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The potential for neighbourhood regeneration in a period of austerity: changing forms of neighbourhood governance in two cities

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Abstract   Localism is an active political strategy, developed in a period of austerity by the UK's Coalition Government as a justification for the restructuring of state–civil society relationships. The deprived neighbourhood has long been a site for service delivery and a scale for intervention and action, giving rise to a variety of forms of neighbourhood governance. Prior international comparative research indicated convergence with the US, given the rise of the self-help conjuncture and the decline of neighbourhood governance as a medium of regeneration. The subsequent shift in the UK model from 'big' to 'small state' localism and deficit-reducing cuts to public expenditure confirm these trends, raising questions about the forms of neighbourhood governance currently being established, the role being played by local and central government, and the implications for neighbourhood regeneration. Two emerging forms of neighbourhood governance are examined in two urban local authorities and compared with prior forms examined in earlier research in the case study sites. The emerging forms differ significantly in their design and purpose, but as both are voluntary and receive no additional funding, better organised and more affluent communities are more likely to pursue their development. While it is still rather early to assess the capacity of these forms to promote neighbourhood regeneration, the potential in a period of austerity appears limited. Reduced funding for local services increases the imperative to self-help, while rights to local voice remain limited and the emerging forms provide little scope to influence (declining) local services and (still centralised) planning decisions, especially in neighbourhoods with regeneration needs that are likely to lack the requisite capacities, particularly stores of linking social capital. Initial conclusions suggest greater polarity and the further containment of deprived neighbourhoods.

Keywords: *Localism, neighbourhood governance, neighbourhood planning, austerity*

INTRODUCTION

Localism is a contested and malleable notion, which has been appropriated by successive public policy agendas. The use of the neighbourhood as a site for service delivery and scale for intervention and action has given rise to a variety of forms of governance.[1] Previous international comparative research on neighbourhood governance revealed that Bristol showed signs of convergence with the self–help conjuncture evident in Baltimore in the US.[2] The subsequent shift in the national model from 'big state' solutions towards 'small state localism' verifies these trends by confirming the neighbourhood as a site and scale, but with an emphasis on voluntary action by actors within it, rather than intervention by actors beyond. This raises questions about the forms of neighbourhood governance being established, the role being played by local and central government, and the implications for neighbourhood regeneration, given the viability and actuality of 'small state' localism.

This paper first considers localism as an active political strategy and explores its development and current incarnation. It then explains the research approach before setting out the former and emerging forms of neighbourhood governance associated with the 'big state' and subsequent 'small state' localism agendas, illustrated via two case study cities, which include consideration of the early stages of implementation of emerging forms. Research findings regarding the role of central and local government, and the practical regeneration implications for deprived neighbourhoods are then considered, prior to drawing some conclusions.

LOCALISM AS CENTRAL GOVERNMENT POLITICAL STRATEGY

Successive national governments over the past 30 years have recognised and used the value of 'localism'. As Clarke argues: 'the political rationales for localism are not based wholly on privatism or community values or even necessarily locational logics; they also include the instrumental use of localism as a political strategy'.[3]

The roots of its usage lie in reforms to counter the centralisation of the post–war welfare state, commenced by the Thatcher Conservative Government of the 1980s. Central–local government relations became increasingly antagonistic as neoliberal market discipline was introduced into public service delivery. Such 'hollowing out of the state'[4] conceptualised government's role as strategic overseer, placing its trust locally in agencies and private actors rather than local government or communities, as with the 'parachuting in' of Urban Development Corporations to implement area renewal. While subsequent neighbourhood regeneration programmes such as the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB; launched in 1994 by the Major Conservative Government) and New Deal for Communities (NDC, launched in 1998 by New Labour) increasingly required partnership with communities and other stakeholders, these were critiqued for the extent to which they were 'steered' by central government.[5] The £2bn NDC programme targeted 39 of England's most deprived neighbourhoods to produce a 'local response' to five indicators of social deprivation related to mainstream services.[6] Communities were 'shoehorned' into the initiative, which superimposed ideas about local area organisation, funding and delivery onto local political contexts.[7]

The first New Labour Government (1997–2001) retained local government in a strict delivery relationship with the centre, where it could 'earn autonomy' through improved performance.[8] A renewed emphasis on localism gradually

emerged during the 2000s, as local government was required to work in partnership with communities and other 'stakeholders', echoing the approach pursued by regeneration initiatives since the 1990s. The outcomes of local government reform, including community strategies, Local Strategic Partnerships and 'place shaping',[9] were termed the 'new localism'[10] and owed much to the perceived benefits of 'networked community governance',[11] such as locally distinctive policy making by those with greater contextual understanding. But it was 'new' because it was set in a 'context of national framework setting and funding'.[10] Subsequent calls for 'double devolution',[12] from central government to local government to neighbourhoods, prefigured many of the elements of the 2010-elected Conservative–Liberal Coalition Government's Localism Act.[13] Continuities are also evident in the Coalition Government's emphasis on self-help, which draws from the increased prominence over the past 20 years of the potential for reinvigorating civil society, expressed through volunteering, political participation, asset ownership and service delivery,[2] manifested in regeneration initiatives' emphasis on the capacity building of communities.

But significant ideological differences remain. The coalition's criticisms of New Labour for extending 'big government' are drawn from the libertarian 'crowding out' thesis,[14] which posits that state action suppresses civil society vitality and responsible voluntarism. Conservative policy, therefore, retains the view that the 'big state' undermines self-help. Thatcher espoused self-reliance; since 2010, the emphasis has been on community and voluntary action. This is in significant contrast to New Labour's 'big state' approach to deprived neighbourhoods, which involved committing large amounts of resource to targeted initiatives such as

NDC and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (explained below), in combination with national standards, which attempted to address equity of service provision.[15]

Thus, while central governments of different hues have capitalised on the normative appeal of localism to further their political strategies, there are ideological differences in how 'the strategic dilemmas integral to governing'[16] have been handled. New Labour's commitment to localism was constrained by its greater commitment to principles of standardisation and equity rather than those of diversity and local control.[17] In contrast, the Coalition Government appears unconcerned by the 'postcode lottery':

> 'Decentralisation will allow different communities to do different things in different ways to meet their different needs. This will certainly increase variety in service provision. But far from being random — as the word "lottery" implies — such variation will reflect the conscious choices made by local people.'[18]

The links that New Labour made between service outcomes and local resource availability (with area-based initiatives targeting 'special resource' to areas of deprivation), and between service outcomes and local service provider competence (with performance management regimes seeking to assure baseline standards) have been decoupled by the Coalition Government. Local variation in service provision is now presented as an outcome of local priorities, expressed via community governance structures, heralding the end of neighbourhood-targeted regeneration initiatives and ushering in community self-reliance to 'step into the breach'. But the Coalition Government still needs to make use of control technologies, but favours more explicitly neoliberal

economic incentives to govern local conduct. Communities that 'choose' to allow development can gain the New Homes Bonus (matching Council Tax from new houses for six years) and a greater portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL; paid by developers in return for planning permission). But the extent to which these are 'choices' is questionable in the context of austerity–era local government funding cuts.

Localism is therefore an active political strategy, which emerges not only from normative concerns about central–local relations, but as part of a continuing, negotiated process of state rescaling,[19] which invents and transfers responsibilities to place-based communities. It is used by the Coalition Government as a way to justify the restructuring of state–civil society relationships based on normative notions of shared responsibility and community, which are manifested in neighbourhood governance. Power needs to be handed back to 'citizens, communities and local government', because only when 'people and communities are given more power and take more responsibility can we achieve fairness and opportunity for all'.[20] Much debate has ensued about the extent to which its small state variant reflects a genuine commitment to localism, or whether the emphasis on voluntarism acts as a smokescreen for deficit–reducing cuts in public expenditure.[21] Certainly, the ideological shift has only been exacerbated by economic circumstances, which have bolstered the perceived inevitability of state withdrawal under austerity politics.

DATA AND METHODS

The research, conducted in 2012, used a qualitative, semi–structured interview-based methodology combined with a documentary review of secondary data. The two city local authorities, Bristol and Westminster, were selected as case studies because they had been the subject of previous research regarding neighbourhood governance prior to the May 2010 election of the Coalition Government (Bristol research conducted in 2008,[2] Westminster research in early 2010[22]). Returning to these sites enabled 'before and after' comparison, capturing former/ongoing and emerging forms of neighbourhood governance, albeit early in the implementation process. These prior links also eased access to the eight respondents with whom interviews were conducted. Respondents were selected via purposive sampling to include local council officers and members whose brief encompassed neighbourhood governance, as well as those directly engaged in emergent neighbourhood governance structures.

FORMER/ONGOING FORMS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD GOVERNANCE

The heritage of the 'big state' approach to deprived neighbourhoods was evident in both cities in the form of neighbourhood management. This approach, which seeks more effective and responsive local service delivery, was promoted by New Labour via a seven-year national Pathfinder programme (launched in 2001), which funded 35 area-based partnerships at £3.5m each for their dedicated officer teams and facilitation of community engagement.[23] Each Pathfinder was managed by a board, consisting of local authority officers and members, representatives of service providers and residents, which determined local priority issues and developed a neighbourhood action plan to address these. In contrast to the NDC's more holistic regeneration ambitions (each partnership received £50m over ten years), neighbourhood management focused on influencing

services with the best 'fit' at neighbourhood level, in particular 'crime and grime', housing and public health. The approach was adopted by local authorities, but often without the dedicated, and costly, area-based staff teams of the Pathfinders, and can be characterised as an attempt to gauge resident priorities regarding service provision.

Both cities had experience of previous initiatives in neighbourhood management. While Bristol's ongoing approach operated city-wide, Westminster had a strategy to target the most deprived areas. Bristol City Council established Neighbourhood Partnerships in 2008, each covering two to three wards, with populations ranging from 20,000 to 40,000 residents, and incorporating the governance structures of former, more costly and targeted initiatives, such as the 'Community at Heart' NDC.[2] Since the election of the coalition, the partnerships have been cited as evidence of 'embedding localism', to 'enable the dispersal of power to neighbourhoods, and to enable everyone to have a voice and to be heard'.[24] The partnerships are supported by (virtual rather than area-based) service provider officer teams and do not have additional resources. Elements of existing council budgets, including highway maintenance and minor traffic works, have been devolved to the partnerships, with final decision-making power vested in local councillors. When asked about the size of the budget devolved, a council member commented, 'we've never set upon a figure … if you include officer time and influencing budgets it's huge'.

In Westminster, the city had previously pursued a deprived ward-targeted model of neighbourhood management through four Local Area Renewal Partnerships (LARPs), created in 2003. These derived in turn from neighbourhood forums

established by a local development trust using SRB monies, and one was subsequently awarded Pathfinder status by central government. The LARPs operated closely according to the Pathfinder model, with a board and wider forums open to all residents. Their funding (at between £180,000 and £400,000 a year) enabled area-based staff teams plus some limited project funding.[22] Funding continued until 2010.

EMERGENT FORMS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD GOVERNANCE

The research revealed two emergent forms: Civil Parish Councils (CPCs), evident in one city; and Neighbourhood Forums (NFs) for planning, evident in both. Each form is designed for different purposes and has differing enabling legislation, constitution, powers and funding (as set out in Table 1). The enabling legislation devolving powers to local government to create CPCs pre-dates the Localism Act. This option was pursued in the case examined below once its funding was cut in 2010, highlighting that 'big state' era legislation encouraging localism has been reaffirmed by its small state variant, with the CPC's funding model through a Council Tax precept offering an option in the absence of additional government resource. Both cities had emergent NFs, a new form of neighbourhood governance enabled by the Localism Act, whereby (in the absence of CPCs) NFs have the right to prepare Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) for designated Neighbourhood Planning Areas (NPAs). The key differences between the two forms are that CPCs have much broader powers (including the option of preparing an NDP) and levy a Council Tax precept, while NFs only have powers to produce NDPs and very limited funding to do so.

Table 1:   Two emergent forms of neighbourhood governance

Legislation	Constitution	Powers	Funding
Civil Parish Council or Neighbourhood or Community Council			
Local Government and Rating Act (1997) allowed communities in England (except Greater London) to petition local authorities (LAs) to set up elected CPCs. Local Government & Public Involvement Act (2007) extended right to London and devolved powers to LAs to carry out community governance reviews, which can also be triggered by a petition signed by sufficient electors. Act also gives LAs a 'duty to promote democracy'. Members' conduct determined by Parish Councils Model Code of Conduct Order (2001).	Elected en bloc for a 4-year term. Minimum of 5 elected members. Larger CPCs may be divided into wards, with separate elections for each ward.	A variety of powers and duties in Local Government Act (1972) and other legislation. Additional powers can be transferred by the LA. Have right to be consulted and express local opinion to higher-level authorities on policies. CPCs can prepare plans and design statements to inform the statutory planning process. Since 2012, they can prepare NDPs (below). Service delivery and service/ policy influencing activities vary between areas.	Precept on Council Tax in CPC area. Annual budget agreed at an annual CPC meeting. Some employ a full- or part-time clerk to manage meetings and day-to-day business. Resources vary between areas. From 2013/14, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): 15 per cent capped at £100 per dwelling; or 25 per cent uncapped if have produced an NDP.
Civil Parish Council or Neighbourhood or Community Council			
Localism Act (2011) Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012)	A minimum of 21 people who live, work or are councillors in a neighbourhood (without an existing CPC), who are approved by the LA as the NF for a defined and pre-designated NPA. There must be a written constitution and membership must be open to those who live or work in the area.	NFs can prepare NDPs, which have regard to national planning policy and are in conformity with other statutory plans such as the LDF. The NDP is considered by an Inspector and must be supported by a majority in a referendum. Neighbourhood Development Orders can be approved for specific sites to enable development without further applications.	No precept. LA required to fund consultation to establish the NF and associated NPA, and subsequently to fund the NDP examination and referendum. Neighbourhood Planning 'Front Runners' received £5–20k from central govt to support plan preparation. From 2013/14, up to £100k per LA available from central govt to support up to 20

CIVIL PARISH COUNCILS

In Bristol, council respondents were in agreement that 'it's patently not somewhere we can go at the moment'. In Westminster, the CPC campaign for Queen's Park ward stemmed from the area's legacy as a LARP, for which funding was cut by the City Council in 2010 following the general and local elections. The campaign group (comprising a core of resident activists active in the neighbourhood forum) sought the Council Tax precept enabled by CPC designation as a means of maintaining the infrastructure of a neighbourhood office and staff, which had received £180,000

funding a year. The intent was that precept income would be supplemented by grant aid for activities, while the focus would be to continue service influencing, with a campaign group member commenting: 'I'm very sure if there wasn't the economic imperative I don't know that we would have been going down this route … of setting up a parish council. We would have continued with the funny money coming in from government'.

The requisite petition triggered a 'community governance review' by the City Council,[25] conducted across the local authority area in accord with central government guidance.[26] The review, led by the Council's Planning Department, encompassed not only whether to establish CPCs, but whether to introduce any other 'new community governance arrangements such as NFs'.[27] While campaigners recognised the council's need to plan ahead, given 'the potential for hundreds of little groups each clamouring for a referendum on a neighbourhood plan', the emphasis on neighbourhood planning was felt to be a 'bit of a snub … the reason they're doing this governance review is because of the 2007 Act, not because of the Localism Act'. Tensions between the two forms of neighbourhood governance were also evident when the campaign group was encouraged by council officers to consider becoming an NF, as an NDP could take a 'holistic approach'. But the CPC 'allowed us to do a lot more' and the group had 'long experience of developing a regeneration social plan' and 'were very clear of the difference between the two'. The community governance review included a question, 'Do you think it is fair to have different forms of community governance across Westminster?',[25] which prompted a campaign group member to comment: 'They didn't choose to ask the question, did they think it was fair that some areas were so disadvantaged compared to

others? And did they need special measures?'

Responses to the review were largely in favour. The council conducted a postal referendum 'to ensure that the proposals for Queen's Park have the clear support of residents who will be asked to pay an additional levy',[28] the results of which were also in favour of setting up the CPC. The council subsequently professed support, in line with central government policy direction: 'For Westminster to have the first parish council in London for 50 years [is] a fitting endorsement of the government's ambitions for localism and neighbourhood engagement.'[28]

The council decided to combine elections to the new body with the next local government elections in May 2014, to enable an estimated cost saving of £7,000.[27] While the campaign group had envisaged elections two years earlier, a member explained that the urgency had reduced because of the area's selection as one of ten central government neighbourhood-level pilots for Community Budget Plans,[29] focused on bringing relevant services and residents together to co-design local public services for families at risk. This was described by one campaigner as providing 'a fantastic training ground and a relationship builder' prior to the CPC's formal establishment.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS FOR PLANNING

In both cities, local government attention was focused on the neighbourhood planning aspects of the Localism Act. Three Bristol neighbourhood groups were part of the national neighbourhood planning pilot scheme (designated as 'Front Runners') set up by central government. The groups applied for their formal NPA and NF designations in May 2012. Two of the three groups were awarded the designations needed to work

towards creating NDPs, one was not.

One of Bristol's front runner areas had a significant history of deprivation and regeneration need, described by a council officer as 'the community that's been "done to" so many times'. Residents had previously worked with significant council input preparing a vision document. The neighbourhood planning process was intended to build from this work, but a council member felt that the neighbourhood planning process had circumvented previous efforts, commenting that the NF 'have an idea of what they want to see going forward, but they have no capacity for writing a plan … and it's just not feasible'. A council officer agreed on the lack of capacity, explaining that the NF was 'ignoring the challenging sites … because they know that the immediate people around here would object'. The officer explained that 'there's community tension in the way in which things are being worked through the neighbourhood planning process that wasn't there with the vision because it is focusing on land and not on services'.

In preparation for the roll-out of neighbourhood planning, the council had produced guidance on how neighbourhood groups can formally seek NPA designation to enable work and resource planning, as well as to 'negotiate with people or get them to negotiate among themselves to cluster into more effective groups', given the potential for different groups wanting to have a say on the same or overlapping areas. Following designation, a two-tier system of council support for NFs had been proposed, with areas receiving greater support if they are 'in the 10 to 20 per cent most deprived', and are identified as regeneration areas with development potential in the Local Development Framework (LDF). By mid-2013, five NPAs and four associated NFs had been designated in the city.[30]

In Westminster, the city council recommended the city's amenity societies, 18 organisations that 'play an active role in shaping the special character of Westminster's neighbourhoods', as 'broadly represent[ing] the most suitable areas for undertaking neighbourhood planning'.[27] By mid-2013, 20 applications for 'neighbourhood area' (NPA) designation had been submitted to the council, several covering overlapping areas not co-terminus with amenity society areas. These included an application for Queen's Park ward from the shadow CPC, operating prior to its formal creation when it will have the right to prepare an NDP for the area, as well as applications concerning two other former LARP areas. Four NPAs had been designated where boundary issues had been resolved, and there were no overlapping applications, three of which were also defined as Business Areas.[31]

Both councils had expended effort to prepare for neighbourhood planning. The resourcing implications were significant, because of a council's obligations to undertake consultations for NPA applications and for community groups to become NFs, to bear the costs of NDP public examinations, as well as to provide information and support to groups seeking to engage in the process. In Bristol, a council officer expressed concern about 'how we balance our resources which are less than they were 18 months ago … in the last financial year we spent more than £15,000 just on staff time' (for neighbourhood planning). The respondent expressed interest in creating CPCs, owing to their ability to levy a Council Tax precept:

> 'It's interesting … that where our people are really struggling because they haven't any source of finance it doesn't seem to be quite the same in the parished areas because … with a year's notice they can get their hands on some money.'

ROLE OF LOCAL AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The key shaping role played by local government in neighbourhood governance is unsurprising. But the way in which central government priorities continue to take precedence is noteworthy, particularly given the focus of attention in both cities on preparing for neighbourhood planning, which has significant resourcing implications for local government as well as making huge demands on the volunteers engaged. Planning system reforms illustrate that, despite a Conservative preference for 'presumed autonomy',[32] compromises have been necessary. While the preceding government's 'over-engineered' approach to planning was criticised as stifling innovation and depriving communities of democracy,[33] the Localism Act diluted more radical policy ideas, given concerns about the planning system's ability to pursue the public good in the absence of strategic control.[34] The range of powers reserved to the secretary of state led to the Localism Bill being denounced as the 'centralism bill'.[35] The NDPs retained their proposed statutory status, but were required to conform with local plans, meaning that local authorities retain control over the quantity and spatial distribution of development.[34] In Bristol, concerns were expressed about the additionality of neighbourhood planning, with an officer respondent explaining that one front runner was effectively producing a 'refinement of our site allocations document'.

At the same time, both cities demonstrate that central government policy is ill-considered, patchy and in practice left to local government to sort out, complicating implementation. Both councils have expended effort in attempts to prepare for neighbourhood planning by gauging initial interest among community groups, given the significant resourcing implications. But the process is steered by local government, with Westminster using the existing network of amenity societies as a suggested framework, and Bristol not awarding the requisite designations to one front runner, despite a council officer commenting that 'the designation requirements are so loose that it would be very difficult not to confer neighbourhood planning status'. Both councils were having to prepare to perform a brokering role between and among diverse communities, in particular regarding the designation of NPAs and NFs, complicated especially in Westminster by the plethora of existing area-based organisations and interests, including Business Improvement Districts and the Royal Parks. The Localism Act legislation, lack of adequate guidance and parallel legislation on CPCs has caused major problems. A Westminster officer commented that '[neighbourhood] planning does work better in rural areas … an existing parish council, a village with clear boundaries, many fewer applications … fewer people', a sentiment echoed by a Bristol council member: 'My feeling on all of this stuff is that it was designed for a village with two hundred people. And that's been the whole of the Localism Act. It was not designed for an urban context.'

Such critique of policy's ability to deal with radical plurality highlights the challenge of achieving a sense of community, one of the conditions identified as necessary for community governance.[10] Another of the conditions, requisite capacity, is also a significant obstacle for the realisation of neighbourhood planning, as evident in the case of Bristol's front runners. And, as a council officer explained, NDPs as a form of statutory planning need to 'take account of viability and deliverability … we can't put a constraint in effect on an area that's not deliverable'. Therefore the

potential power of NFs has been curtailed by the pursuit of national priorities, reflected in local plans and fiscal incentives, and by the shaping role of the local authority, which is having to choose where to focus effort and resource. This has resulted in fragmentation in terms of the areas being prioritised by local authorities, and in terms of who engages at neighbourhood level. While such fragmentation can be presented as an outcome of local priorities, it is also evidence of increasing polarity between those areas with and without the actors and capacities in place and market interest in their development.

REGENERATION IMPLICATIONS

Other forms of neighbourhood governance have been sidelined, with prior structures adapting where possible to the newly available policy options, such as the Queen's Park CPC campaign founded by those formerly engaged in the LARP. Bristol's deprived neighbourhood 'front runner' had been subject to a prior 'visioning' initiative, felt to have been bypassed by the neighbourhood planning process. Tensions were evident because of the perceived need for a more holistic service as well as land–use planning approach to the area's regeneration, which neighbourhood planning was not felt to offer. Bristol's Neighbourhood Partnerships in turn reflect an earlier shift in the forms of neighbourhood governance being encouraged by central government, accompanied by council policy rhetoric about deprived communities being expected to tap into market–led growth.[2] The partnerships have since been rebranded as evidence of embedding localism in the city. The council's current attempts to manage demand for neighbourhood planning by offering greater support to deprived areas in line with LDF regeneration areas

continues this market–led strategy, while also being an attempt to compensate partially for the areas' likely lack of capacity.

In Westminster, a similar pattern emerged, where it proved easy to de–couple the deprived–area targeted LARPs from mainstream service delivery after their 'special' funding stream was cut.[22] The subsequent successful CPC campaign demonstrates the ability of a well–organised, committed community to circumvent the dominance of local policy direction towards neighbourhood planning, illustrating that the coalition's localism has to an extent compromised local government power by the devolution of power to civil society actors. The council has since pragmatically expressed support for the CPC, framed in terms of the localism agenda. But central government's role in validating neighbourhood–level efforts, circumventing local government via the awarding of a Neighbourhood Community Budget, highlights that, along with the 'front runners', the long heritage of central government experimentation at the neighbourhood level continues.

But tensions are likely to arise, given the political strategy of the coalition's form of localism, which presupposes 'natural' localities in which needs can be agreed and met through local agency, and under which variation in service provision is presented as an outcome of local priorities. The CPC does not intend to engage in service delivery itself, but wants to continue to influence local services as it did through neighbourhood management. Indeed, in all the examples examined, the emphasis remained on participation (by influencing services) rather than independent community action (through self–help behaviours). In Bristol, a council officer did not think that 'any of my [NF] groups … are at the stage of thinking we

want to deliver services. They're not in that place.' This shows not only the persistence of embedded practices, but the profound difficulties of substituting self-help for government-led service provision, and the lack of concrete ways to implement the rhetoric of small state localism in forms of neighbourhood governance. While CPCs do present an option for urban neighbourhoods with regeneration needs, this form of governance is easier to establish in rural areas with well-defined communities. A CPC's wide range of powers and right to be consulted means that much depends on the enthusiasm and abilities of the clerk and members, as well as relationships with the local authority.

Overall, local government's role in the emergent forms and reconfiguration of existing forms of neighbourhood governance affirmed its role at least as 'community network coordinator',[36] albeit within the bounds set by central government's brand of localism. But concerns about the ongoing viability of such a role, given 'the very limited amount of hard power in terms of coercion and material incentive that local government can exercise',[36] are also validated, particularly in the absence of local government ability to ameliorate inequity and ongoing funding cuts. The intention of Queen's Park CPC to continue to influence service provision runs 'the risk of surfacing the incapacity of local authorities to respond to local community expectations and grievances'.[37] But it has a significant advantage over an NF structure in terms of regeneration, given that it is now an ongoing endeavour, anchored by its precept funding mechanism, and able in theory at least to undertake a wide range of activities, although its capacities to do so will be bounded by its abilities to fundraise and lobby effectively. While such deprived communities may have strong and useful stores of bonding social capital,

more affluent communities are more likely to be able to draw on bridging and indeed linking forms of social capital with higher tier agencies,[38] through which they can exert pressure to secure better quality services or oppose unwanted developments. But both CPCs and NFs face a real challenge in securing an active membership fully representative of the local community, which can be sustained in the long term.

CONCLUSION

The shift from the redistributive 'big state' to the less-focused 'small state' variant of localism, which relies on community organisation, retains the neighbourhood as a policy locus, but with few if any additional resources. Bristol's NDC had £50m over ten years. Its Neighbourhood Partnerships now have some say over the elements of council budgets which have been devolved. One of Westminster's four LARP areas has managed to replace its initiative funding with a Council Tax precept to be paid by its residents. In both cities, the emergent NFs had no funding support except for a small 'front runner' allocation from central government. And the context is a period of austerity, with a 27 per cent cut in local government funding heralded by the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review.

That the two emerging forms of neighbourhood governance are voluntary and receive no additional government funding means that better organised and more affluent communities are more likely to pursue their development. The forms differ significantly in their design and purpose. Neighbourhood Forums constitute an additional tier to the planning system that does not fit the ethos of small state localism, making the planning system more complex and impenetrable. While both cities have seen much voluntary activity regarding the

formation of NFs, residents may become disillusioned when they realise the limitations of NDPs, such as their need to conform with LDFs and their limited opportunity to affect service delivery. Moreover, NFs may have only a limited impact on neighbourhood regeneration, particularly as the most deprived areas may lack market interest and development opportunities (which in turn would generate CIL income). The creation of CPCs could encapsulate future direction if government ambitions to encourage their creation are realised, as evident in moves to consider how NFs can subsequently become CPCs.[39] This would increase self-reliance, the notion that needs can be agreed and met through local agency, with residents in deprived communities being expected to pay for their services. But in the example examined, inertia is evident, given the focus on neighbourhood management–style service influencing rather than the more transformative responses associated with self–help, such as gaining assets and engaging in service delivery (via the Community Rights to Buy and Challenge enabled under the Localism Act). It is understandable that change is incremental, and continued empirical research is needed to ascertain how small state localism plays out in different communities.

What is clear is that these dual forms of governance, where pursued, will absorb a lot of community time in establishing neighbourhood democracy, arguably distracting from the context of declining central and local government services and budgets previously taken for granted. The potential of these forms to promote neighbourhood regeneration seems limited. At present, the powers available to neighbourhoods are weak, and there is little central guidance or support. Civil Parish Councils may become influential with various service providers, and in the

longer term could pursue transformative self–help behaviours. But this is more likely to happen in better organised areas with expertise and political skills sufficient to become expert at lobbying. Such areas tend to be more affluent, though the presence of activists from previous deprived neighbourhood initiatives may sustain activity, as has been seen in Queen's Park. Overall, however, the prospects seem to be for greater polarity and the further containment of deprived neighbourhoods.

While the coalition's policies 'show traces of an ideological commitment to localism', its small state variant is a product of 'savage public spending cuts and the need to externalise responsibility for performance failure' as much as 'a principled commitment to more autonomous local governance'.[21] Localism's current incarnation serves as a smokescreen for cuts and economic recession, and developments in neighbourhood governance appear tokenistic. Reduced funding for local services increases the imperative to self help, while rights to a local 'voice' remain limited and the emerging governance forms provide little scope to influence (declining) local services and (still centralised) planning decisions. This is especially the case in neighbourhoods with regeneration needs that are likely to lack the requisite capacities, particularly stores of linking social capital through which pressure can be exerted to realise community preferences.

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