall, the Stirling decentralisation scheme made little headway in facilitating more widespread public involvement – the opportunity to participate was there, but few residents took it up. The 'evolutionary process of delegation of power and responsibility' simply did not happen.

Local government as a vehicle for pluralism

As noted in chapter five, the decentralisation of power in the UK has acted as one of the key justifications for local government in the UK. Local government is an institution which allows for the dispersal of power within a locality – one of its key roles being the reconciliation of alternative strands of political interest and opinion (Stewart and Stoker 1988; Stoker 1989).

In each local authority there was evidence of an active interest group, pluralist democracy. Since the 1960s there has been a mushrooming of local pressure groups and movements, tenants associations, environmental groups and single issue groups in politics in general (see McConnell 2004: 121-128; Newton 1976; Stoker 1991: 114-139; Wilson and Game 2002: 313-323). Traditionally Britain, when compared to other states, has been characterized by a strong civic culture (Pratchett 2004b: 225-6; see also Hall 1999). The fieldwork in Fife and Stirling revealed efforts to strengthen and widen the base of local pressure group activity with council officers and resources being utilised towards this end. Active citizenship, and a pluralistic interest group based local democratic environment, was viewed as a good thing in itself (Stirling Council: undateda: 2).

In all three councils there was evidence of charitable and not-for-profit organisations running services on behalf of councils to plug perceived gaps left by council services (see chapter 10). This was particularly the case in the field of social services. Each local council was clearly involved in moulding the nature of the local voluntary sector, with its funding a key aspect of the vibrancy of this sector. Funding was provided in the form of grants (either on a one-off or ongoing basis) or, as became common, formal agreements or contracts. Fife emphasised a commitment to supporting organisations in the

social economy to develop social enterprises (Fife Council 1997). The voluntary sector was viewed as useful for service delivery and consultative purposes, due to its expertise and experience (A20 1997, B14 1997, B20 2008, C2 1997, C11 1997).

There was, however, evidence (in terms of the aspirations of council officers) in both Stirling and Fife of the Councils seeking to extend their consultation beyond the 'usual suspects' (A5 1997, B20 1997). The 'usual suspects' being the interests of business, professions, housing associations, the voluntary sector and groups which are in some way connected to the council through a financial or contractual relationship. While such groups may very well be an effective channel of localised interests, however if they are dependent on the finance and/or goodwill of the councils then what may be in existence is a very top-down (as opposed to bottom-up) version of democracy. Also, concerns were expressed regarding the 'representativeness' of the groups that had traditionally taken part in consultation exercises. As a Stirling officer indicated in 1997, 'The one thing that strikes me when I encountered those involved in the forums is that particular sections of the community seem over-represented' (B14 1997). When asked to elaborate on this she mentioned 'old age pensioners, the middle class and both of these groups are let's just say not drawn from the poorer parts of the community' (B14 1997). This particular point is frequently made in studies of political participation – as Pratchett has noted:

It has become a truism of political science that power and influence are not unevenly distributed across communities but are embedded in particular social and economic institutions and skewed towards particular socio-economic groups. (2004b: 216)

Another point to note is that the vision each council had was more consistent with a view of interest groups as reactive rather than proactive agents i.e. they were responding to the agenda being set by the council (rather than vice-versa). A Highland Officer noted in the first phase of interviews, 'I tend to think of participatory politics as being about interest groups and single issue politics – it is issues like school closures that tend to generate a lot of participation in the democratic process' (C2 1997).

Moreover, simply engaging in, announcing and beginning democratic renewal initiatives, even if framed with the best intentions, may have undesirable consequences. For example, they may further entrench the power of well-established pressure groups whilst further marginalizing less well resourced groups. Studies of political participation have found that it is the middle class, middle aged and better educated that engage most with democracy (e.g. Parry et al 1992). Officers, particularly in Stirling Council, recognised this and actively undertook measures to combat the resource advantages of business and middle class interest groups by seeking out and targeting groups such as the young, ethnic minorities and socially excluded. Fife Council also identified and established what it referred to as 'networks experiencing discrimination' (i.e. women, ethnic minorities, elderly people and people with disabilities). It sought their consultation over customer care issues which affect these particular groups placing particular emphasis on making the complaints procedures more accessible. The aim was to make sure these priority groups were fully functioning and contributing to consultation and service planning over a wide range of service issues across the Council. Fife also established a Youth Forum and Stirling created a Youth Congress. Both councils used these new institutions for participation and consultation with young people for the Council's children services plan.

All three councils were also concerned with reaching out to particular 'communities', and they conceived of these beyond geographic communities. One officer in Highland suggested that the problem councils faced was that it was often difficult to see a mechanism whereby notions of community could be engendered, never mind expressed, in modern mobile and atomistic communities (C12 1997). In communities in Fife, Stirling and Highland there is often a dichotomy between residence and workplace. Social relations rather than being neighbourhood-based are more likely to be based around workplace or private interests. These factors make traditional notions of community almost obsolete (particularly in more urbanised areas). Community today is as likely to be defined in terms of a lifestyle group (e.g. gay), interest (e.g. religion, sport) or ethnicity (e.g. Asian). Individuals are possibly more likely to express themselves in these communities of interest and identity, none of which are necessarily territorially-based (C12 1997). Moreover, these territories may not even be congruent with those of local councils.

Participatory Democracy

As noted above, in the 1970s and 1980s political and community activists were calling for the greater involvement of ordinary citizens in decisions such as house demolition and road building (Stoker 1991: 10). The idea of empowering people was also linked to restoring an element of accountability. As one Stirling Council officer remarked, 'It is not enough to deliver high quality services if people cannot influence it. If they cannot, you are merely a quango' (B17 1997). As Pratchett notes participation helps to legitimise the end-product of local politics:

Effective local politics is arguably what enables an effective articulation of competing interests, allows for negotiation and compromise, and reaches a settlement that is satisfactory to – or at least accepted by – all interests. (Pratchett 2004b: 217)

The councils were, at least rhetorically, in favour of more consultation and participation. They aimed to create a more vibrant and inclusive local democracy. Fife Council stated that 'during its shadow year, the new Council set out its aim of achieving a fundamental change in the way that local government works and in how it relates to local people and communities' (Fife Council, undateda: 4). New schemes of public participation can be interpreted as attempts to confer increased legitimacy on local councils (See DETR 1998). Stirling Council suggested:

Promoting Local Democracy is about encouraging, enabling and empowering citizens to participate in decisions affecting their communities and ensuring local democratic accountability for Council services. (Stirling Council, undateda: 4)

As McConnell (2004: 134) suggests, 'Participation, it can be argued, is first and foremost an initiative of the centre with the primary role of ensuring stability and adding legitimacy to policy processes'. In modern academic parlance participatory initiatives could also be interpreted as attempts to enhance the social capital of the area: 'social capital refers to that network of relationships, and interpersonal trust, which fosters cooperative working and community wellbeing' (Hill 2000: 121).

Stirling and Fife Councils in particular sought to go beyond customer satisfaction surveys to more expansive forms of participation such as forums and citizens' juries. The latter's explicit emphasis is on giving citizens information so that they can make more enlightened policy recommendations

to the Council. One officer in Stirling suggested that a key aim should be to increase the 'civic literacy' of citizens (B14 1997).

Fife Council declared itself to be, 'the only democratically elected, locally accountable body in charge of public services in Fife' (Fife Council 1996). It also declared a belief 'that local democracy is best served by encouraging the fullest participation by citizens in determining policies, priorities and programmes' (see Fife Council 1996). Fife Council held meetings throughout Fife on both local planning and the budget in 1996 and 1997. Over 3,000 individuals took part in the Council's public 1996 consultation to decide on £17 million worth of budget savings. People were asked for their views through public meetings, newsletter and a budget helpline. At the time it was the largest budget consultation exercise undertaken by a Scottish council.

The process of consultation was reviewed and improved in 1997 with smaller focus groups (composed, for example, of the elderly, youths, disabled), in addition to public meetings. The aspiration was to have ongoing consultation on use of resources with public and staff rather than as a one-off exercise, once a year, feeding into planning. For the 1997/98 budget consultation exercise, a paper to Fife Council's Policy and Resources Committee recommended that 'Elected Members ... lead the participation exercise and act as the catalyst in bringing together local people and Service Managers, as the main stakeholders in Local Government Services' (Fife Council 1997: para 2.1). Focus groups were created to involve people who were not normally involved in more established representative organisations. The purpose of the focus groups was not for lobbying but was to give opinion, and to bring an anti-poverty and equal opportunities dimension to the process (Fife Council 1997: 5.1.5). Locality-based 'Stakeholder' Meetings were also held – designed to act as a catalyst in bringing together local people and managers to

discuss budget options (Fife Council 1997: 5.2.2). A staffed telephone line was set up as a mechanism to facilitate expression of individual views on budget proposals. However, the number of callers was 'very low' (A20 1997).

The groups to be targeted, in an attempt to make consultation on the budget as inclusive as possible, were set out in an appendix to an official Council paper. These included young people, ethnic minorities (e.g. through the Racial Equality Council or Fife Muslim association), lay members of under eights Children's Forums, older people, those with sensory impairment (e.g. via the Fife Society for the Blind and Social Work Hearing Impairment Team), travellers, tenants, women (consult with Networking Fife) and community care groups.

Fife Council suggested its 'Aims and Values recognise the importance of building public confidence in the ability of the Council and the democratic process to address community concerns meet needs and to achieve real improvement in the quality of life' (Fife Council undateda: 7) Its Aims and Values stated:

Fife Council intends to establish a close partnership with the public. If this is to be meaningful, information will need to be freely available, the Council will need to be open to criticism and public scrutiny and comment. Through decentralisation, access to services and decisions will be improved while effective complaints procedures and reports on service standards and performance will help strengthen accountability and redress. Communications within the organisation and between the Council and the public will be given a high priority.

In Highland in 1997, C12 mentioned that 'Planning for Real' was becoming fashionable in the planning field. This involved a bottom-up process of citizens meeting planners to discuss and reach consensus on their vision for the future of their communities. The theory was that communities' priorities

for development could be fed directly into the planning process. C12 suggested that it was on the agenda that there was potential for the transference of this type of process into the budgetary one i.e. some mechanisms could be found whereby the population of the Highlands could feed their priorities for budgets into that process. Brewer in Fife in 1997 also suggested involvement in Local Agenda 21 (emerging from the Rio 1995 Summit) was an emerging avenue of participation in some communities in Fife.

In Stirling, B14 in 1997 envisaged a role for education in terms of democratic participation with some space in local school's curricula for 'citizenship or civic education'. By 1998 the Council was claiming to be 'developing considerable experience of involving children and young people, the homeless, unemployed, disabled and ethnic minority groups in commenting on and shaping services' (Stirling Council undated*a*: 6). Its Youth Congress was formally launched in January 1998, and comprised 14 young people aged 16-25, who met five times a year. It was consulted on a number of issues including Children's Service Plans and the Council budget. In the education field Stirling pointed to various participatory mechanisms. School Boards existed in 73 per cent of its schools in 1998, all secondary schools had elected Pupil Councils and in schools with no boards parent consultative groups were formed.

The three councils in 2008 pointed out that development in online and communication technology since they were set up meant more and more individuals were utilising these devices to communicate directly with the council (thereby negating the need for enhancing their presence in localities). In Stirling, an officer pointed out the significant financial costs of keeping under-utilised local offices open, though local councillors, in areas where

these offices were marked for closure, often mounted campaigns to keep them open (B20 1997). He also suggested that if current trends continued (i.e. individuals increasingly by-pass councillors) councillors might become increasingly marginalised.

Although undoubtedly well-meaning and symbolically powerful, in a democratic sense, council participation schemes can be criticised on a number of grounds.

First, the initial motivation for engagement is often for managerial reasons. Participation schemes have often been designed as managerial tools to increase the effectiveness of the services councils provide to their local populace. Lowndes et al (2001) have labelled these 'consumerist methods'. Many 'participation' schemes are akin to the market surveying of major retailing organisations. Peters and Waterman's best selling *In Search of Excellence* (1982) suggested the most successful companies are those that retain a close relationship with their customers. Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) book contained a similar theme for public sector organisations. It is undoubtedly the case that expanding knowledge and higher levels of education has created much higher expectations amongst 'consumers' of local public services. Stoker (2004: 120) reports that survey and focus group findings indicate that people are more than willing to participate if the issue is important to them and they are asked.

Second, participation schemes have often been little more than glorified consultation exercises. As one officer suggested, 'Participation can be a double-edged sword as, in my experience, it tends to heighten expectation. Whilst I might think of it in terms of a consultation exercise participants are more likely to think of it as a forum for negotiation or even decision-making'

(B15). It should also be noted that increased participation often means more political contestation between competing local groups and interests and the council. As one Stirling Officer noted in the first phase of research, 'Often, opening up a local issue creates political space for opposing radical groups to mobilise and this does not always make for community harmony' (B14 1997).

There is also the question of what impact these schemes have on the substantive political processes within the council. As one Fife Officer commented in the second phase of research:

Most of the time these democratic structures have negligible impact on council decision-making because you do rely on political processes to be that link. I have some sympathy with those politicians who would argue that if they have their ties to the community clearly established, if they are speaking for the community isn't that democracy at work in itself. Why would you then need to go and look at participative structures which add to that. (A7 2008)

Third, participation schemes were not very pluralistic or representative. One officer in 1997 argued:

Notions around at the moment of active citizens can be dangerous. In my experience these types of citizens can represent only a very small section of the community. I think the most effective forms of participation tend to come via services and on specific issues, the classic of course being school and hospital closures that's when participation tends to be very vocal when it's reactive. In my experience people don't get that excited about broad issues but they do about specific and localised ones like school closures. (B10 1997).

This type of view was expressed numerous times in interviews. One officer was critical of the public and suggested that, they, almost inevitably, tended to take a short term view:

Sometimes people in government have to make unpopular decisions it's a fact of life. If you're in charge there's not much point in opening up the floodgates to those who are going to be critical of you. As managers, sometimes we have to look to the long term the public tend to only think in the short term. (B1 1997)

Fourth, the multitude of initiatives taking place during the first phase of research in Stirling caused one manager (B14 1997) to suggest that often, 'the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing in terms of consultation'. She outlined that the vast majority of consultation was service led with more often than not services being oblivious to what the other was doing unless interpersonal contact between the specific services was strong. It was also intriguing to note how three officers referred to the notion of 'consultation fatigue' in the initial post-reorganisation round of interviews (B6 1997, B14 1997, B16 1997) especially as the initial research was undertaken only a short time after the new councils were created.

Fifth, the councils' success at engaging with local populations in certain areas was not particularly evident. One officer in Fife (A20 1997) noted that certain meetings were attended by 'one man and his dog' with council officers outnumbering the public. Similarly, in Stirling an officer suggested that 'in a dark cold, wet evening Eastenders, Coronation Street and game shows hold more appeal than a draughty village hall' (B14 1997). In 2008 two officers in Highland (C4, C5) acknowledged that the area committees established by Highland Council in the immediate post-reorganisation period had failed in terms of community participation and engagement. The literature on political participation has tended to acknowledge that continuous political participation is low – Milbraith's (1965) research only puts 2 per cent of the population in the 'gladiator' category. Gladiators represent the small number of political activists who remain continuously engaged in political activities.

Similarly, Parry and Moyser (1992) have 1.5 per cent as 'complete activists'. MORI's work for the Local Government Commission in England in the late 1990s showed that just 3% of the population say they have attended a council meeting in the past three years (DETR 1998). No equivalent research could be identified in Scotland, but it would be surprising if the figure was much higher in Scotland today.

The MORI research also noted that when people were asked how interested they are in what their councils do, and whether they want a greater degree of involvement only 2 per cent responded, 'I'm not interested in what the council does, or whether they do their job'. One in five said they, 'would like to have more of a say in what the council does and the services it provides' (cited in DETR 1998) There thus does seem to be a latent potential for involvement in council participation. Of course this should not be overstated, in the same survey the majority (58 per cent) were happy to know merely what the council was doing and let them get on with the job. However, an overwhelming majority agreed that users of council services did not get enough say in how services were run.

Overall, the three councils' participation schemes were based around a representative core model that participation was there to support. Blaug (2002) is critical of this 'democratic engineering' model of engagement:

Democratic engineers, in viewing democracy in terms of institutions, encourage institutional solutions to problems, offer resources with colonizing strings attached and are, in the last instance, unable to relinquish the power they control. This kind of help closes down discussion ... and gives rise to discussions and meetings which are, fundamentally, un-engaging. It is little wonder ... a recurrent problem for democratic engineering is the failure of the people to actually show up. (Blaug 2002: 112-3)

In summary, Fife and Stirling councils were aspiring to get their respective populations more involved in council decision-making. However, this was aspirational and the impression was given (at least by some officers) that they recognised that only small numbers of the public were sufficiently interested to engage with the council.

Representation

The third aspect of democracy to be explored is representative democracy. Political parties are of course the key routes of recruitment for individuals into representative democracy in Scottish local government. Parties were well established in two of the three case study councils in 1997 and in all three by 2008 (see table 2.5). Parties particularly made headway in Highland Council – with councillors elected on party labels in the majority in 2008, with only 34 independents remaining. An SNP/Independent administration was formed post-2007. As C4, in 2008, noted, ‘I think we probably are a bit more like other councils now’. The situation in Fife was a new SNP/Liberal Democrat coalition and in Stirling an initial Labour/Liberal Democrat administration was replaced in early 2008 with an SNP minority one. Minority and coalition arrangements were the norm in Scottish local government after 2007, with only two Scottish councils having a single party with majority control of the council chamber.

In two of the three case study councils the party group was the main democratic forum of decision-making. As Copus has argued:

the party group has replaced the council chamber as the place in which majority councillors conduct representation, carry out political

deliberation, make council decisions and set policy and where the minority group plan tactics, decide how to undermine the ruling group and conduct political debate. (Copus 2001a: 55)

The Labour party was dominant across large swathes of councils in the central belt of Scotland after the 1995 local elections, holding massive majorities in councils such as Glasgow and North Lanarkshire. In councils under Labour control at this time, the Labour Party was the dominant forum for democratic debate. The council chamber in such councils effectively acted as a rubber stamp for decisions taken within the Labour group. This was the case in both Stirling and Fife from 1995 till 1999. However the introduction of the single transferable vote system in 2007 and the downturn in fortunes of the Labour Party resulted in a much more eclectic mix of council chambers and coalition administrations. Table 9.2 outlines the position in the three case study councils:

Table 9.2 Party representation in the three case study councils 1995 and 2007

Fife	1995	2007
SNP	9	23
Lab	54	24
LD	25	21
Con	0	5
Ind/Other	4	5
Highland	1995	2007
SNP	9	17
Lab	6	7
LD	4	21
Con	1	0
Ind/Other	52	35
Stirling	1995	2007
SNP	2	7
Lab	13	8
LD	0	3
Con	7	4
Other	0	0

In recent years the nature of representation has been changing with councillors increasingly urged to redirect their efforts towards strategic planning, monitoring and review and acting as local 'champions'. However, as more than one officer (A7 2008, B20 2008) noted, many still see their fundamental role as choosing priorities and deciding how to raise and spend public money - the very essence of representative democracy.

Also new more stringent 'tests' of local democracy have been added. For example, is the chamber truly representative of the community it represents? Whilst this thesis does not directly assess this question, a few observations can be made here about the changing role of the councillor.

One Fife officer, during the initial phase of research, suggested that the councillors in his council did continue to see their role in the traditional 'making choices, determining priorities' manner as outlined above. However, this particular officer was sceptical of how they could fulfil this role effectively without engagement with constituents – 'I asked the councillor, how can you effectively decide on his priorities if he did not seek the views of his constituents?' (A14 2007). Fife Council has throughout the period since reorganisation retained the traditional committee structure. In fact the McNish Report's (2001) suggestion of a move towards a cabinet model was rejected. The McNish Report itself – an examination of Scottish local authority internal decision-making structures – outlined an evolutionary rather than revolutionary strategy for the reform of Scottish local government political decision-making structures. Interestingly the Labour group in Fife included a commitment to moving towards an executive model in their 2007 manifesto, however the SNP and Liberal Democrats formed a coalition administration post-2007 and reinforced the committee model. The only major adjustment

was the move from three to seven area committees, finally breaking away from the links with the previous district councils.

It was noticeable in Highland Council that a number of community councillors and officers were keen to emphasise the broader representative role of the council – emphasising how it should articulate the views of Highland to the Scottish Office (now Government), central (UK) government and the EU. However, Highland was and is a rather distinct council in Scotland covering, as it does, a vast geographic area which is very distinct in character from the urban/suburban central belt of Scotland.

Highland, like Fife, has retained a traditional committee style of political decision-making structure since its inception in 1995-6. Even after the introduction of STV – described by one officer as a ‘catalyst for change’ – it has been retained. In his words, ‘The executive model is I suspect a step too far for the public, definitely a step too far for the press and probably a step too far for the majority of the members. There are still 34 (out of 80) independent councillors weaving about the place’ (C4 2008).

It was only in Stirling where the executive model was implemented in 2005. The executive scheme basically involved the council moving toward the administration consisting of councillors acting as ‘portfolio holders’ and forming a political executive akin to cabinet secretaries at Scottish Cabinet level. B20 in 2008 viewed it as a success, citing the fact that both sides of the council (at the time, Labour and Conservative) viewed it as a success. It gave the Conservative opposition the opportunity to chair the Scrutiny and Governance Committees. Indeed a delegation visiting from South Ayrshire in 2007 ‘were ‘gobsmacked’ at how positive the then Tory opposition leader was about the changes’ (B20 2008). He did, however, report a negative side effect;

the possibility that the 1996 reforms which involved the decoupling of committees and services could be reversed with 'portfolio holders' again coming to be identified with specific services in the same manner as the old director of service/committee chair axis of power.

In all three councils there was evidence that some of the councillors and officials still adopted what could be termed a 'traditional' perspective on the role of democracy in their local authority. Elections, councillors and committees are best thought of as the mechanisms of traditional representative democracy. For example, one council official in Fife council (A5 1997) recalled a previous meeting with senior elected members in Fife Regional Council when one member was unimpressed with survey evidence. He argued, 'It's our job to decide priorities ... That's what we're elected for'. This statement encapsulates the traditional democratic outlook on local politics – councillors are elected, councillors therefore know best. This emphasis on local councillors, once elected, having a mandate to make decisions as they see fit is a perspective which remains evident.

The emphasis was on local councillors as the key agent of local democracy, often to the neglect of other democratic processes. For example, in Highland Council, one official suggested: 'There is a democratic deficit in Highland - we once had 183 councillors, now we only have 72' (C8 1997). In this view, local democracy is simply a numbers game and the more local councillors you have representing an area, the better!

In Fife, the leader of the council in the immediate post-reorganisation period, Alex Rowley, was actively campaigning against this limited, traditional notion of local democracy. One officer (A17 1997) cited the example of his work on a postgraduate Community Adult Education Course, as an exercise

he encouraged people to attend a meeting, he designed a poster depicting Fife local council as a wolf and the public as sheep. The other 'members' of Fife council were in uproar and the written material was withdrawn. The officer who cited this example suggested that the principle Rowley was trying to put across was fine – he wanted the public to become more active and have the confidence to challenge the council. However, the reaction of the Fife councillors at the time may suggest that they were not so keen in having their decisions questioned and challenged by their constituents (A17 1997).

In Stirling there was also evidence of more expansive thinking with a recognition that democracy extended beyond the ballot-box, and councillors. However, as an official in Stirling Council noted in 1997, 'democracy does not always mean succumbing reflecting and responding to the wills of supposed majorities' (B14 1997). This official was interviewed whilst the paedophile issue had flared in the Stirling Raploch community (one of Scotland's most socially deprived areas) with vigilantes seeking to take the law into their own hands. They attempted house eviction via mob role – an undoubted expression of political participation, but not of the type Stirling was trying to engender. The officer reflected that Stirling Council as a democratic institution, had a duty to uphold law and adopt a more learned, less populist, policy stance than that advocated by paedophile campaigners. In such an emotive policy area the Council should seek to educate such campaigners in the practicalities of local policymaking and the dangers involved in their activities. 'If democracy is to operate here in Stirling we have to enforce the basic ground rules – participation does not mean the population telling us what to do, especially if it isn't in line with basic democratic values' (B14 1997).

In Highland, C4 (1997) acknowledged that the Council's notion of community sometimes implicitly assumed communities would speak as one when the actual reality was sharp divisions of interest. As Pratchett has argued,

One of the problems with contemporary policy discussions of political participation is that they assume that everyone in a community shares the same vision for their locality, and that a harmonious settlement can be reached on all policy issues. Exhortations to greater levels of participation are often premised on this assumption. (2004b: 217)

In Fife one locality manager acknowledged how she could easily be overwhelmed by different groups in her locality. The locality did not have a single homogenised community but rather a loose, almost chaotic collection of groups whose principle feature was that they were diverse and different. Their interests could not simply be aggregated to arrive at that of the community as they were marked more by division than similarity. This plurality of groups, whilst reflecting a vibrant democracy, for one officer made 'managing the locality more problematic, but at the same time challenging' (A20 1997).

Deliberative Democracy

Two of the three councils engaged in 'deliberative democracy'. Stirling Council set up a Stirling Assembly – an open forum designed to allow the citizens of Stirling an opportunity to debate major issues in the area. Fife Council utilised a citizens jury as part of the deliberative process about how to engage in regeneration in Levenmouth.

The Fife citizens jury method has its roots in Germany and the USA (see LGMB 1996). Under this model, citizens are exposed to a wide range of

information, have the opportunity to question witnesses and are able to reflect on the experience and perspectives of fellow citizens with differing backgrounds. There is an attempt to create a jury that is roughly a microcosmic representation of the general population. The jury like that in a court trial is expected to try to reach consensus, the conflict of opinions that will inevitably exist between jurors being suppressed through the process of deliberation. Citizen juries are based around the idea of decision-making emerging from a process of open discussion. The jury cross-examines witnesses, formulates views and makes recommendations

Deliberative democracy is different from normal pluralist patterns of participation where individuals and groups are drawn into political process to advance and/or defend their interests usually on instrumental grounds. It recognises that the process of politics involves compromise and re-evaluation of beliefs after engagement with others. Political actors participate in reasoned debate from which understanding and awareness of other viewpoints will emerge and from this process better decisions will be arrived at.

The purpose of the Stirling Assembly was to give the wider interests of the whole Stirling community the opportunity to debate the major issues in the area. It was in a way a forerunner to the national Scottish Civic Forum (SCF) established at a national level in 1999. The Stirling Assembly, like the SCF, was premised on the notion that full representative democracy requires an engaged civic society to strengthen the ability of civic organisations to engage in the democratic process.

In its original conception the Assembly was to bring together various strands of Stirling civic society – churches, trade unions, voluntary organisations, business associations and local community groups. It was to promote

participative politics involving as wide a range of people as possible in the processes of policy formulation. The Stirling Assembly was designed to ensure that key strategic issues in Stirling were addressed 'positively' and by people who had experience to offer and whose voices had not been previously heard. In essence it was to be a gateway and to increase dialogue between the council and the people of Stirling. As Lindsay argued (in relation to the Scottish Civic Forum):

The old assumptions that policy ideas and their development are the functions of political parties, elected members and civil servants is being overtaken by the recognition that much of the critical and creative thinking does not come from these sources The challenge now is to develop structures which generate a creative relationship between civic and state institutions. (2000: 411)

Like the experience of the SCF, the 'theory' of a vibrant new mechanism of deliberative democracy did not, however, quite work out in practice. Originally the Stirling Council proposed that Assembly should consist of around 70 members who were to be nominated by and represent 'communities of interest' (e.g. voluntary associations, business groups, amenity groups) and geographic communities. However, after an inaugural meeting in 1997 a more evolutionary approach was adopted and it was decided to allow anyone committed to the concept of an Assembly to participate.

The meetings took place on Saturday mornings and usually involved workshops and a plenary session. Topics on the agenda of themed meetings included the council budget, the structure plan, healthcare and 'sustainable Stirling'. Initially the Council decided the agendas of the meetings, however after a few meetings an autonomous Steering Group was set up in April 1998

to take over the running of the meetings. The Steering Group comprised participants from the community, business, the voluntary sector and civic groups. It took over the responsibility for canvassing opinion about suitable topics for meetings of the Assembly, arranging meetings, formulating reports on the deliberations and decisions of the Assembly, and ensuring the Assembly's views were communicated to those whom they were directed and that any response was fed back to the Assembly. However, as acknowledged by the Council (Stirling Council undateda: 17) there was an ongoing 'legitimacy' issue with the 'open meeting' approach which raised concerns about representativeness. In its defence, the Council did suggest the open meeting approach to be consistent with the promotion and encouragement of active citizenship (Stirling Council undateda: 17). The Council was also committed itself to:

- Promoting the Stirling Assembly as a means of consultation on strategic issues and the development of new policies within the Council.
- Extend and develop the role of the Stirling Assembly as a means through which Stirling Council can exercise its community leadership role as a vehicle for Community Planning.
- Enhance the Assembly's representative role and its legitimacy as a means of accessing community views and aspirations about major issues and encouraging active citizenship.
- Monitor and profile the attendance at meetings in order to introduce measures to increase participation and address issues of representativeness (Stirling Council undateda: 18)

In 2005 the Stirling Assembly ran 'into the sand' when 'it almost fell in on itself' (B20 2008). After the early days attendances of 60 or more it 'drifted to 20 or so of the usual suspects coming again and again and community councils not liking it as they felt they fell across it' (B20 2008). In this sense, it lasted longer than the SCF but has to be considered, in retrospect, a failure.

Fife's deliberative democracy approach was different and involved a citizens jury. Fife's population was represented by 14 members of the public selected at random. They sat for four days hearing evidence from experts on economic regeneration, job creation and employment as well as local people. Under the guidance of council appointed moderators (the Institute of Public Policy Research and Opinion Leaders Research) the jurors could ask questions and discuss their views in groups.

The council argued that the benefits of a citizens jury was that it improved the value of civic participation by increasing the time for deliberation amongst citizens, involved general members of the public (rather than politically motivated groups) and allowed for representation of groups that would go unheard (Fife Council 1997b; A10 1997; A13 1997). Out of the 14 jurors, 13 indicated they would happily repeat the exercise. However, it was a rather expensive method of encouraging participation and the Council only said that recommendations could influence policy. The Fife exercise cost £13,000, 50 per cent of which was met by EU funding from a fund called the Community Capacity Building Project (Fife Council 1997b).

An officer in Highland Council outlined his scepticism to the whole idea of citizen juries:

Citizens juries shift raise all sorts of issues about accountability. Which people do you select? How so you select them? What mandate do they have? At the end of the day the Highland councillor has to go to the ballot and can be kicked out if the people don't like what they have to offer but the same thing doesn't necessarily apply to these types of bodies. (C2 1997)

A counter argument was put forward by A10 in Fife – 'they are a useful "halfway house" between the uninformed or uninterested majority with a

small minority of activists who dominate decision-making' (A10 1997). Reflecting on the experience A7 argued in 2008, 'The problem with juries is that they are resource intensive and you are left asking the question, 'so what?' As a method of community engagement, you've only really engaged those you've spent three days with. It didn't really have any resonance beyond that'.

An important point to emphasise is that the new democratic devices such as the Stirling Assembly and citizen juries in Fife were seen as supplementary to the normal channels of democracy (i.e. parties and elections). The councillors interviewed still talked the traditional language of representative democracy – they were there to fulfil the Labour manifesto on which they were elected (B2 1997, B19 1997). Officers frequently made reference to the manifestos of the parties running the administrations (B20 1997, C4 1997).

It should also be acknowledged that political participation exercises tend to throw up a pluralistic variety of competing, not always reconcilable, viewpoints. As McConnell (2004: 128) argues:

The outcomes of public participation exercises are 'political footballs' to be fought over by councillors, officials, party groups and local people. Each set of interests will tend to interpret and use results as they see fit. No group wants public participation to destabilise its own power base.

Another deliberative democracy project worth noting was Fife Council's rather grandly titled (but short-lived) 'Citizenship Commission' created in 1996 to promote representative and participatory democracy in Fife. The Citizenship Commission had four key objectives:

- Improving the quality and co-ordination of approaches to involving the public in shaping council services
- Encouraging and developing active citizenship
- Reviewing Fife Council's democratic structures and members' support needs
- Influencing the national democracy debate (Fife Council undated^a: 10)

The Citizenship Commission had a remit to promote and encourage good practice on participation within services, committees and developing the role of elected members; as well as the development of citizenship with young people and adults. It was also designed to monitor and improve the Council's performance in terms of its relationship with users and citizens in the shaping of council services, and to influence government and public bodies in relation to public involvement and accountability. The Citizenship Commission was not involved in the day-to-day issues of service provision.

The project was short-lived – it had been shelved by 1997 before the first round of fieldwork had been completed. In 1997, A20 referred to it as 'a damp squib', whilst A5 referred to a 'lack of political will' to carry the project and invest finance and staff time to get it off the ground. Reflecting on the Commission experience in 2008, A7 suggested that it was initiated as a way of talking to people about the best way that engagement could be taken forward by the council and that after 'initial energy' it 'fizzled out'.

Conclusion

Much of the evidence collected in fieldwork in the three councils does not identify the enhancement of democracy as the primary motivation for reform within the councils. Of the three councils, Stirling, placed most emphasis on democratic initiative with Highland the least. However, even the success of Stirling's reforms would have to be classified as limited. Amongst the factors

inhibiting change were apathetic populations with no culture of participation; political parties; alternative power bases (e.g. councillors, community councils) and officers schooled in the existing traditions of local government with little experience of the new mechanisms of democratic renewal and reform.

As in previous chapters conclusions can be drawn with reference to the hypotheses outlined in the relevant 'theory' chapter of the thesis.

- New democratic codes of accountability to supplement, or even displace, traditional bureaucratic and professional codes became more relevant to understanding local political processes.

In reviewing Fife, Highland and Stirling's schemes of decentralisation it would be hard to disagree with Hill's broad judgement about the schemes across the UK in general:

Decentralisation has been more successful in promoting access, information and influence and in allowing greater management discretion to officers, than in devolving political control over decision-making. (2000: 112)

This reflects an ambiguity, about the place of decentralisation and the 'model' of democracy it is congruent with – is it really a model of participatory democracy or is it merely consultation within a traditional framework of representative democracy? In Blaug's (2002) terminology it is a 'democratic engineering' model, whereby decentralisation exercises were seen as external and supplementary to the real democratic processes (association with councillors and elections) within the council.

None of the councils was successful in entrenching participatory mechanisms and none of them has come near to challenging the status of the traditional representative mechanisms as the key sources of legitimisation. Most of the new mechanisms are focused upon consultation, improving transparency and more effective information transmission. In Highland, C5 referred to 'a general increase in expectations of accountability, we're much closer to customers now, and culturally there is an expectation that those who deliver are very, very accessible'.

The conclusion that has to be drawn in this research, is that in Fife, Highland and Stirling their decentralisation schemes are essentially 'add ons' to the traditional framework of representative democracy. The initial decentralisation schemes, in Highland and Fife in particular, were primarily implemented for functional and managerial, rather than democratic, purposes. They were incremental in the sense that they were built on pre-existing district council structures.

However, if one is to fully understand the decentralisation schemes initiated in each council one has consider their administrative, managerial *and* democratic dimensions. Much of the writing concerning local government, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s was rather uni-dimensional, concentrating almost exclusively on managerial change. This is understandable as the agenda of change of both the Thatcher and Major governments was one dominated by managerial concerns. As Stoker (2004: 43) has argued, 'the Conservatives ... concentrated on a largely consumerist and managerial agenda they largely neglected the political organization of local government and the fabric of local democracy'.

In summary, there is little evidence of new democratic modes of accountability displacing traditional ones. Indeed the new democratic initiatives were often viewed in the case study councils as tangential to well established democratic and political processes.

- New mechanisms of democratic engagement which emphasise participation and deliberation impact on local political processes.

As stated previously the extent to which new democratic processes impacted on the substantive policymaking processes of each council was negligible. In essence they fed into policymaking processes but traditional committee deliberative, party political and pluralistic consultation processes remained the key inputs that explained the outcome of local politics.

Each of the three councils did, to varying degrees, offer new opportunities for citizens to participate in local politics. However, in terms of public policymaking in almost every instance the opportunities presented were peripheral and at the margins of what could be termed mainstream policy processes. It was not always clear to what extent the engagement of citizens was going to impact on the ultimate outcome of the policy process.

McConnell (2004: 102) speaks of party groups 'slipping through the net' of the UK Government's recent modernisation programme. A similar case could be made for the fact that political parties seem to evade each perspective outlined here. There is undoubtedly a dichotomy between increasing party politicisation of Scottish local government and decreasingly political party membership (cf. Pratchett 2004b: 222). However, parties since the 1970s have become ever increasingly important institutions in understanding politics within Scottish local authorities. Surprisingly there has been little, if any,

research into local party political processes which have encouraged engagement with local democratic processes.

As already noted, the democratic reforms instigated by each council were, on the whole not particularly successful. There may be something therefore in Pratchett's (2004b: 215) suggestion that the institutions of local politics have become complex and arcane creating a barrier to the participation of the general public in local political processes.

- A belief in the utility of democratic processes is likely to be evident amongst leading council officers

A belief in the utility of democratic process was undoubtedly evident, almost universally, amongst the officers interviewed. However, many emphasised that councillors who had established ties with their communities believed these to be more important than new democratic mechanisms. While council officers may pay lip-service to notions of democratic renewal their power base remains largely unchallenged. As McConnell (2004: 98) argues - citing Kingdom's (1991: 303) summary of the basis of officer power – permanence, expertise, numbers, social status, ability to control the flow of information, and 'there is a case for suggesting that modern methods of public participation are to a large extent 'cosmetic''(2004: 134).

There is considerable evidence from the case studies that officers remain rooted in a conception of local democratic processes along traditional lines i.e. representative democracy is achieved through the periodic election of councillors and internal democratic structures, and that officers are accountable to the elected members. The vast majority of officers interviewed

made reference to this conception of local democracy. There was less than a universal commitment to the introduction of new democratic schemes.

- Local democracy as expressed through the ballot box, elected council chamber and committees is not viewed as the sole democratic basis of the council.

It was striking that all three of the case study councils wanted to be seen as more democratic and to have an outward focus. Each one was engaged in initiatives designed to make the council more democratic. Often these initiatives stretched far beyond the traditional notions of public accountability with more emphasis on openness, transparency, representation, participation and deliberation. At face level, particularly in Stirling, the language of reform emphasised 'active citizenship' reflecting the council's 'hope that representative democracy can be strengthened by taking account of the informed views of its citizens' (Councillor McChord (Leader), in Stirling Council undated^a). However, as noted previously, these aspirations were largely unrealised.

In analysing democratic initiatives attention is drawn to the contingent nature of local government in Scotland. The actuality of government and decision-making is dependent upon democratic processes (the NPM analysis, by neglect, overlooks the importance of these processes in legitimising the actuality and process of local government). However, it is the traditional model of representative democracy rather than the new channels of democracy which remain the crucial legitimating mechanisms.

- The council views one of its primary roles as engagement with its local community and the creation of a vibrant civil society in its area.

In the post-war period the increasing centralisation of standards and finance has meant a conception of local government has developed which emphasises the delivery of services to centrally prescribed levels. This has reinforced a perception of local councils as the geographically and functionally dispersed arms of central government. There is no acknowledgement of councils as *democratic* institutions in their own right. In this context it is perhaps not surprising that the successive UK governments have been able to pass laws and regulations usurping and de-limiting the powers of local councils.

In the mid 1990s it was the recognition of this trend by councils such as Stirling which led them down the path of trying to accentuate the democratic dimension of governance in their locality. Institutions like the Stirling Assembly were a manifestation of the council trying to do things differently and to extend democracy beyond its traditional channels.

However, overall when set against Hill's (2000: 122) continuum from 'consultation to collaboration, from tokenism to activism', it is difficult to argue against the notion that – despite their best efforts – the efforts of each council were closer to the former consultation/tokenism end of the continuum.

There has been an undoubtedly sporadic burst of local political vibrancy. As Pratchett (2004b: 213) noted, citizen attention has shifted from ideologically based policies towards single issue causes. In each of the case study councils there was evidence of issues such as planning applications and developments, local school, care home, office, leisure centre closure resulting in considerable political activism. However, often this political engagement was not of the type envisaged as necessarily useful and whether such sporadic outbursts amount to 'a vibrant civil society' is dubious.

Overall, the democratic innovations were largely symbolic and often tangential to the key political and administrative policymaking procedures in each council. In terms of the operation of each council, bureaucratic and professional chains of accountability still retained significant relevance – there was little sense in which they were displaced by new codes of accountability.

Chapter 10: Local Governance in the Three Councils

As noted in chapter 6, the local governance perspective which emerged in the 1990s is the newest of the perspectives under scrutiny. As indicated previously, 'local governance' moves the focus away from the actors or institutions of local government to an emphasis on wider civic society and its role in service provision. In fieldwork officers in Fife, Stirling and Highland councils were questioned regarding their changing roles vis-à-vis their communities and external operating environment. It is important to note that what is reported and analysed here are the perceptions of council officers of the changing operations of councils. The bulk of the data collected was from actors *internal* to the council. Only in Highland, where community councillors were interviewed, do external perspectives inform the analysis.

Nevertheless, the data collected, allow for an assessment to be made of the utility and relevance of this new analytical perspective (at least from the perspective of council officers). The chapter proceeds by reporting the data collected under the sub-headings outlined in chapter 6:

- The new language of governance
- Non-state institutional actors
- Networks/partnerships
- Interdependency

This will be followed, in the concluding section, with consideration of the hypotheses set out at the end of chapter six:

- A differentiated local polity characterised by functional and institutional specialisation and the fragmentation of policies and politics emerged in each council area.
- Actors beyond the institutional boundaries of local government are becoming more important actors in delivery, operation and management of local public services.

- Networks and partnerships became more important arenas for local politics and policymaking with interdependent relationships becoming the norm in all policy areas.
- Fragmentation erodes local government accountability because institutional complexity obscures who is accountable to whom and for what.
- In responding to the changed environment local councils use new regulatory tools to steer and guide local policymaking in their chosen direction.

The New Language of Governance

There is evidence in two (Stirling and Fife) of the three councils that the new language of governance was adopted in corporate policy documentation and by some of the council's more senior officers. For example, Fife Council emphasised:

It is important ... that the council does not focus solely on the services that it provides. Increasingly people are faced with an array of service providers, which can mean having to cut through a mass of bureaucracy in approaching different organisations. (Fife Council, undated*a*: 12)

One of the reasons Fife Council argued that decentralisation was necessary was closely related to its conception of its governance arrangements:

Increasingly local government is one of a number of providers of public services and resources. As a democratically-elected body and the major provider of services, local government has the key role to play in representing communities and in ensuring that resources and services are co-ordinated and targeted to meet agreed priorities and

need. Through working in partnership with communities and other service providers at a local level, decentralisation is critical to the task of targeting resources, improving access to opportunities and to addressing poverty and disadvantage. (Fife Council, undateda: 3)

The Fife Council locality managers were responsible for working with different services, improving information and access and working with the local community and other agencies. As noted previously, these locality managers had a younger age profile than local council officers in similar grades in other services. The language of joint working, collaboration and networks was one they were comfortable in adopting. This is of course no surprise given the aims and objectives of the locality management scheme.

However, one is struck by the internal focus of the locality management scheme. A Fife Council (1997a) *Introduction to the Local Office Network* leaflet, emphasises the locality manager's role as 'facilitating cross-service working and involving individuals and groups within the locality'. Locality managers had 'operational responsibility for service delivery' in partnership with 'other Services', not external operators. At least according to the Council's own documentation, it would appear that the focus of the locality managers was predominantly 'in-house'.

The internal focus is even more apparent in the job descriptions posts below locality managers:

- 'Council service officers will spend a significant proportion of their time on the counter dealing with the full range of Council services delivered within offices'.
- 'Council Services Assistant will provide clerical support'.
- Council Services Team Leader will play 'a role in developing and maintaining consistent office procedures'. (Fife Council 1996a)

All of these roles seem to be consistent with what could be termed the classical local council bureaucrat function.

In Stirling there was some evidence of the new language of governance. The Council declared that:

The Council is a partnership of 22 Councillors, 3,500 employees, local organisations of all kinds, 2,500 businesses and above all, our 83,000 local people. (Corrie McChord, Council Leader in Stirling Council, undated^a)

In addition Stirling was part of the original Joint Community Planning Working Group set up by the Secretary of State for Scotland and COSLA in 1997. The remit of this group was:

To study existing best practice in Councils' partnerships with other bodies (including the public sector, the voluntary sector and the private sector) in planning, providing for and promoting the economic, social and environmental well-being of the communities they serve. (Scottish Office cited in Stirling Council, undated^a)

And:

Having regard to the Councils' status as the focus of democratically elected leadership of their areas, to consider how to develop their role in working together with other bodies to plan for, promote and meet the needs of their communities, including possibilities which would need legislation for their implementation. (Scottish Office cited in Stirling Council, undated^a)

However, the leadership of Stirling Council continued to express its faith in the notion of a public sector ethos informing its operations. For official B20, the public sector ethos is still 'totally relevant'. He emphasised the consistency and continuity engendered by public provision:

I think all too often you will specify what you are looking for from outside you will get a service delivered to that, there will be a desire from the company who is delivering it to make sure that it is dealt with as efficiently as possible and what you possibly lose over a period of time is that customer focus, but more importantly than the customer focus, the connectivity that takes place across the different services, and if you have got an external company delivering there won't be that sort of relationship and understanding over a longer period of time about what needs to be done. (B20 2008)

B20 then went on to cite the example of a care package and how a commercial company will provide one for six months without regard for assessing potential future needs, whereas the in-house social work operation will be continually assessing a person. It will be recognised if a person is deteriorating and that perhaps a homecare package will be insufficient in future weeks and months. When that occurs the extended family would be brought into discussion to assess whether residential care may be more suitable to the changing needs of this individual. He suggested that when external companies are involved 'you don't always get that feedback, what they are doing is delivering a service for you and not looking at the whole person' (B20 2008). In other words with a directly provided service it is recognised that care packages often need to change and that very often the care assessments are better done alongside the delivery of services. For example, in the case of residential care a care commission inspection may perhaps find something that is going wrong but, had there been ongoing assessment and regular contact, service could be reviewed and adjusted on an ongoing basis. For him if there was one institution (i.e. the council) carrying out delivery, rather than an external provider, then – as happened in the past – 'assessment and service delivery talk to each other a lot more than perhaps they do when you're an external provider' (B20 2008).

In Highland what was noticeable was the absence of explicit use of the language of governance. As one officer observed in 2008:

In the first five years post-reorganisation there was minimal contact with other public agencies in the Highlands. We did externalise our IT services but that was more to do with geography and recruitment than actual choice. (A4 2008)

It was acknowledged that joint working was extended through community planning post-2000, but it 'took a while to grow' (A5 2008).

Overall while the language of governance was undoubtedly evident in corporate policy documentation and in the observations of some officers, it was clear that the councils still retained a lingering preference for the direct provision of council services. When joint working was discussed it was more often joint working with other public sector partners that was highlighted. The language of governance has undoubtedly penetrated Scottish local councils but, it would appear, not to the extent that the governance thesis may suggest.

Non-state institutional actors

One of the other features of the governance literature is the emphasis on the increasing importance of non-state institutional actors in local politics. However, in all three local authority areas the council remained the most important institution in understanding local politics and service delivery. This is not to say that non-council institutions were not involved in key aspects of service delivery, but for the most part it was the council which remained the primary institution.

However, in all three council examples were cited of non-institutional actors becoming involved in service delivery. For example, as previously noted, in Highland the council's in-house IT service had experienced so many problems in the recruitment and retention of staff that a strategic decision had been taken to outsource this service to the private sector. Another example cited in Highland was the Inverness Arts and Leisure Committee giving the Inverness Area Sports Council £45,000 to distribute as it wished. This reflected an acknowledgement by the Council that this body, with local knowledge and expertise, was more equipped to ensure that the money was spent wisely than the more remote council. In such a vast geographical area with such a dispersed population this is not altogether surprising. The community councillors and members of the voluntary sector interviewed in 1997 were all in favour of this type of initiative, indeed the main complaint was that the council was not going far enough down this route (C3 1997, C10 1997).

In Fife much emphasis was placed on the links between the Council, Fife Chamber of Commerce and the local private sector when issues of economic development and planning were discussed. However, such links were hardly new. Studies of the power dynamics in local councils in the 1970s consistently highlighted the close links between council elites and local business (e.g. Cockburn 1977; Saunders 1979). A decade ago, Harding's (1999) study of Edinburgh and Manchester came to similar conclusions. Non-governmental institutional actors have always been involved with councils - policy initiatives such as CCT, PFI/PPP, Best Value, regeneration partnerships have brought them into sharper focus and enhanced their formalised status. In 2008 official A7 suggested that the commercial influence had increased in Fife post-reorganisation.

However, he also expressed disappointment because he didn't think 'the locality management side of things (had) patrolled the same beat, the degree of joint working we would have hoped and our ambition in 1995 has not materialised' (A7 2008). He also noted that the number of Fife Council employees had actually grown since reorganisation – mainly in response to national policy initiatives. The expansion of nursery care to three year olds, extra demand in social care, more police on the street all had staffing implications. He did suggest however that the vertical layers of management had been reduced with fewer deputies and assistant directors in services.

Fife Council openly declared its view 'that it is not the best judge of what constitutes of quality service' (Fife Council, undated^a: 12). Accordingly it was committed to consulting and involving users of services in determining service standards. This, it argued, was crucial to ensuring the responsiveness of services. It was also committed to working with other public sector agencies, and argued:

The Council has done a great deal to improve partnership working between different organisations in Fife, such as the Health Board, training providers, the voluntary sector, housing agencies and Fife Enterprise, to ensure that we are not working in isolation and are able to come together and plan services. (Fife Council, undated^a: 12)

In Stirling, it was suggested that the extent of involvement of non-state institutional actors had actually gone into reverse. B20 outlined in 2008 that in some areas the Council had commissioned external providers but these areas were 'coming back in'. He cited the example of vehicle fleet maintenance which was put out to the company *Abro*, but it had not worked well and the contract was being brought back in. Other examples were care work which was put out but which he argued was provided better in-house. Stirling was

also making plans to reverse decades of policy and to start building council housing again. Overall, B20 suggested:

I think we remain open-minded but what we have realised is that sometimes when you go out to have those partnerships to deliver services they don't give you everything that you are wanting. So we are not, you know, we don't want this monopoly provision of services from the council but what we found over the experience of the last 12 years, actually sometimes that's the best way of doing it. But sometimes you need to put it out in order to shake up what you're doing internally so that it can come back in with the efficiencies that are built in, so I think you have constantly got to review this. But I wouldn't sense that we are putting more and more out. (B20)

B14 also raised the point that the council had to consider the wider impact of contracting out functions:

contracting out can create as many problems as it solves, it may improve internal organisational accountability but weaken political and external accountability, using contract staff may be more efficient but it can also undermine staff morale and motivation. (B14 1997)

However, she was also clear about the need for joint working:

As a council we need to work closely with the NHS because community services is part of care in the community and impacts on the quality of peoples lives – libraries, arts, culture, sport are important parts of that. (B14 1997)

Overall the most striking feature in the three councils was the continuing scale of public bureaucracy and belief in what could be termed public sector ethos. When asked to place Stirling Council on a continuum, where zero = contracted private provision and 10 = direct public provision, B20 responded:

I think I would place us closer to direct services but not as close as we were in 1996. We moved away from it after 1996 but we are moving back the way now due to some difficult experiences with external providers. Services like school catering, vehicle maintenance, aspects of community care are actually going back to direct services. So you know on a scale of ten I would say we are probably seven or eight, whereas at one stage we were leaning into six. (B20 2008)

It would appear that when placed against the evidence of Scottish local government, the extent of non-state institutional involvement in local public service delivery is actually much smaller in scale than the governance thesis appears to suggest. The dispersal of local government power outwards may be radically overstated.

Networks/Partnerships

The increased existence of networks and partnerships as vehicles through which to deliver local public services has become something of a statement of academic orthodoxy in recent years. Interdependent relations between councils and other organisations are deemed to have become the norm in 'modern' approaches to local public service delivery. The first thing to say is that there was undoubtedly evidence of such relationships existing in all three case study councils. However, the evidence suggests that interdependent networks are by no means the key unit of analysis in understanding local governance in Scotland.

The continued dominance of professionals and their relevant associations means that much expertise in local authority service delivery remains 'in-house'. Policymaking and public service delivery in many council areas is

technical; and professionals see this as a useful barrier, in some instances, to widening the policymaking arena. In other words, policymaking in some areas remains relatively closed to external scrutiny and transparency and remains confined within the relatively closed bureaucratised world of the council.

The 1997 Labour Party manifesto included a commitment that the new Labour Government, 'will place on Councils a duty to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. They should work in partnership with local people, local businesses and local voluntary organisations. They will have the powers necessary to develop these partnerships'. This was taken on board by the then Scottish Office which established a Community Planning Steering Group made up of representatives of key public agencies within the areas. Both Highland and Stirling were represented on the COSLA/Scottish Office Joint Working Group which was charged with advancing the concept of community planning. The Scottish Office then selected five Scottish councils as 'pathfinders' asking each to prepare a draft Community Plan by August 1998 (Stirling Council was one of these councils). This section will outline details of each council's experience of community planning.

In Highland, as noted above, the most notable partnership the Council developed was with the commercial company that provided its IT services. It was also noted that the rural nature of Highland often compelled it to look at external providers. As one officer noted, 'In terms of service delivery Highland is increasingly getting in to partnership with other organisations particularly for things like care in the community' (C14 1997). In 2008 the two

main areas in which the council liaised was with NHS bodies was over joint delivery of services. According to C4:

On the children's side it is really positive well developed we get good inspections, the community care side is completely different its almost like its underdeveloped – it's the same partners but on one side we have 'jaggy' conversations with health, on the other we don't! (C4 2008)

C5 indicated that around the children's agenda Highland Council:

Was always a good bit further on because of the nature of the area – operationally good from early, early on. Why? Because nobody bothers on the ground if you are health, social work or education but once you get up into middle management you get all the fights about, who's going pay for the taxi to get this kid to the school etc? (C5 2008)

In Highland the anecdotal evidence was that the nature of the area meant that it was a good bit further on around the children's agenda because operational council employees on the ground were focused on the needs of the child and family not their own particular corporate silos.

Anther example of partnership in Highland was the Community Planning inspired, 'Well Being Alliance' which involved the chief executives of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, NHS and Police. However, official A4 indicated that it was going to be abolished because of dissatisfaction with the 'brand' (Well Being Alliance). His own view was that three or four meetings a year was not a terribly effective means of taking strategic policy initiatives forward:

it can produce 'strategyism', plans, policies all you like but its what you do with them and I think it's strong on them but weak on implementation would by my analysis. (C4 2008)

Having said that, the officers in Highland did cite what they considered to be good examples of joint working. These included the 'really successful' 2007 Year of Highland culture and other big investments totalling £14M which involved the Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise working together to gain central government funding initiatives. Also the Council had worked closely with partners including the NHS, Police and Enterprise and produced a 100 page Single Outcome Agreement (Highland Council 2008) which A4 claimed 'is seen as one of best in Scotland' by the Scottish Government.

However both C4 and C5 in 2008 were keen to emphasise some of the difficulties of joint working:

We are quite keen what we don't do is get high level conversations, at strategic level there is discussion, at local level there are things going on but there is this gap in the middle and there's always the danger that middle managers don't particularly want to do things – my frustration in the past nine months is to make sure it goes right through the organisation – I've had some really difficult conversations with the NHS, big 'rammys' about what we're doing and how we're doing it but I actually think that that is paying dividends. (C4 2008)

It was interesting that C4 was defensive of his (self proclaimed) 'traditional structure' and attitude to the public sector: 'My own view is it's not really about the structures. It's about how people want to work and their attitudes. We're interested in the wider public sector in the Highlands. We have a budget of £565M and 12,500 staff - our structure is not unreasonable. The public sector, of which we are a large part, remains a very significant part of the Highland economy'.

In Fife, A7 suggested that:

You could find some evidence in Fife of a move from bureaucratic structures to flatter ones, but it doesn't feel like a massive sea-change to be honest. I think the models are still generally bureaucratic models of management.

He did, however, refer to a 'change in culture' over the period of time where there was much more joint working in evidence between services, 'more corporacy' within the organisation.

In terms of commercial sector influence, A7 suggested that this was most prevalent in Commercial Services. He suggested 'If you were calling a spade a spade at reorganisation, he (the Director of Commercial Services) was director of ex-CCT services. That was the focus'. Public-private partnerships, it was suggested, 'has changed the landscape and people's mindsets. PPP is significant in schools – secondary and primary in three phases, and street lighting'. A7 argued that what PPP had done in Fife was to bring issues of support provision to the fore, and reinforce the focus of people within those buildings: 'they are there to provide a service. It starts to separate and provide a new mentality in people's minds ... what they're really about'. He suggested that he had detected a 'definite change' in mentality with employees much less wedded to the 'in-house option'. However, he did concede that in Best Value reviews 'there (was) still a tendency a bias towards in-house and improving the in-house situation'. This was noted in Stirling also, officers in both councils put it down to personal psychology more than political ideology – 'it is difficult for an individual to conduct a best value and argue for an option which involves his or her job being outsourced' (B20 2008).

In Fife illustrations of joint working were in 'the shared services agenda' of community planning and single outcome agreements (SOAs). SOAs are the new post-2007 Scottish Government initiative designed to engender a focus on public policy outcomes between councils and their community planning partners. SOAs are an attempt to engender notions of 'joint accountability' (see COSLA 2008). They are part of a wider concordat agreement between the Scottish Government and COSLA (2007). Official A7 suggested the policy structures surrounding SOAs and the Fife Economic Forum were part of a changed mind-set with people being less concerned about the 'how', and with barriers breaking down and a sharper focus on outcomes. Improving public policy outcomes was the 'theory' behind such initiatives, with the institutions involved (including local councils) having no particular regard for the processes whereby this objective could be achieved.

Another significant partnership cited was 'Community Safety' with Fife police. The whole top floor of the headquarters of Scottish Enterprise had a community safety team of 80 drawn from the council, the police, housing bodies, as well as environmental nuisance and drug and alcohol teams all under a single management structure. Another example was Development Services working in partnership with Scottish Enterprise Fife in the Fife Energy Park project.

The point was made that Fife, like Highland Council benefited when engaged in community planning from having other public sector organisations with congruent borders. This advantage of co-terminosity did not apply in Stirling where there was a complex pattern of boundaries.

The emphasis according to Douglas Sinclair, the chief executive of COSLA in 1997 during the initial stage of fieldwork, was that community planning

should be seen as 'collaborative and participative' by councils and not to be threatening to their role. Fife Council in 1997 emphasised that it envisaged community planning, building on already established relations with, for example, Fife Enterprise, Fife Health Board, Fife Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the voluntary sector. There were also the joint working arrangements associated with Fife Agenda 21 (a sustainable environment initiative) and the Fife Round Table (the business community). The Council thus argued it already had a well-established framework for the community planning approach, with partnership 'more advanced ... than is generally the case' (Fife Council 1997b: 2).

In 1997 Fife also envisaged community planning as an opportunity to establish a clear framework within which a 'number of ongoing and developing initiatives can be progressed in a purposeful and interrelated way. These include proposals for a Fife Economic Forum/Business Council, and the advancement of a number of joint initiatives currently being addressed by working groups involving the Council, other agencies, the voluntary sector and the general public' (Fife Council 1997b: 3). It openly embraced community planning as a 'sound and worthwhile approach ... in tune with the principles of consultation and partnership which are embedded in the Council's Aims and Values and an approach which provides a basis from which to achieve not only co-ordination of action but also efficiency in the delivery of services' (Fife Council 1997b: 3).

The Fife Local Office review (see Fife Council 1996a, 1996b, 1996c) highlighted support amongst the public and council staff for the Council to share facilities with organisations such as the health board, Scottish Homes, housing associations, the Post Office, benefits agencies and Citizens Advice. However, it did also highlight that care had to be taken to avoid separate

arrangements for each locality resulting in haphazard connections and inconsistency in the treatment of enquiries across Fife. In 2008 one official noted that community planning had codified and formalised and 'probably advanced' pre-existing joint working practices (A7 2008).

In 1997 Stirling Council also pointed towards joint working with other agencies in statutory planning for a Children's Plan 'a corporate multi-agency plan' (Stirling Council, undated^a). The council's Community Care/Housing Plan involved collaboration with Scottish Homes and Forth Valley Health Board. Moreover, the Stirling Partnership for Urban Regeneration (SPUR) was a multi-agency partnership of the council, Forth Valley Health Board, Central Scotland Police, Stirling Voluntary Association, the private sector and the local regeneration groups in the Raploch, Top of the Town, Cornton, Cultenhove, Cowie, Fallin, Plean and Throsh areas of Stirling. The council was also involved in a Rural Stirling Partnership with Forth Valley Enterprise, Scottish National Heritage and local businessmen, including farmers (see Stirling Community Plan 1999).

In 2008 official B20 expressed an 'open mind' about the public or private procurement of services: 'we have taken a view that we don't need to provide all the services ourselves and in certain areas we provide it by external providers so be it'. He cited the example of economic development and how the council set up a joint venture with a company, Scarborough, to deliver business development. Two new business parks and a shopping centre expansion were created by going down this route. He noted how 'as a consequence of that Stirling has moved from 1995 being a place that exported labour to Glasgow, Edinburgh and Grangemouth in particular to an area that has now got 4500 net inflow of people to the jobs in Stirling over the period'. Stirling had been transformed into 'an economic hot spot'. However, in

contrast an example of a failed partnership cited was that with Scottish Enterprise which had 'done done very little for Stirling over the last 13/14 years'. The only worthwhile initiative where they had been involved was 'the Top of the Town/Castle' initiative that finished about 1997:

So our economic growth since 1996 is almost entirely down to the efforts of the council, Scottish Enterprise have not played a part in that and we are pretty pissed off at the moment, we have not been declared as part of the two city model. (B20 2008)

The 'two city model' was Scottish Enterprise's strategy for economic growth which centred on Edinburgh and Glasgow and the corridor in between (which Stirling was not part of). Overall, a vast array of networks and partnerships involved in strategy and public service delivery undoubtedly existed in all three councils. Moreover, central government initiatives – principally community planning – were given further encouragement for councils to go down this route. The openness and external orientation of councils with external agencies was a dominant theme in the fieldwork, particularly in Fife and Stirling.

Interdependency

Another theme of the governance literature is that these new networking and partnership arrangements mean that the primary role of councils is changing, with interdependent relationships becoming the norm in service areas. The area where this was most apparent was in the case of housing. In both Fife and Stirling particular emphasis was placed on the changing nature of housing as a council service. In Fife, one interviewee in 1997 commented on how, 'Housing used to be all about building and maintaining property now it is about solving disputes' (A13 1997). In Stirling an officer (B14 1997)

suggested that anti-social behaviour was becoming an important issue in the council and one that required the council housing service to work with other services and agencies to find solutions. It was noted that since the 1980s the role of the council had changed with other registered social landlords (RSLs) – primarily housing associations – growing as new building council housing withered to negligible amounts. Officers put this down to central government policy with a wider diversification of landlord a recurring national policy.

Fife Council, in particular – though its locality management scheme – had encouraged more adaptation and flexibility, on the part of its housing officers. During the initial stage of fieldwork in 1997-98 significant resistance was noted within the housing profession. It was suggested that: ‘the housing profession do not want to change because it needs to re-examine their jobs, it takes a “quantum leap” to move to multi-functional community service perspective.’ (A20 1997) It was one which another officer perceived the council’s housing service had not yet taken (A15 1997). Acknowledgement by housing officers that their working environments had changed would appear not to have taken place in this officer’s estimation. However, by 2008 generic working in local offices had become the norm and a ‘combination of experience, retirement and new recruitment has negated early resistance’ (A7 2008). Indeed the locality management scheme allowed locality managers to access devolved grants budgets and area regeneration/housing funds and to utilise local knowledge when assessing proposals.

In Fife there were also examples in each of the major towns (Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline, St Andrews) of different agencies coming together to improve the town centres. In the case of Dunfermline the example of the Carnegie Trust, town centre management, retailers, festival workers and arts groups

coming together to work on environmental improvement projects was cited. However, official A7 did acknowledge the Council 'getting it wrong' in the area of a nationally-driven initiative expanding nursery places for three year olds. The Council took the wrong approach as it decided to deliver much of the provision through schools, and it resulted in many pre-existing community playgroups (which had sprung up independently of the council) being disbanded. There was a denial of choice to parents and those pre-existing community playgroups were the very things that got people involved and helped to stimulate community activism.

Official A7 recalled post 1995-6 reorganisation 'frosty meetings' with the Health Board and a real sense of offensiveness on their part. In contrast, the relations in 2008 were 'night and day'. He suggested that it could have changed anyway but community planning brought a whole culture of joint working:

It has been relatively easy for us to get partners to sign-up for the single outcome agreement (a 2008 Scottish Government policy initiative) – going to Government by end of June simply because of community planning. The public sector in Fife has been able to advocate outwith its boundaries by virtue of fact we were working together (A7 2008).

All three councils also placed emphasis on partnerships with the voluntary sector, mainly in the social care sector. Official A7 reported that in Fife particular emphasis was placed on grant support to build organisations in the social economy to develop social enterprises. Both Community and Transport Services in Fife Council were big funders of voluntary services. In Stirling community-based initiatives in the form of Community Trusts managed local provision of services. Community Trusts were non-profit making vehicles set up and run by local people to run local businesses and projects. Official B20

cited examples of Community Trusts running a residential home in Killen, a post office in Gartmoor, youth groups and environmental projects such as the building of bridges. These Community Trusts were sometimes born out of the community councils in the areas – the latter lacking the statutory powers to do things, thus creating these new vehicles which could. They were, in the words of this officer, ‘the real success stories of community planning ... it is about understanding the locality and these schemes are born out of localities’ (B20 2008).

Community Planning emerged from a desire by local government and the Scottish Office to create a strategic structure to oversee existing partnerships with public sector bodies and to develop a shared strategic vision for an area and a statement of common purpose (Community Planning Working Group 1998 para.11). Councils were to work alongside police and fire services, health boards, local enterprise companies, housing associations, benefits agency and other bodies to create a more ‘joined up’ or holistic strategic framework for governing arrangements. The idea was that these bodies would invest their time and resources in a stable system which encouraged co-operation and co-ordination between local public service providers.

However, not all of the council officers interviewed were totally convinced by its merits. For example, one argued:

Community Planning feels a bit process-orientated I think we would have difficulty standing up on a public stage and answering the question ‘What’s community planning ever done for you?’. However, though it may be hard to demonstrate you’ve got to believe better planning will have impact on service delivery. (A7 2008)

In all three councils officers were keen to make the point that many of the processes which were 'badged' and labelled as community planning, were activities that were already taking place.

The other key policy initiative that had encouraged more interdependent relations between councils and other bodies, since the 1990s, was public-private partnerships (PPPs). Between 1997 and 2007 PPPs became increasingly common as the financing vehicle of choice for the renewal of Scotland's public sector infrastructure. PPPs are essentially Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects re-branded and re-labelled by the UK Labour Government. Typically PPP schemes involve a 20-35 year time-period during which a commercial company or consortium undertakes to design, build, finance and operate and maintain a project (e.g. school) in return for an annual lease payment from a public sector partner (e.g. local education authority). These are often referred to as DBFO schemes. The key argument in favour is that PPP allows the local council to focus on strategic priorities and policies leaving operational tasks such as facilities management to its commercial partner. This allows the council to plan and budget more effectively as long-term contracts pass significant ongoing maintenance contracts to the private sector. Risk associated with the ownership of assets is transferred to a commercial partner or consortium.

As noted above, Highland Council was one of the first to become involved in such a partnership when it outsourced its Information Technology (IT) function because of local personnel recruitment and skill shortages. The Council also developed PPPs in Education, with programmes for primary and secondary schools. According to C5 in 2008 they had 'worked well, with high quality product delivered on time'. He did admit, however, that there were:

issues about how we pay for PPP over a prolonged period of time, but in comparative terms the costings have been good. Everything has been very well managed by the private partner and community liason has been excellent. The standard of finish is very good, it has been really successful. (C5 2008)

Interestingly, however, a plan to include the commercial sector in the running of care homes in the Highlands had been reversed by the incoming 2007 elected administration. As C5 noted:

If you said 'what's the prognosis of the future?' I think its probably we can do it ourselves, it will be interesting to see what the new administration will want to. The Care Homes partnership project was overturned, they want us to procure the five care homes ourselves and run them ourselves which is pretty much in response to a public campaign which is interesting. (C5 2008)

In Stirling, official B20 emphasised his council's belief in 'the mixed economy' – 'we put out some engineering and design, property but its what *we* want to do'. He noted that the Council's schools PPP phase one and two were different. In phase two they decided not to include catering in the schools facilities management partnership arrangement due to new Scottish Government national direction on healthy eating and fitness; only cleaning and facilities management was outsourced to the private partner.

Officers from each of the three councils emphasised that interdependent relations were *not* necessarily the norm. For A7 in Fife:

that was probably an over statement in some areas. It is generally true but there are some instances of services not sufficiently outward looking. For example, education services did not work well enough with employers and economic forum with regard to skills. Education has historically been a bit insular'. Although the further education sector were represented on Fife Partnership, and St Andrews

University played a role in Fife Council Management Development and knowledge sharing, linkages between the secondary school sector and the wider economy were described as 'underdeveloped'. (A7 2008)

In Highland, when questioned on interdependent relations, both C4 and C5 emphasised relations with other public (rather than private) sector bodies. C4 noted some joint council/tourism posts, though these were only 'less than a handful'. He also noted open dialogue with the NHS over care home projects with one significant planned project in Granton on Spey which would incorporate a new hospital facility, new care home and GP practice all in the same site. In Education C5 cited a jointly funded post which incorporated education, sport, culture and health responsibilities. Nonetheless, overall it was striking how the emphasis in Highland remained on joint working *within* the public sector.

Conclusion

The governance 'thesis' whilst undoubtedly of relevance in understanding changes which have taken place in local government in recent decades, remains less pronounced when set against the data gathered from the three case study councils. Much of the evidence collected actually contradicts notions that the traditional bureaucratised mode of public service delivery is in permanent decline. Whilst there is undoubted evidence of new forms of provision incorporating institutions beyond local government, local councils in Scotland appear to remain as the dominant partner in most of these arrangements.

- A differentiated local polity characterised by functional and institutional specialisation and the fragmentation of policies and politics emerges in each council area

Whilst the data gathered is primarily indicative that there are signs of movement in this direction as each service area does appear to be functionally distinct and separate from others. This is particularly true for education (which in each Council was the service area which consumed most of the council's budget) where the education directors appeared to enjoy a significant degree of autonomy from the corporate centre. However, although there were signs of a fragmentation of policymaking, each council still retained a significant corporate/strategic centre with mechanisms for oversight and direction. Phrases such as 'corporacy' and 'joined up government' were evident in interviews – the corporate centre of councils exists in order to facilitate the joint working of specialised services. Moreover, the extent to which 'institutional specialisation' existed outwith each council was not particularly extensive. To the extent that there was fragmentation of policymaking it was taking place *within* each council.

- Actors beyond the institutional boundaries of local government become more important actors in local governance.

As hinted at above, a tentative answer can be provided to this hypothesis. Yes, in each council actors beyond the institutional borders of the council played a role, but only incrementally. Moreover, the changes taking place were inconsistent across different services. The impact of non-governmental actors in service areas, such as corporate services and planning, appeared negligible. In other areas such as education, housing and social work there was undoubtedly an increase in non-state actors with reforms such as right-to-buy, the growth of housing associations and care in the community bringing new actors into local policymaking. However, most of the staff

involved in service provision in these areas remained directly employed by the council. This hypothesis would therefore be upheld in some service areas, but less so in others.

- Networks and partnerships became ever more important arenas for local politics and policymaking with interdependent relationships becoming the norm in all policy areas

Network and partnership arrangements, whilst not becoming the 'norm' in all policy areas, have undoubtedly increased post-reorganisation. Each council's external orientation has increased. However, possibly because of the continuing relevance (and political power) of professional associations, trade unions and the social democratic outlook of three of Scotland's four main political parties there remains a belief in the utility of direct public provision, which means this model of local government organisation remains a viable and relevant form in Scotland.

- Fragmentation erodes local government accountability because institutional complexity is obscuring who is accountable to whom and for what.

The answer to this hypothesis would have to be 'not proven'. Yes, new relationships are emerging however, official A7 in Fife probably summed up the feeling across all three councils when he stated:

Complexity, accountability and issues of clarity? How much of that resonates with the public I'm not so sure ... their view would be it's all the council anyway ... you cannot readily disentangle the council from a voluntary sector provider ... I'm not sure community planning has made things much more complex from the point of view of the consumer ... maybe from the point of view of a lot of managers. (A7 2008)

Officers in each council reported unease amongst a number of politicians about some joint working structures and how they produce governance issues about accountability of decision-making. However, that unease stemmed from delegating more power to officers, yet councillors in each council retained clear responsibility in relation to policy intervention and assessing performance. Overall, the issue of fragmentation of responsibility did not appear to be a major issue in any of the three councils.

- In responding to the changed environment local councils use new regulatory tools to steer and guide local policymaking in their chosen direction.

As noted above the emphasis since reorganisation has been on enhancing councillors' monitoring and performance role. Though one officer actually expressed a desire to lessen his council's use of regulatory tools:

Listen, it would be contradictory of me to increase regulation given that I think external inspections, regulations and audits are totally and utterly over the top for our services at the moment. I sat down and counted 27 or 28 different inspection organisations – we bounce along from one inspection to the next and it's not helpful. (B20 2008)

It was clear that the council officer did not conceive themselves to be utilising 'regulatory tools' (within his council). Often councils remained the commissioner, client and provider of services and, in this context, 'regulation' appears to these officers as simply part of (rather than separate from) the management task. Far from 'regulation' they conceived of themselves as carrying out conventional bureaucratic tasks such as oversight, audit, planning and straightforward line management.

In summary, the local governance thesis would have to be judged 'not proven' when set against the empirical data gleaned from Scotland's (peer judged) three most innovative local councils. Wilson and Stoker (2004: 250) suggested that Scotland 'may offer a different story' to the English picture painted around 'the demise of traditional local government' (2004: 248). It would appear that on the basis of interviews conducted for this thesis, Scotland does provide a 'different story'.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

This thesis has sought to describe, analyse and understand the changing nature of Scottish local government since the unitary councils were set up in 1996. In doing so it has utilised data collected during two research phases - 1996-98 and 2008 – from three councils: Fife, Highland and Stirling. Much of this data was collected from face-to-face interviews with senior officers from each council.

As outlined in chapter 1, the case studies were the three councils deemed most likely to be innovative by a straw poll of Scotland's new local authority chief executives in 1996. The three councils selected were those which came top; that is they were the councils most likely to be engaging in new managerial, democratic and governance practice. Thus the data collected is from the three councils deemed *most likely* to exhibit significant change.

The data (and focus of analysis) has predominantly been on the administrative side of each council's operation. In analysing the data gathered from these three councils the thesis has utilised four alternative analytical perspectives:

- Traditional Municipal.
- Managerial.
- Democratic.
- Governance.

These perspectives represent differing interpretations of how local government should be conceptualised and studied, and how it should be described. As noted in the introduction, the perspectives are not exclusive to each other – overlaps in particular between the managerial and governance perspectives have been noted.

The relativist philosophical starting point is that we all carry with us implicit frameworks of understanding through which we gather information. The knowledge we gather is shaped by our own implicit perspectives. By outlining assumptions and suppositions which form the basis of each perspective and assessing the merits of each against the body of empirical data collected, this study has sought to provide an overview and assessment of recent developments in Scottish local government.

Another point to be noted about these perspectives is that they often skim the fine line between being tools of description, understanding and explanation and being prescriptions for change in local government. Each perspective contains elements of both explanatory and normative theory. The perspectives are reflective of what Skocpol (2003) referred to as the 'double engagement' of social science – academic theories and methods which contribute towards 'real world' debates.

Chapter 2 introduced the research context in which the study was undertaken. In doing so it outlined the managerial and democratic reforms which sought to alter the landscape of local government in Scotland. It also outlined some of the key academic accounts of these changes such as Rhodes (1997) and Stoker (1999; 2000). It also elaborated further on each of the perspectives utilised:

- the traditional municipal perspective and its emphasis on the delivery of public services within a framework of political accountability;
- the NPM perspective's emphasis on the effective, efficient and economic delivery of public services;
- the democratic perspective's emphasis on the themes of representation, participation and deliberation;

- the governance perspective's emphasis on the broader network of public, voluntary and commercial institutions delivering local public services.

Chapter 2 also provided basic information for each of the case study councils. The three local authorities could be termed a reflective or purposeful sample of Scotland's 32 local councils. As noted in chapter 2, by choosing the three councils most likely to change, the thesis sets up the most stringent test possible of the null hypothesis that Scottish local government is marked by more continuity than change. This chapter also outlined the research methodology.

Chapters 3 to 6 set out four analytical frameworks in the study of local government. The first of these is the 'traditional municipal' perspective which consists of the inherited beliefs about the institutions and history of local government and how they continue to shape how local councils operate. These beliefs include the direct delivery of public services through a line management of accountable bureaucracy within departments, a political framework emphasising elections, councillors' policy mandates and political oversight via committee and administration via mutuality and professionalism.

Chapter 4 outlined the NPM perspective and its influence in understanding local government change in the 1980s and 1990s. The belief was examined that the traditional public ethos of local councils was being eroded by the introduction of private sector styles of management. The new managerial codes of accountability involved the decentralisation, devolution and disaggregation of council organisation. Part of the NPM perspective was a belief in the utility and portability of the management function and the

utilisation of markets and competition in how the council approaches its service provision role.

Chapter 5 outlined the local democracy perspective. It reflects a more 'localist' tradition with its emphasis on the pluralist, representative, deliberative and participatory aspects of local democracy. Local government is conceived as a political arena in which involvement and participation are crucial to its democratic purpose. Councils do not exist simply to deliver localised public services but have broader political purpose.

Chapter 6 moved the focus to a more contemporary perspective – that of local governance. This perspective emerged from the academic literature in the 1990s and has gained the status of contemporary orthodoxy. The governance perspective starts with the belief that Scottish local governance cannot be properly understood by limiting analysis to formal political institutions. The emphasis moves to the transformation of the environment in which local councils operate - with new alternative public service delivery mechanisms increasing in importance. This perspective suggests that a fundamental transformation has taken place in the way councils operate.

After outlining each perspective the thesis then moved on to examine each of them in light of the empirical data gained in the case study sites. At the end of each of the 'theory' chapters general hypotheses derived from each perspective were outlined – the empirical data was then utilised to 'test' each hypothesis. Chapters 7 to 10 reported this data.

Chapter 7 examined the continuing relevance of the municipal tradition, which was based on practice and underpinned the municipal perspective, as a framework for understanding Scottish local government. It suggested that it

remained useful in drawing attention to the continuing importance of inheritance and legacy in each of the case study councils. Each had the appearance of change – each was a new council with a new chief executive, corporate logo and organisational structures. However, under the surface there was much continuity. Whilst there were moves away from the direct delivery of public services through a line management of accountable bureaucracy, it still remained an important feature of all three councils.

Chapter 8 noted the influence of NPM ideas but the evidence from the three case study councils suggested that the influence on Scottish local government of these ideas has been diluted by the political and managerial leaderships of the councils, as well as by important stakeholders such as trade unions and professional associations. The aims of NPM - better managed and better quality public services - are of course shared by all councils, however, the practical measures associated with NPM were often not implemented. In particular, marketisation has not penetrated Scottish local government with the 'in-house' method of service delivery still often remaining the favoured option.

Chapter 9 examined the influence of the democratic perspective on reform within the three councils. Although aspirations were evident to create new democratic structures post-reorganisation the councils had very limited success in realising them. Apathetic populations, officers, councillors, community councils and the traditional routine of council operation nullified or significantly diluted any impact new democratic reforms could have. Democratic renewal initiatives were essentially tangential 'add ons' to the traditional existing framework of representative democracy in each council. Indeed some of the reforms could be labelled 'cosmetic' as they had little linkage with policymaking structures within the councils.

Chapter 10 examined the relevance of the governance perspective in each of the case study councils. Although the language of governance undoubtedly informed council documentation, its penetration into working practices was not as significant as the perspective would suggest. To the extent that there was fragmentation of policymaking and politics it was taking place as much *within* rather than outside the council. That said other organisations were becoming more relevant in some significant policy fields such as education, housing and social work with new disaggregated patterns of service delivery and partnership arrangements in place. Overall, whilst there was evidence supporting the governance thesis it was not conclusive and it would have to be judged 'not proven'.

The enduring relevance of the traditional municipal perspective

A key theme of this thesis has been the enduring relevance of the traditional municipal perspective to an understanding of Scottish local government. There are stable and recurring institutional structures which, because of their reliability and validity, have been retained with local council structures. As Hill asserted in 2000:

In Britain the legitimacy of local democratic institutions derives from philosophical and administrative traditions inherited from the nineteenth century. (Hill 2000: 122)

This thesis has emphasised the continuing importance of these traditions in Scottish local government.

However, in recent decades numerous reforms have led to a questioning of these traditions with new ideas about how local government should be organised appearing on the political agenda. This begs the question as to why local government is so susceptible to new ideas? Undoubtedly an answer to this question is the perception of failure in local government. As John convincingly argues:

When local government was a settled, if rather neglected, institution of British democracy, the lack of executive potency and legitimacy did not matter much. Local government had established its role as the administrator of the services of the welfare state. But the rapid political changes of the 1980s highlighted the failings of local democracy. (John 2004: 47)

Since the 1980s reforms have been invariably linked with overcoming the perceived 'failings' of councils. For example creating less hierarchical councils, making them more inclusive and participative (rather than exclusive), and more open collaborative, transparent and consultative (rather than closed and secretive). However, this study has demonstrated that the impact of these reforms has been over-stated.

It is for this reason that the argument has been advanced that recent developments should not be seen as constituting the need for a radical re-think in how Scottish local government is understood, explained and studied. Newer perspectives such as governance tend to overstate the degree of change, whereas the traditional framework of understanding retains much relevance. The bureaucratic mode of local governance has undoubtedly been re-cast, however its essential components remain in place namely direct public employment, public sector career structures and large scale administrative agencies. That said, the development of an increased

emphasis on regulatory activity has increased the ability of the Scottish Government to control the disaggregated structures of governance created by recent reforms.

Much recent analysis of local governance underplays local government's capacity to steer and control policy and is premature in predicting the end of the bureaucratic mode of local governance. For example Stoker argues:

A more fragmented system of local governance places aspects of local service formation and delivery (for example, through PFI contracts and fire authorities) beyond the direct control of local people. Whilst the activities of councillors in their local authority are once removed from the electorate, these wider areas of governance are twice removed. (2004: 118)

While this is true it must also be acknowledged that local councils - through new oversight, monitoring and regulatory activities - still retain a degree of control over service delivery. In Scotland the demise of traditional local government asserted by Wilson and Stoker (2004: 248) does not seem so readily apparent.

The conclusions drawn in this thesis tend to reflect those of McConnell who argues that, 'despite numerous changes in local authority decision-making structures and processes over the past 50 years or so, there is more continuity than we might think' (2004: 70-1). McConnell, in reviewing the then Scottish Executive's modernising local government programme, suggests:

who would argue against local authorities being 'modernised', transparent and accountable? On the other hand, the processes of reform bypass the enormous power of party groups. 'Missing the target' in this way may or may not be intentional. (McConnell 2004: 89)

In turn, however, the present research is also largely silent on the role of party groups in council policymaking process. It could thus too be accused of 'missing the target'. However, the target for this research was to assess the relevance of existing analytical frameworks for understanding local government. None of these 'hit this target' in any definitive way. It is not difficult therefore to concur with McConnell who argues:

changes to local decision-making structures may come and go, but the subterranean relationships between councillors, party groups and officers should be our real focus if we wish properly to understand who holds power over local decisions. (2004: 90)

McConnell's (2004) narrative of the development of Scottish local government identifies time periods encapsulated by the phrases 'tradition, corporatism, fragmentation and depoliticisation, and modernisation' (2004: 90).

Traditions tend to become embedded because they have proved to be durable and long lasting. It is easy to outline the benefits of better management, democracy and governance however, the implementation of changing practices to allow these benefits to become manifest is a separate and more difficult task in the context of traditional practices. No one would argue against better management, democracy and governance because in theory everyone is in favour of them. However, as highlighted in the case studies, in practice there are barriers and institutions (e.g. trade unions, professions, political parties) that mean their simple transplantation into pre-existing organisational structures is not straightforward.

Overall the story being told here is that reorganisation, and the reforms to political and organisational processes that accompanied it, far from being

a radical break from the past are best seen as exhibiting strong elements of continuity with traditional practices in local councils. Many of the elite officers interviewed for this thesis emphasised the usefulness of structures which developed through experience and evolution. The new councils evolved from pre-existing structures – their internal structures were different but not sufficiently so to represent a clean break from the past, indeed in many instances incremental change would be the most accurate description of new approaches.

At the level of ideas, change appears radical. However an understanding of existing institutions and ideas helps us understand why change is so incremental. In the three councils the impact of new ideas was diluted internally by political parties and their ‘time-served’ personnel (particularly the Scottish Labour Party in Fife and Stirling). Long established professional associations, community councils and voluntary sector interests also played a role in the dilution of these ideas in practice.

Probably the most significant event – the introduction of the single transferable vote electoral system in Scottish local elections (and the related retirement of many incumbent local councillors) – to have impacted on Scottish local council occurred in May 2007. This is likely to have more impact on the internal workings of local authorities than any reform examined in this thesis. The story outlined here is an evolutionary and incremental one, with significant elements of continuity that can be identified within local government. The local government reorganisation did not fundamentally alter the established trajectory of Scottish local government in the way STV may.

Prior to the May 2007 elections Scottish local government bore more than a passing resemblance to Scottish local government in 1996, or even 1979. The local governance perspective exaggerates the limited governmental capacity of local authorities. There are partnerships, networks and other organisations that have been granted power by local councils to make, or influence, decisions in particular fields. However, power devolved is often power retained – as the example in the field of community planning cited below highlights.

Councils often retain statutory obligations (and thus authority) to regulate certain services, they provide finance and their status as the only democratically elected local public agency can be utilised to manipulate networks to move in desired directions. The Labour-Liberal Democrat Scottish Executive's (1999-2007) 'Community Planning' and the SNP Government's (2007-) 'Single Outcome Agreement' policy initiative, whilst facilitating more joint working do not necessarily involve a large degree of power shifting from the council. Research by Audit Scotland (2006) highlighted how there was no power to delegate formal decision-making to community planning structures with the result that important decisions affecting the local authority had to be referred back to the council for confirmation. Geddes et al. (2007) noted that 'the themed architecture of community plans/strategies', coupled with the persistence of 'silo' mentalities of many partner organisations compartmentalised and created institutionalised barriers to joint working. As reported by Pemberton and Lloyd:

Local elected members do not appear to be connected closely to, or to be in sympathy with (community planning partnerships) ... with consistent messages emerging that some elected members view community planning as a threat to their direct control of council services and funding, and with some in Scotland (for example) expressing concerns that allocating funding to CPPs which they feel do not have the same

direct accountability as local authorities. (Pemberton and Lloyd 2008: 444)

In summary, Scottish local councils remain capable of providing direction and leadership, rumours of their demise are grossly overstated. Moreover, due to their elected basis, they retain within their armour the crucial weapon of democratic legitimacy. The chief executive and corporate centres of many local councils are if anything becoming more substantial, focused and knowledgeable than before. Evidence can of course be found for a loss of capacity, because councils do undoubtedly find themselves in a complex, challenging and changeable operating environment. However, one could argue that this has always been the case. Local government has become more fragmented but to equate that with 'disability' is a leap in logic. While total control is clearly not possible, beyond a limited range of policy domains, the capacity for co-ordination and influence in the corporate centres of local councils undoubtedly remains.

Analytical Perspectives

The study has also sought to demonstrate that a lot of what is deemed important in the study of local government (as well as politics more generally) is dependent on the particular analytical framework that guides research and analysis. This thesis has utilised four frameworks to guide research into the changing nature of local government in Scotland. The contribution of these perspectives is not at the level of causal analysis. They are organising frameworks and their value is in clarifying how local government may be perceived. Each provides a readily available frame of reference through which to understand change

In recent years, local government studies have been heavily influenced by the local governance perspective. However, the argument of this thesis is that there remains a diverse basis and pluralism of approaches which is of value to the study of local government. Diversity, rather than conformity, remains evident.

It became apparent during fieldwork interviews that it was not only academics who tended to be influenced by particular analytical frameworks – so too were local government officers. Each of the perspectives, however implicitly, reflect different conceptions of what they consider important in the study of local government. They represent different ways of viewing and analysing the reality of local politics. The research philosophy underpinning the thesis was therefore that:

Political scientists can ... only judge other people's stories through the medium of their own. Consequently we don't seek the 'truth' but rather set out to provide what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes as a more adequate explanation. (Lowndes 2004: 235)

A simple narrative of local politics tends to assume that the leadership of local councils is in control. It is one the media appear to subscribe to when they refer to 'the council'. It tends to assume a degree of unity amongst the plethora of managers, professions, services, networks and institutions that make up the local political environment. Whilst, there is an element of truth in this – in some instances a committed local political leadership can effect change when it has clear goals, aims or objectives it wishes to achieve – this type of over-simplification masks a more complicated reality. Each of the four perspectives on local government takes us beyond a simple narrative of local politics. There are hidden implicit assumptions with such a view of local

government and rather than being accepted these assumptions are challenged by the alternative perspectives examined here.

This research has sought to acknowledge and make explicit the assumptions that underpin conventional frameworks of analysis in local government. It has then examined to what extent these perspectives help towards an understanding of how Scottish local government has developed since it was reorganised in 1995/6. It has utilised both old and new perspectives and has drawn the conclusion that the traditional municipal perspective retains a resonance among local council officers and thus retains utility for researchers in the field.

In essence the argument of the thesis has been that while new managerial, democratic and governance perspectives are useful in highlighting change in local government, nonetheless they tend to neglect the continuity inherent in many council structures. Despite a welter of reform in local government in recent decades, the credibility of the core assumptions of the traditional municipal analytical framework remain largely intact. The traditional perspective on local government may have many flaws but it is still the one that connects most closely to everyday practitioner understandings of the environment in which they operate. It retains a high degree of both validity and reliability amongst practitioners in the field and as a way of understanding the operations of local government.

However, all of the new perspectives, to varying degrees, contribute valuable additional insights. They each capture important strands of the stories of change – the shift from hierarchies and to more market organisational forms, from administrative to more managerially focused services, from bureaucracies to networks and how questions of democracy and legitimacy

continue to resonate. The new perspectives undoubtedly capture the new discourse of local government, whether they capture the actual reality is more questionable.

Traditional, managerial, democratic and governance 'recipes'

As outlined in the introduction, Spender (1989) emphasises that the role of managers is the discovery, imitation, repackaging and manipulation of information and ideas – or as he termed them, 'recipes'. A recipe is a guide to action which is open, it resolves uncertainties at a group, but not an individual, level. It evolves as an accepted rationality. Industrial economists observe the tendency of firms within an industry to copy each other (Spender 1989: 65). The, 'industry recipe, (is) the shared knowledge-base that those socialized into an industry take as familiar professional common sense' (1989: 69).

This thesis has argued that the post-reorganisation reforms in local government were challenges to the original traditional recipe of local council organisation and structure. The new recipe for Scottish local government was a fusion between new managerial, democratic and governance ideas about the future direction for local government organisation and management. However, as this research highlights the original/traditional recipe still represents, to many officers, the institutionalised rationality in local government and could therefore be interpreted as a barrier to change.

During the reorganisation period (1994-1996) there was a significant 'window of opportunity' for those with progressive ideas regarding local authority

structure and organisation. Reformists argued that traditional approaches had little applicability in the 'modern day' real world of uncertain and changeable local authority environments. Networks of leading councillors and officers became policy entrepreneurs who sought to raise new recipes for implementation. So-called 'progressive' policy reformers were therefore seeking new recipes to guide them in these uncertain environments. As Spender argues, 'The entrepreneurial manager discovers, copies, creates and manipulates information and ideas' (Spender 1989: 37).

However, like most initiatives in local government their implementation was variable and was influenced and mediated by local circumstances and constraints. The principles behind these new ideas were filtered through localised policy processes to emerge as locally implemented practices and policies. As Stewart notes, 'The national world of local government maintains a continuity of practice, yet provides for the dissemination of innovation' (2000: 8). As the seminal Hawthorne management studies highlighted, in the real world, organisations are highly political places – personalities and history interfere with the logical, controlled and artificial picture of organisation flow charts. Ideas tend to have to be mediated through, what could be termed, the unruly dynamic of politics.

Each case study local authority was different in terms of the way it was organised – however the similarity in 'recipe' between them is still apparent. This thesis has argued that each of the new 'recipes' for local government influenced each council's internal organisation and reform, however the base of traditional local government remains largely intact, despite the challenge each new recipe represented. In essence a municipal traditional structure remains the 'base' recipe for local councils in Scotland. A combination of new managerial, democratic and governance ideas have each added a dash of

flavour to this recipe but its fundamental ingredients remain the same: public services delivered within a framework of political accountability.

In summary, this thesis has emphasised evolution rather than revolution and structural constraints over human agency. New management gurus, heroic council leaders and chief executives and democratic reformers do not figure largely in the accounts of developments in the three councils. Institutional structures such as professions, committees, operating codes are emphasised. In the context of the two narratives of local government outlined by Lowndes (2004) referred to in the introduction – ‘local government transformed’ and ‘local government unmoved’ – the evidence from Scotland presented in this thesis contains more evidence supporting the former. The latter one - ‘local government transformed’ outlines:

The sense of transformation ... evidenced ... in the catalogue of interventions and initiatives since 1979 ... the changed language of local government ... overarching narratives of reinvention, re-engineering, renewal and modernization. (2004: 231)

The second one, ‘local government unmoved’, outlines councils as remaining collections of professionally-driven departments, representative models still dominate with bureaucratic paternalism still evident. Neither narrative is entirely accurate (just as the perspectives outlined here are not). Narratives and theories of how local government works are contestable and often contradictory – the literature on local government is not a neat collection of knowledge which, when accumulated, leads to some positive facts about how local government operates.

Various branches of British political science have followed the same trajectory in recent decades with new perspectives challenging traditional interpretations. Indeed some 27 years ago, Dearlove was arguing:

New perspectives may have had to burst through the more established interpretations, but this does not mean they burst them apart. Quite the reverse. New approaches and perspectives were slowly absorbed and accepted precisely because they could be interpreted so as to sustain the credibility of the core assumptions integral to the earlier accounts and to the tradition of understanding as a whole. (1982: 438)

The contention in this thesis, in accord with Dearlove, is that the new insights gleaned from managerial, democratic and governance perspectives have not fundamentally undermined the traditional local government framework of analysis. Fifteen years ago Jordan argued that, 'It is premature to abandon the traditional public administration literature as administrative forms may be more resistant to change than those who follow 'restructuring' suggest' (1994: 93). This study would echo this conclusion.

Appendix A: List of Interviewees

Alan Alexander, Scottish Local Authorities Management Centre, University of Strathclyde.

Allan, Stuart. Head of Law and Administration, Fife Council.

Allen, Frank. Area Manager, Nairn, Highland Council.

Angus Skinner, HM Inspector (Social Work).

Begley, Pat. Social Work Services, Stirling Council.

Bob Black, Accounts Commission.

Brewer, Ernest. Head of IT, Fife Council.

Brown, David. Corporate Manager, Commercial Services, Fife Council.

Burnell, Martin. Head of Human Resources, Fife Council.

Claridge, Chris. Area Manager, Inverness, Highland Council.

Clark, High. Portree Community Council.

Corbett, Dawn. Strategy and Performance Manager, Fife Council..

Corrie McChord, Leader of the Council, Stirling Council.

David Belfall, Housing, Scottish Executive.

David Middleton, Local Government, Scottish Executive.

Davidson, Alan. Head of Housing, Fife Council.

Devlin, Brian. Technical and Development Services, Stirling Council

Dickson, Bill, Stirling Council

Dodds, Alistair, Chief Executive 2008, Highland Council.

Doherty, Paul Policy Officer, Stirling Council.

Douglas Osler, HM Inspector (Schools).

Downie, Linda. Civic Services, Stirling Council.

Enston, Mike. Corporate Policy Office, Fife Council.

Fletcher, Peter. Head of Democratic Support, Stirling Council

Frederick Marks, Local Government Commissioner.

George, Carol. Policy Officer, Stirling Council

Hugh Fraser, Director of Education, Highland Council.

Hutchison, John. Area Manager, Lochaber, Highland Council.

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