

The influence of the political party group on the representative activities of councillors

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**THE INFLUENCE
OF THE
POLITICAL PARTY GROUP
ON THE
REPRESENTATIVE ACTIVITIES
OF COUNCILLORS**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of London.**

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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF THE POLITICAL PARTY GROUP ON THE REPRESENTATIVE ACTIVITIES OF COUNCILLORS

This thesis studies the influence of the political party group on the processes of local political representation. It sets out to discover how party groups are able to position themselves between councillor and the electorate, to demand the loyalty of councillors, and to ensure that they act publicly in a cohesive fashion in respect of local issues.

The study distinguishes between different *theatres of representation*, the more or less open arenas within which councillors speak and act. This distinction is used to investigate the actual and likely behaviour of councillors in a range of situations from the closed and private to the open and public. The study also introduces the concept of *crises of representation*, which arise when a councillor experiences the competing pulls of party group loyalty and local feelings on contentious issues affecting his or her ward or division. To explore this tension, the study introduces the concept of event-driven democracy to describe those situations which motivate the community to protest council decisions and compete with the party group for councillors' loyalty.

Evidence from a survey of 629 councillors in 20 authorities in the Midlands and surrounding area was gathered in order to compare and contrast reports of past and hypothetical actions in open and closed theatres of representation. Interviews were used to supplement and illuminate these data. Three case studies examine the actual responses of councillors faced with crises of representation. Comparison is made with national data. Differences between the political parties are explored and political affiliation examined as a factor in party group influence on local representation.

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PART I

DILEMMAS OF REPRESENTATION

1. INTRODUCTION.

Within the liberal democratic model of representation, there exists an important tension: that between the local councillor as an elected representative, the electorate he or she represents, and the political party of which he or she is a member. The aim of this thesis is to explore that tension.

The predominant understanding of the relationship between councillors and their constituents fails to take account of the impact of party on the processes of local representative democracy. That the presence of parties has introduced new elements to local authority decision-making has long been recognised. The role of the party group - the cohesive organisation of councillors from a single party - has in comparison been neglected. Yet, it will be shown, the party group plays an important part in the representative process itself, interposing itself between the electors and their representatives with its own distinctive claims to commitment.

The first section of this chapter explores the tensions within liberal democracy as they relate to mass participation. The second section turns to the conflicts that result when the processes of representative democracy meet with the pressures of an increasingly assertive and demanding electorate. It introduces the notion of 'event-driven democracy', recognising that local issues and events may energise the community, or sections of it, to seek an enhanced input to local political decision-making only episodically. The third section shows how political parties have come to play an increasing role in local politics, and argues for a new focus on the part played by the party group in the processes of local democracy.

The final part of the chapter previews the ways in which the argument is deployed and the evidence assessed in the chapters which follow.

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY UNDER PRESSURE.

It is commonplace to argue that the classical doctrine of democracy, in which the people are participants and decision-makers, is no longer relevant. Modern society's scale and complexity requires mechanisms of indirect, or representative democracy, to ensure the quality of political decisions and decision-makers.¹ While loss of direct involvement may be a product of the necessities of decision-making rather than a desire to reduce citizen participation, the result is the same: representation involves a transfer of engagement from the citizen to the elected representative, facilitated through the mechanism of the political party.

The elements of liberal democracy

The theory of liberal democracy is based on two propositions: 'the electoral presumption' and 'competitive elitism'.² The electoral presumption is that a system of electorally-based representative democracy is the most 'practical' mechanism for choosing 'governors' from competing

¹ See, J. Madison, *The Federalist Papers or the New Constitution*, in M. Beloff (editor), New York, Doubleday, 1966, J.S. Mill *Considerations on Representative Government*, in H.B. Acton (editor), *Utilitarianism, Liberty, and Representative Government*, Dent and Sons, 1951. J.A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, London, Unwin, 1974 and G. Sartori, *Democratic Theory*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1962.

² D. Held, chapter 5, 'Competitive Elitism and Technocratic Vision', *Models of Democracy*, Oxford, Polity Press, 1993, pp. 143-185.

elites and reflecting the general priorities of the electorate. Here the people are and can be no more than producers of governments, being required only to decide on 'the men who are to do the deciding'. Indeed, democracy can be defined by the existence of institutional arrangements for 'arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote'.³

Inextricably linked to the electoral presumption is 'competitive elitism', the elevation of political elites to positions of power through the sporadic input of the electorate. Indeed, in liberal democracy the political role of the citizen is restricted to infrequent electoral activity and the selection of leaders via the mechanism of political parties. Anything more than the use of elections to produce governments is ruled out, for as has been argued, the electorate lack the intellectual sophistication for wider political involvement.⁴

Moreover, the threat of the tyranny of the majority is stressed by many theorists of liberal democracy, who seek to balance it with political control and property ownership. Much democratic theorising has been based on reconciling support for a system of popular democracy with protecting 'the haves (a minority), from the have-nots (a majority)' and avoidance of a majority turning the 'instruments of state policy against a minority's privilege'.⁵ Such fear underpinned the foundation of American

³ Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p. 269.

⁴ Ibid, p. 262. and Sartori, *Democratic Theory*, pp. 75-78. Also see, chapter 6, 'Democracy, Leadership and Elites', pp. 96-134.

⁵ Held, *Models of Democracy*, p. 66.

democracy.⁶ The answer was to turn from democracy to Republicanism, or representation, for as Madison noted: 'in a democracy, the people meet and exercise the government in person: in a republic, they assemble and administer it by their representatives and agents'.⁷ Indeed, the important question for America's founding fathers was how strong the 'democratic element' should be.⁸ Furthermore, republicanism was linked with ideas of 'simplicity, civic virtue, and even small proprietorship as the typical estate of a true citizen' and thus protected the propertied minority from the 'majoritarian overtones of democracy'.⁹ Indeed, the 'omnipotence of the majority' could drive minorities to protect their freedom by an 'appeal to physical force'.¹⁰ Such an appeal however, would not be necessary in the United States, where there was a 'love of property' and where the majority displayed a rejection of 'doctrines which in any way threaten the way property is owned'.¹¹

While protection of the minority from popular exploitation is not a central feature of British local politics, earlier periods were characterised by just such a debate. First, the local government franchise as it developed throughout the nineteenth century ensured that those exercising the vote, and the candidates from which they could select, fulfilled some property

⁶*The Federalist or The New Constitution*, in M. Beloff (editor), pp. xvi-xvii.

⁷ Ibid, J. Madison, *Paper No 14*, p. 62.

⁸ B. Crick, *In Defence of Politics*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1982, p. 58.

⁹ Ibid, p. 68.

¹⁰ A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, in J.P. Mayer (editor), London, Fontana, 1994, p. 260.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 638-639.

qualification.¹² The franchise and the office of councillor was restricted to certain sections of the community and even radical candidates 'tended to be small masters, shopkeepers or publicans'.¹³ Young refers to mid-nineteenth century attempts to reform county government as not a search for 'representative democracy' but the development of a 'form of ratepayer democracy'.¹⁴

Secondly, the development of municipal government as an integral part of the growth of the British state led to some 'bitter hostility' 'voiced by interests threatened by municipal proposals - particularly gas and water companies'.¹⁵ The Victorian assumption that national politics were irrelevant to local government was undermined by municipalisation, and

¹² For a comprehensive discussion of the property qualification for the franchise and council candidacy, see, B. Keith-Lucas, *The English Local Government Franchise*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1952.

¹³ E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth Century Urban Government*, London, Edward Arnold, 1973, p. 10.

¹⁴ K. Young, 'Bright Hopes and Dark Fears: The Origins and Expectations of the County Councils', *New Directions For County Government*, in K. Young (editor), London, Association of County Councils, 1989, p. 6. Gyford notes that 'the bodies which emerged from the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act were seen first and foremost as owners of corporate property'. Indeed, 'councillors as members of the corporation were trustees in a fiduciary relationship to the ratepayers within a system based upon the rights of property'. J. Gyford, 'Diversity, Sectionalism and Local Democracy' in *The Conduct of Local Authority Business, Research Vol. IV, Aspects of Local Democracy*, HMSO, 1986, p. 128.

¹⁵ J. Davis, 'The Progressive Council, 1889-1907', in A. Saint (editor), *Politics and the People of London: The London County Council 1889-1965*, London, Hambledon Press, 1989, pp. 27-48, p. 28. Young makes a similar point by identifying a tirade by the tramways interest against 'local authorities exercising any further powers', 'Bright Hopes and Dark Fears' p. 17.

the pursuit of local redistributionary policies.¹⁶ Indeed, as the franchise was extended, property ownership would require protection from infringement by either national or local government.¹⁷ Liberal democracy, then, has traditionally portrayed liberalism, with its entrenchment of minority rights, both political and property, as a counterpoint to democracy. Similarly, it balances the dangers of participation with an acceptance of electoral apathy.

Apathy and participation

An institutional or procedural definition of democracy does not necessarily imply mass participation. Indeed participation may be deprecated on account of the low level of intellect deployed by the typical citizen when considering political issues.¹⁸ The representational model created by the critics of participation is that democracy cannot be left with the 'citizenry' alone. Representation is thus a filter, allowing sporadic input to the democratic process, whilst separating actual decision-making from wholesale public involvement. It protects and facilitates the general democratic ideal at a cost of a participatory role for the people and can be seen as both inclusive (in intent) and exclusive (in practice). Morris-Jones furnished exclusion with its own justification and rejected a general 'duty'

¹⁶ For a discussion of these points see, Davis, 'The Progressive Council, 1889-1907', particularly, pp. 32-35. For a further discussion of this point, set between the wars, see J. Gillespie, 'Municipalism, Monopoly and Management: The Demise of Socialism in one County, 1918-1933' pp. 103-125, *Politics and the People of London*.

¹⁷ N. Seldon, 'Laissez-faire as Dogma: The Liberty and Property Defence League 1882-1914', in K. Brown (editor), *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain*, London, Macmillan, 1974, pp. 208-233.

¹⁸ Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p. 262.

to participate in political activity and, specifically, to vote. He argued that while low electoral turnout can weaken support for local democracy, democracy remains healthy if those with little interest in or knowledge of political issues 'choose' not to participate.¹⁹

Parties and participation

Morris-Jones's view is not, however, widely held in discussions of the quality of local democracy, where electoral turnout is awarded central importance. If representative democracy is perceived as a set of institutional relationships and procedures to facilitate the sporadic input of the electorate, then electoral turnout must be an important indicator of the health of any democracy. The defenders of representative democracy thus present the vote as the 'trump card'.²⁰ Indeed, elections can be 'virtually absolute trumps: the only legitimate method for ascertaining the will of... the people'.²¹ Local electoral turnout in Britain averages around 40 per cent (less for by-elections) and, as Rallings and his colleagues point out, Britain 'lags some distance behind' the rest of Europe in local electoral turnout.²² The argument about local electoral democracy would appear weak, were it not for the link between political parties and popular involvement in local elections.

¹⁹ W.H. Morris-Jones, 'In Defence of Apathy: Some Doubts on the Duty to Vote', *Political Studies*, 2 (1) 1954, pp. 25-37.

²⁰ A. Phillips, 'Local Democracy: The Terms of the Debate', *Commission for Local Democracy Research Report No 2*, 1994, pp. 10-11.

²¹ P. Green, 'A Review Essay of Robert Dahl, Democracy and its Critics', *Social Theory and Practice*, 16 (2), 1990, pp. 217-243, p. 238.

²² C. Rallings, M. Temple, and M. Thrasher, 'Community Identity and Participation in Local Democracy', *Commission for Local Democracy, Research Report No 1*, 1994, Table 6, p. 17.

Election campaigning and competition between local political parties is a stimulus to public interest in political issues. It also facilitates a choice between alternative policies and encourages the electorate to vote.²³ Indeed, political parties ease the elector's choice through label identification.²⁴ Without it, individual profile and local knowledge would be at a premium, for to vote other than for party an 'elector must know something of the personal characteristics of the candidates'.²⁵ Indeed, the 'relatively disinterested [sic] elector' may rely on party to make local elections 'more readily comprehensible'.²⁶

On the other hand the presence of parties may lead to electoral apathy and to something deeper; cynicism about local democracy. The Maud committee in 1967, and the Widdicombe committee in 1986, highlighted the existence of negative attitudes towards local democracy. A significant percentage of Maud's respondents registered alienation from the council responsible for 'governing their locality'.²⁷ Criticisms of the democratic procedure and selection of representatives, were also voiced.²⁸ When

²³ For a discussion of the benefits of local political party competition see Rallings, Temple and Thrasher, 'Community Identity and Participation in Local Democracy', pp. 18-20.

²⁴ N. Rao, 'Representation in Local Politics: A Reconsideration and Some New Evidence', to appear in *Political Studies*, 1997.

²⁵ J. Stanyer, 'Social and Rational Models of Man: Alternative Approaches to the Study of Local Elections', *Advancement of Science*, 26, 1970, pp. 399-407.

²⁶ W.P. Grant, 'Non-partisanship in British Local Politics', *Policy and Politics*, 1 (3), 1973, pp. 241-254. p. 245.

²⁷ Committee on the Management of Local Government, *Research Vol. III, The Local Government Elector, An Enquiry Carried out for the Committee by the Government Social Survey*, by M. Horton HMSO, 1967, p. 70.

²⁸ Maud Report, *Research Vol. III*, Tables 98-100, pp. 69-72.

questioned as to their ability to influence their local council, 54 per cent responded negatively, being either ineffective or uninterested in local affairs.²⁹ Almost three in 10 of Widdicombe's respondents failed to complain about their council as a result of 'a sense of personal incapacity or pessimism'.³⁰ A negative shift in confidence in local democracy since Maud was noted, alongside a 'cheerful dismissal of hustings promises'.³¹ Young and Rao underlined this trend with 1994 data, when only 38 per cent responded positively to the statement 'people like me can have a real influence on politics if they are prepared to get involved'.³² Support for local democracy was linked to the influence of elections in local affairs and real choice between 'alternative candidates or parties'.³³ It seems that political parties have had none of the beneficial impact cited by Rallings and his colleagues, and may in fact work to depress local involvement. Indeed, by acting as disciplined bodies, parties may narrow the choice available to the local electorate to one of accepting or rejecting a small number of competing policy packages.³⁴

The arguments about the beneficial (or otherwise) impact of political parties on local elections are quite distinct from those concerning their impact on the conduct of council business and the ongoing representative

²⁹ Maud Report, *Research Vol. III*, Table 105, p. 75.

³⁰ *The Conduct of Local Authority Business, Research Vol. III, The Local Government Elector*, HMSO, 1986, p. 52.

³¹ Widdicombe committee, *Vol. III*, tables 6.13-6.17, pp. 94-98

³² K. Young and N. Rao, 'Faith in Local Democracy', *British Social Attitudes: The Twelfth Report*, in J. Curtice, R. Jowell, L. Brook and A. Park, (editors), Aldershot, Dartmouth, 1995, pp. 91-117. pp. 111-112.

³³ Young and Rao, 'Faith in Local Democracy', p. 100.

³⁴ J. Burnheim, *Is Democracy Possible? The Alternative to Electoral Politics*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989, p. 102.

process. These latter direct attention to the actual working relationship between the councillor and the party group, the importance the party group has for the councillor in his or her representative activities, and the interrelationship between the councillor, the group and the electorate. These are matters examined in the later chapters of the thesis.

Accountability in liberal democracy.

A balanced view would be that representative democracy facilitates, via party, a choice of councillor, but excludes the community from any other choices. The interaction between councillor, party group and community, which occurs around specific issues and events, exemplifies the tensions inherent in local representative democracy. Such tensions raise an important question: can the electoral process stimulate sufficient citizen involvement to ensure councillors are held to account for what they do?

It is in the answer to this question that a judgement will be reached on whether criticisms of liberal democracy add up to a case against it, or an argument for enhanced democracy within broadly liberal democratic terms. The judgement must depend on the particular context, for the severity of the shortcomings of liberal democracy become more or less important on different spatial scales. For example, within local democracy the councillor confronts the tensions generated by a system which focuses political power in the party group, and more liberal democracy would not in itself lead to a shift of power to local communities. Nevertheless, such a shift may be both desirable and demanded by today's more assertive local communities.

THE COUNCILLOR AND THE ASSERTIVE COMMUNITY.

A number of surveys have considered community assertiveness as evidence of both the electorate's willingness to take action, and belief in the effectiveness of it when faced with unpopular governmental acts. Three surveys, in 1984, 1985 and 1991, noted similar trends; a decline in political passivity; a growing confidence amongst the electorate in their ability to affect the political process; and the increasing importance of the local arena as a catalyst for enhanced citizen protest.³⁵ They also noted that few people perceived the various acts of protest as effective, compared with those claiming they would take such action. However, councillors were seen as an effective focus for protest. Indeed, a number of studies found a greater propensity to protest local than national actions.³⁶

Almond and Verba noted that British political culture was characterised by 'general attitudes of social trust and confidence' and that participation had not challenged its deferential nature. Indeed, the British 'maintained a

³⁵ K. Young, 'Political Attitudes', *British Social Attitudes: The 1984 Report*, in R. Jowell and C. Airey (editors), Aldershot, Gower, 1984, pp. 11-45. K. Young, 'Local Government and the Environment', *British Social Attitudes: The 1985 Report*, in R. Jowell and S. Witherspoon (editors), Aldershot, Gower, pp. 149-175. A. Bloch and P. John, *Attitudes to Local Government: A Survey of Electors*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1991, pp. 36-38.

³⁶ G.A. Almond and S. Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in five Nations*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 185. A. Marsh, *Protest and Political Consciousness*, London, Sage, 1977, particularly pp. 66-69. K. Young, 'From Character to Culture: Authority, Deference and the Political Imagination Since 1945', To appear in S. James (editor), *Political Change in Britain Since 1945*, London, Macmillan, 1997.

strong deference to the independent authority of the government'.³⁷ Marsh, amongst others, has challenged the idea of British political culture as essentially deferential, providing an alternative view of a Britain that is willing to consider a range of political protest actions alongside a concern for political involvement.³⁸ Kavanagh noted that in Britain's civic culture, where ideology and mistrust combine, there is an 'enhanced potential for protest', thus further undermining Almond and Verba's assertion of the deferential nature of British political culture.³⁹ Young has gone as far as to comment that the *Civic Culture* could be seen as 'embarrassingly naive and...as simply wrong'.⁴⁰ Young reports that the propensity has increased for local government to attract greater citizen protest than central government,⁴¹ and indeed, Britain has moved 'towards an assertive and truculent pattern of political behaviour'.⁴² The 1987 British Social Attitudes Report noted evidence of a 'growing self confidence' amongst the electorate, which would bring new political concerns and a 'greater wish to be consulted in the political process'.⁴³ In 1995 Young and Rao found that two in every five respondents felt they could have a real influence on politics, if they got involved.⁴⁴

³⁷ Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, p. 455.

³⁸ A. Marsh, *Protest and Political Consciousness*.

³⁹ D. Kavanagh, 'Political Culture in Great Britain: The Decline of the Civic Culture', in G.A. Almond and S. Verba (editors), *The Civic Culture Revisited*, London, Sage, 1989, pp. 124-176. p. 152.

⁴⁰ Young, 'From Character to Culture'.

⁴¹ Young, 'Local Government and the Environment', pp. 150-154.

⁴² Young, 'From Character to Culture'.

⁴³ A. Heath and R. Topf, 'Political Culture', In R. Jowell, S. Witherspoon, and L. Brook (editors), *British Social Attitudes: The 1987 Report*, Aldershot, Gower, 1987, pp. 51-69. pp. 58-59.

⁴⁴ Young and Rao, 'Faith in Local Democracy', p. 111.

What are the implications of these trends for the representative process? Gyford noted that 'a move away from a society with a large degree of consensus on interests and values, towards a more diverse and fragmented society', exerts pressure on representative democracy to take on a greater participatory form.⁴⁵ Moreover the councillor will directly experience the tension between his or her position as a local representative and demands from the electorate within their ward or division for a greater involvement in local affairs. Widdicombe reported that councillors' responses to the increased assertiveness which impinged on their activities and those of the party group, was to support 'more say' for the 'ordinary citizen in the decisions made by local government', although this 'say' need not detract from the 'proper responsibilities of the councillor'.⁴⁶ Consultation could be enhanced, but the councillor's position as elected decision-maker need not be diminished.

The implications for representative democracy

Two questions are raised by these developments in political culture. First, can the system of representative democracy at the local level cope effectively with greater consultation and an increasingly confident and assertive electorate? Secondly, how will councillors manage pressure for greater participation, within a system controlled by the party group? Much depends on the intensity of feeling on any issue, and whether 'acquiescence' is a permanent or a transient state, and on how a

⁴⁵ Gyford, 'Diversity, Sectionalism and Local Democracy', pp. 110-111.

⁴⁶ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. II*, table 7.15. p.75, and table 7.16, p. 77.

'sufficiently salient matter' may rouse an otherwise 'quiescent citizenry into involvement' and intense, though intermittent action.⁴⁷

In evidence presented by Batley, a community's demands for involvement as a response to events, and councillors' attitudes towards their representational role, display the tension within local democracy. Councillors 'did not see themselves in the main as representatives of the community's interests'. Their task as local representatives was not

to represent the *expressed* interests of the ward but to identify these interests and then 'to convince people that you know best'.

This seemed to amount in practice to attempting to bring the public to terms with party (or council) policy which must often be long-term and city-wide in scale rather than short-term and parochial as local opinion was felt likely to be.⁴⁸

The tension generated by citizen involvement is that it conflicts with councillors' right to govern and thus threatens the party group, and its authority-wide view of representation. Indeed, Lambert *et al* comment that councillors may seem to have little interest in 'being direct representatives of the area, but rather regard themselves as elected to create and defend city government'.⁴⁹ Those members of the community who are moved to seek direct representation of an area and its interests may indeed join

⁴⁷ G. Parry, G. Moyser, and N. Day, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 358.

⁴⁸ R. Batley, 'An Explanation of Non-Participation in Planning', *Policy and Politics*, 1 (2), 1972, pp. 95-114. p. 104-105

⁴⁹ J. Lambert, C. Paris, and B. Blackaby, *Housing Policy and the State: Allocation, Access and Control*, London, Macmillan, 1978, p. 141.

political parties to use the processes of councillor selection to influence the policies of a local authority.⁵⁰

The mobilisation of action

Recognition of the tension between an assertive electorate and its councillors as local party representatives gave rise to the concept of 'event-driven democracy'. The term is construed for the purpose of this thesis as referring to that tension between the community's focus on issues and events of local importance, and the councillors' focus on the decision-making forum of the party group. It highlights the crisis of representation created when councillors find that issue-based demands for representation from the community conflict with the party-based demands for loyalty from the group. Event-driven democracy relates to the mobilisation of communities and individuals, around a particular event in which they have an interest. It can be seen as primarily reactive and protective in nature; reactive in that communities are mobilised after a decision has been made or consultation undertaken, and protective in that communities perceive some threat from the decision or from its consequences. Yet it is also important to see such processes in a positive light, with events as a motivational trigger to action. This action provides a stake in the community and has an educative effect on those involved.⁵¹ Indeed, it has been argued that:

⁵⁰ B. Colenutt, 'Community Action over Local Planning Issues', in G. Craig, M. Mayo, and N. Sharman (editors), *Jobs and Community Action*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, pp. 243-252. p. 246. Bealey, J. Blondel, and W.P. McCann, *Constituency Politics: A Study of Newcastle-under-Lyme*, London, Faber and Faber, 1965, pp. 320-323.

⁵¹ N. Boaden, M. Goldsmith, W. Hampton, and P. Stringer, *Public Participation in Local Services*, Harlow, Longman, 1982, p. 15.

people are less willing than they were to accept authoritarian styles of leadership. Action groups and public protest have become a regular feature of policy development. The receding tide leaves pools of interest where new initiatives are taken.⁵²

As local events are immediate to local communities they can serve to motivate the electorate to a greater degree than that generated by local election campaigns, the timing of which may not be congruent with an issue's life-span. Campaigns on issues of common concern, by 'involving the previously uninvolved for however short a time, may increase democratic activity'.⁵³ Such campaigns indicate that councillors and the community are motivated by different political issues, and councillors, in complaining of the electorate's lack of interest in local politics, reflect these different motivations.⁵⁴ Such varying spheres of interest and the events that drive members of the community to activity, provide arenas in which the tensions between the councillor as a representative, the councillor as a member of a party group, and the electorate themselves, can be explored.

How do councillors, as power holders and gatekeepers, perceive and respond to the challenges to representative democracy emanating from local events? How do they respond to the demands for involvement rather than representation, and balance this against the demands of their parties?

⁵² Ibid, preface.

⁵³ A. Cochrane, 'Community Politics and Democracy', in D. Held and C. Pollit (editors), *New Forms of Democracy*, London, Sage, 1986, pp. 51-77. p. 72.

⁵⁴ W. Hampton, *Democracy and Community: A Study of Politics in Sheffield*, chapter 6, 'The Local Citizen', London, O.U.P, 1970, pp. 122-152. pp. 149-152 are of particular note.

In order to address these questions it is necessary to consider the claims made on councillor loyalty, particularly those generated by the party group. This requires us first to consider the impact of the party group in the context of the long term process of the 'nationalisation' of local politics.

THE NATIONALISATION OF LOCAL POLITICS.

National parties have had a persistent presence in the structure and processes of local representation, but insufficient recognition has been given to the importance of the local manifestation of party, particularly the party group. Parties accordingly continue to be viewed as 'national' rather than 'local' entities. McKenzie took the view that the party outside its Parliamentary manifestation was little more than 'a highly organised pressure group with a special channel of communication directly to the Leader, the Cabinet and the Parliamentary Party'.⁵⁵ This, the dominant view of national political parties has overshadowed their local impact and significance.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ R.T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties*, London, Heinemann, 1955, p. 585. Parkinson has criticised Mackenzie's approach and argued that local political parties should be regarded far less as 'creatures of the national party machine'. Local parties have a distinctive local purpose and interest and more importance should be attached to the 'effect of local factors in motivating party members'. M. Parkinson, 'Central-Local Relations in British Parties: A Local View', *Political Studies*, 19 (4), 1971, pp. 440-446. p. 444

⁵⁶ C. Game and S. Leach, 'The Role of Political Parties in Local Democracy', *Commission for Local Democracy, Research Paper No. 11*, 1995, pp. 7-8.

Gyford and James note that much of the existing literature on political parties relegates the local party to an almost non-existent status.⁵⁷ The customary division into 'constituency parties, party headquarters and the party in parliament' reflects the assumption that outside of the national arena political parties have little relevance.⁵⁸ A more recent text perpetuates this tripartite model of parliamentary, professional and voluntary party.⁵⁹ Indeed political parties in local government have not been distinguished from constituency parties or seen as a separate manifestation of party 'as the scale of their activity would seem to merit'.⁶⁰

Equally, national political parties squeeze local events out of local election campaigns. They use particular local councils as the worst examples of local government by their opponents, and the best examples by their own party administrations. Local elections are drawn into some national aggregate of party activity, which may be beneficial to future national election campaigns. This is not new. 'As early as the 1870s Sir John Gorst, principal agent of the Conservative Party', used local election results 'as Parliamentary indicators'.⁶¹

⁵⁷ J. Gyford and M. James, *National Parties and Local Politics*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1983, pp. 3-6.

⁵⁸ R. Rose, *Politics in England: Change and Persistence*, London, Macmillan, 1989, p. 272.

⁵⁹ R. Garner and R. Kelly, *British Political Parties Today*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993.

⁶⁰ Game and Leach, 'The Role of Political Parties in Local Democracy', p. 7. Also see, Gyford and James, *National Parties and Local Politics*, pp. 3-8.

⁶¹ K. Young, *Local Politics and the Rise of Party: The London Municipal Society and the Conservative Intervention in Local Elections 1894-1963*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1975, p. 32.

Accounting for the rise of party

The politicisation of local government has long been a source of argument. The 'intrusion into local government elections of party politics' was deprecated by *The Times* of 3 November 1880 which saw councillors as 'docile tools of party politics'. Yet, Jones notes, support existed for party politics amongst the local press of 1885, in Wolverhampton, as 'political organisations' contesting local elections could overcome the 'deplorable apathy' amongst the electorate as they had done 'in Parliamentary elections'.⁶²

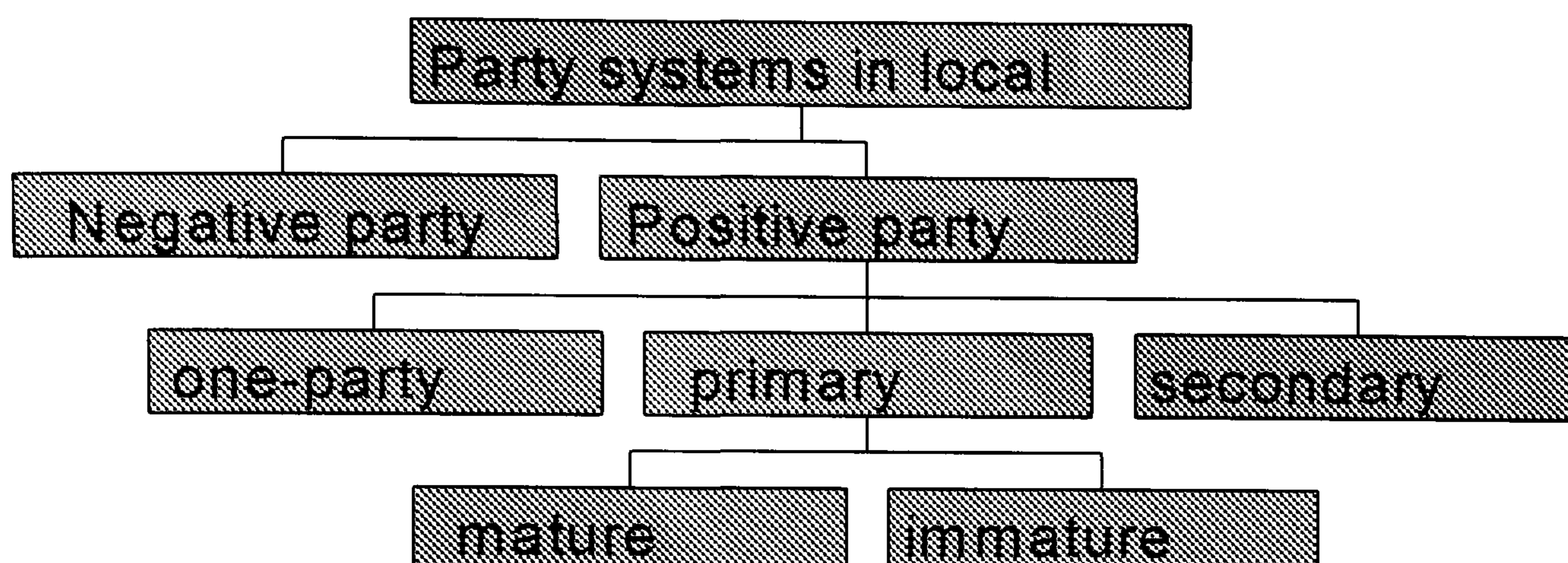
Gyford summarised the long term process of the party politicisation of local government identifying five distinct stages. These he termed *diversity* (1835-65), *crystallisation* (1865-1905), *realignment* (1905-1945), *nationalisation* (1945-1974), and *reappraisal* (1974-).⁶³ Although he deals with broad national trends, it appears that at the local level party groups themselves changed in character, corresponding to a maturation process classified by Bulpitt as either negative or positive. The main distinction between these types of party systems is the degree to which councillors act in coherent political groupings to accept responsibility for control of council policy and the settling of patronage issues.⁶⁴ Gyford's 'stages' provide a useful prism through which to view Bulpitt's 'processes'.

⁶² G.W. Jones, *Borough Politics: A Study of Wolverhampton Borough Council 1888-1964*, London, Macmillan, 1969, pp. 149-150.

⁶³ J. Gyford, 'The Politicisation of Local Government', in M. Loughlin, M. Gelfand and K. Young (editors), *Half a Century of Municipal Decline*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1985, pp. 75-97.

⁶⁴ J.G. Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government*, London, Longmans, 1967, particularly, pp. 123-130.

Figure 1.1. Party Systems in Local Government.



Source: Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government*, p. 130.

Gyford's initial stage of *diversity* from 1835, does not imply the total absence of party organisation and activity in local government, merely that this had not settled into a clear two-party structure. Party existed in the local setting, and the party label, amongst others, was used to secure the election of candidates to an array of representative bodies.⁶⁵ This period was however characterised as one of confusion, with local politics adopting a 'kaleidoscopic form', and being conducted by a variety of political actors and a 'bevy of personal cliques and factions'.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ For a detailed discussion of the many causes of diversity amongst councillors including party during this period see E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*.

⁶⁶ Gyford, 'The Politicisation of Local Government', p. 79. Shifting the time scale of the debate Grant concedes that when independent organisations or 'sponsoring groups', such as chambers of commerce, back a council candidate it is difficult to distinguish sponsoring group from ordinary political party. Although, unlike political parties, sponsoring groups may avoid or lack mechanisms for the discipline of councillors, they may remove their support or endorsement at any time. Grant, 'Non-Partisanship in British Local Politics', p. 243.

The period of *crystallisation* identified saw the 'solidification' of a two party system.⁶⁷ Whilst the use of the independent label continued in this period, the developing Conservative-Liberal competition energised the gradual absorption by the party system of independent councillors, pressurising them to adopt a party label, or membership.⁶⁸ There was a greater tendency in this period for candidates to adopt party labels to contest elections, making it easier for councillors to act *en bloc* in conducting council business.⁶⁹ Indeed, during this period the contest for the government of London saw a vicarious two-party struggle between the Conservative and Liberal parties in the guise of Moderates and Progressives, a contest which was as much about national political concerns as it was about local government.⁷⁰

The period of *realignment* saw the gradual replacement of the Liberal party by the Labour party, as the principal opposition to the Conservatives, with the decline in Liberal candidacies and seats held, matched by Labour

⁶⁷ The label Conservative or Liberal was not necessarily adopted and the use of the moderate, progressive or radical label continued. See Davis, 'The Progressive Council'.

⁶⁸ For examples outside of this period see, Jones, *Borough Politics*, p. 66. Bealey, Blondel and McCann, *Constituency Politics*, pp. 344-350. Pressure on Independents to join a party is described on p. 347.

⁶⁹ See, Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*. Saint, *Politics and the People of London*.

⁷⁰ K. Young and P. Garside, *Metropolitan London: Politics and Urban Change 1837-1981*, London, Edward Arnold, 1982, pp. 58-59. K. Young, 'The Politics of London Government 1880-1899', *Public Administration*, 51 (1), Spring, 1973, pp. 91-108, p. 97. Grant noted the Labour Party policy of intervening in local elections 'under its own banner' whereas 'persons of Conservative or Liberal sympathies would use labels of the 'citizen or progressive type'. W.P. Grant, 'Local Parties in British Local Politics: A Framework for Empirical Analysis', *Political Studies*, 19 (2), 1971, pp. 201-212. p. 203.

increases in the same.⁷¹ The rise of the Labour Party in local government, its use of standing orders and group discipline as a device to ensure councillors acted *en bloc* as coherent units, had an important impact on the conduct of council affairs and the interplay of party relationships.⁷² This period accelerated development of 'primary mature' systems, relying on Labour as a majority group, (or, when Labour were in opposition, Liberals or Conservatives), taking all patronage positions. With Labour absent, Conservatives and Liberals were not likely to 'adopt the same degree of organisation and discipline, or take patronage so seriously'.⁷³

The distinctive element of the period of *nationalisation* was not a domination of a subordinate level of political activity by national parties, but a reciprocal acknowledgement by key political actors of the benefits of assimilating local with national party concerns. The spur to this process was the consensual atmosphere of the post war period, the stability of economic and social development and the 'shared assumptions and values of local and national politicians', rather than the centralising tendency of national parties.⁷⁴ The period of 'nationalisation' saw the re-emergence of the nineteenth century trend of local voting patterns reflecting national

⁷¹ For example it was in the 1920s that Labour steadily increased its representation on the LCC, finally taking control in 1934. See M. Clapson, 'Localism, the London Labour Party and the LCC between the Wars', in A. Saint (editor), *Politics and the People of London*, pp. 127-145. Also see, Young and Garside, *Metropolitan London*, pp. 173-174.

⁷² Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government*, pp. 99-102. pp. 119-123.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 129.

⁷⁴ Gyford, 'The Politicisation of Local Government', p. 87. For a perspective linked to local government re-organisation see, M. Steed, 'The New Style of Local Politics', *New Society*, 5 April 1973, pp. 11-13. M. Schofield, 'The Nationalisation of Local Politics', *New Society*, 28 April 1977, pp. 165-166.

concerns, and national party standing.⁷⁵ Local elections thus became overshadowed by the national contest and votes were cast according to a national preference.⁷⁶

The period of *reappraisal* involved a 'further escalation in the spread of party politics'.⁷⁷ The absence, however, of machinery by which councillors could be forced to comply with the national party, provided a local political independence.⁷⁸ Indeed, save the disciplining of individual councillors and councillors voluntary compliance to national, model standing orders, national parties had little means of controlling the activities of local party groups.⁷⁹ The period of reappraisal continues. A more recent development (1995) in the Labour Party's national rules gave the National Executive Committee power to suspend councillors from group membership and oversee councillors' adherence to group standing orders and rules.⁸⁰ The shifting relationship in this period of reappraisal

⁷⁵ Gyford, 'The Politicisation of Local Government', p. 86. This process is also documented by K. Newton, *Second City Politics: Democratic Processes and Decision-Making in Birmingham*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976. P. Dunleavy, *Urban Political Analysis: The Politics of Collective Consumption*, London, Macmillan, 1980, pp. 135-140. Also Rallings, Temple and Thrasher, 'Community Identity and Participation in Local Democracy'. Hennock noted that the end of the nineteenth century saw local and national politics 'part company' and local voting 'no longer a mere reflection of changing party effectiveness' nationally. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*, p. 287.

⁷⁶ Gyford notes the influence of local and national factors on local elections, *Local Politics in Britain*, Croom Helm, 1976, pp. 125-132.

⁷⁷ Gyford, 'Politicisation of Local Government', p. 89.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 91-92.

⁷⁹ For a discussion of party networks and culture see, Game and Leach, 'The Role of Political Parties in Local Democracy'.

⁸⁰ *Labour Party Rule Book*, Rule 6.6A.6A1 (a), (b), (c), London, The Labour Party, 1995, p. 35.

saw Hackney Borough Labour group disbanded in a national party attempt to restore discipline, damaged by investigations into council corruption. To rejoin the group councillors were required to give an 'undertaking to abide by party rules', accept 'whips approved' by the national party's general secretary, and accept the 'authority of the group leader'. The national party acted to prevent the activities of a 'party within a party' and ensure the proper functioning of the group.⁸¹

Also in 1996, a local-national party policy dispute in Walsall was resolved by the expulsion of 15 councillors from the Labour Party. Even so, this did not represent an ability to control the activities of councillors, only a reserve power to expel them from a national party. They were still able to act as a distinct and organised grouping, contesting both policy and patronage issues, and indeed local elections.⁸²

Not all local politicians may go along with a reappraisal in favour of the national party machine. Party concerns recently led a former Liberal Democrat councillor in one of the authorities covered in this study to resign from the party to form a localist-orientated group entitled 'Chase Residents'. He had originally joined the Liberal Democrats because they did not 'toe a party line without question, unlike others', but links with other parties 'had eroded that'. Chase Residents was to be a non-political organisation based on the proposition that 'local government should be run

⁸¹ *Guardian*, Thursday May 23, Thursday May 30, Friday August 2 1996.

⁸²Such councillors, expelled from the national party, would not be able to contest seats as Labour Party candidates.

for and in the interests of local people, not of political parties' and 'to give local people a real say in the decisions that very often affect their lives'.⁸³

Overall, the five stages identified by Gyford, from *diversity* to *reappraisal*, represent a process of developing influence for political groupings or parties in local government. It also confirms that, since 1835, political organisations of one sort or another, whatever label adopted, have contested elections and controlled local councils. In the early stages of diversity and crystallisation, conditions existed whereby a majority of Independents, parties or other groupings coalesced, but operated a negative system by nonetheless rejecting responsibility for the control of council business. Similarly, a concealed party system could operate were a 'grouping' not elected on a party label, nonetheless organised and coordinated their activities to control council business.⁸⁴ The equal distribution of patronage via a secondary party system was particularly open to these earlier stages, but also possible in the latter stages of movement from realignment to reappraisal. These early stages were however open to patronage and policy disputes being resolved by reference to 'party' as well as to any other label.⁸⁵

⁸³ *Cannock Mercury*, 18 January 1996. For a consideration of the 'purely local party' see, Grant, 'Local Parties in British Local Politics'.

⁸⁴ Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government*,

⁸⁵ For a discussion of the nature of such disputes between various groupings of councillors which clearly indicates the existence of the developing group system, and the competition between political parties and organisations for control of council business, see E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*.

Throughout these stages, candidate adoption of an overtly party political label was not universal.⁸⁶ Yet the conditions were always present for the organisation and activities of coherent, or identifiable 'groupings' of councillors, and for the existence of Bulpitt's party systems.⁸⁷ The factors necessary for the party group to develop, and then to exert, an influence over local representative democracy, and to influence and discipline its members, have been a long established feature of local government.⁸⁸

Jones has identified four 'broad types' of local political systems. These he described as, *non-party*, *partially party*, *emergent party* and *wholly party* systems. Jones highlighted the importance of the political party for bonding councillors together and for focusing their loyalty. Any political grouping however, whether a formal political party or some other more informal *bloc*, can generate similar cohesive properties and act as a focus for the councillor's loyalty.⁸⁹ Thus, the systems Jones outlined would equally exist alongside those identified by Bulpitt, within Gyford's stages of politicisation.

The contribution made by Gyford, Bulpitt and Jones to our understanding of party within local government throws light on the development of the party group as a loyalty-demanding pull on the councillor's representative activities. Indeed, Jones noted, the party group filled the vacuum left by the absence of a political executive in British local government and it came

⁸⁶ Gyford, 'The Politicisation of Local Government'.

⁸⁷ Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government*.

⁸⁸ Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*. See particularly the discussion of the division in the Liberal Party in Leeds in the 1840s over the Liberal government's policy on education, pp. 199-200.

⁸⁹ G.W. Jones, 'Varieties of Local Politics', *Local Government Studies*, 1 (2), 1975, pp. 17-32, pp. 19-21.

to be seen as 'the place where council decisions were taken'.⁹⁰ It is not however the decision-making processes of the group that has heightened the profile of party politics in local government, but the adoption by both councillors and groups of a national party label.

The national party as the basis for local representation

In 1986 the Widdicombe committee referred to the 'near universality of the phenomenon of politicisation' in local government, with party labels predominating in 'about 80 per cent of all councils'.⁹¹ Whilst only 30 per cent of the Widdicombe survey's respondents could name their councillor, 54 per cent could identify their party and 61 per cent the party in control of the council (56 per cent for the upper tier council).⁹² Party, then, has a public resonance which links local representatives to national political entities. It is not surprising that many councillors accept Newton's contention that local elections are won or lost almost irrespective of themselves and that neither they, nor their local party, are held to account on local election day, particularly, if whilst voting, scant attention is given to what councillors 'have or have not been doing'.⁹³

The debate concerning the impact of local and national factors and political parties on local elections remains to be settled.⁹⁴ There is

⁹⁰ Jones, 'Varieties of Local Politics', p. 30.

⁹¹ Widdicombe committee *Research Vol. I, The Political Organisation of Local Authorities*, p. 25, and p. 197

⁹² Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. III, The Local Government Elector*, p. 31.

⁹³ Newton, *Second City Politics*, p. 7, p. 17, and p. 223.

⁹⁴ For a detailed discussion of the factors influencing elections see, Hampton, *Democracy and Community*, chapter seven, 'The Local Electorate', pp. 153-182 looks, *inter alia*, at the class composition of

however a widespread conviction 'that local government elections are a judgement on central rather than local government'.⁹⁵ Miller however draws the distinction between nation-wide trends, and local trends and variations, noting that national trends only 'explain a *proportion* of the variation in actual results'.⁹⁶ The notion of local government elections as solely determined by the popularity of national government has elsewhere been described as a 'fallacy'.⁹⁷ Miller notes the importance to local election results not only of local taxation and other policies, but also variations in style, presentation, local media coverage and candidates' personal qualities. Thus both local and national issues can affect local results.⁹⁸ Local impact is here understood in terms of inter-authority variation. What is excluded from Miller's conclusion is the impact of ward level local 'issues' which may affect only a small number of voters in a single ward, and may not be reflected in local electoral behaviour at all.

Indeed, the importance of national factors in local elections is open to exaggeration and as Green identifies, voting in local elections consists of

Sheffield and party support. See also Bealey, Blondel, and McCann *Constituency Politics*, chapters 11 and 12, pp. 219-227 and pp. 228-248. A.H. Birch, *Small Town Politics: A Study of Political Life in Glossop*, London, Oxford University Press, 1959. He notes that 'in some towns voting in municipal elections...is based fairly clearly on national party allegiances' (underlining Newton's findings) but that in Glossop this was 'very far from being the case', p. 100.

⁹⁵ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. III*, in part two Miller considers in detail local electoral behaviour. He also cites a comprehensive list of references which underline the influence of national politics over local elections, pp. 105-172. p. 146.

⁹⁶ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. III*, pp. 146-147.

⁹⁷ G.W. Jones and J. Stewart, *The Case for Local Government*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1983, pp. 16-18.

⁹⁸ See, Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. III*, pp. 157-170.

three components; the national, the local authority-wide and a 'truly local factor, one unique to a particular ward'.⁹⁹ The fact that local electoral swings may comprise an important local or ward-based element emphasises the representative links between the councillor and his or her electoral area. The blurring of electoral accountability inherent in the difficulty of disaggregating the component elements of voting helps to maintain the view that national concerns dominate local elections. Thus the party group is able to capitalise on this process and demand the loyalty of the councillor as a party affiliate.

So exactly who or what does the councillor represent: the party group, the council or their ward or division? Confusion on this amounts to 'representative failure', and a weakening of the link between councillors and their ward or division. Indeed, this weakening makes it all the more difficult for councillors to be 'community leaders who emerge from the wards they represent' and more likely to be those 'interested in public affairs who seek an opportunity to represent their fellow citizens wherever it may conveniently be found'.¹⁰⁰ This observation - based on research in Sheffield - implies that a councillor need have no relationship, other than a questionable loyalty, to the ward or division he or she represents, which is simply an electoral convenience. As it is political label rather than the candidate's local profile that is instrumental in securing electoral success, it follows that loyalty is to the party and, more importantly, to the party group. At least in urban areas, it is only after election that the councillor

⁹⁹ G. Green, 'National, City and Ward Components of Local Voting', *Policy and Politics*, 1 (1), September, 1972. pp. 45-54, p. 45. Green's findings are underpinned by the work of Young and Rao in their survey of electors' opinions of the important influences on councillors' decision-making. Young and Rao, 'Faith in Local Democracy'.

¹⁰⁰ Hampton, *Democracy and Community*, pp. 203-204.

may develop a local profile and area loyalty. Such loyalty may however be severely tested if a divergence of opinion occurs between the group and the local electorate over any local event.

In other parts of Britain, the path to election may be very different, and the claims to party loyalty and local connection have a different weight. Rural England and Wales may see the persistence of 'social leaders', but their gradual displacement by the 'public person' emphasises the importance of a councillor's relationship with party and not community.¹⁰¹ In this context the strength of councillor's partisan attachment to the party group can be considered as a result both of time and place. Equally important is the electorate's acquiescence in the dominance of political parties in local government, witnessed by the degree to which local electoral choice manifests itself through a party preference. In turn the group is able to interpose itself between the councillor and the community.

THE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PARTY POLITICS

Despite the importance of the relationship between councillors and their electorate to the working of representative democracy, there has been little research on what electors think about local democracy. Major national

¹⁰¹J.M. Lee, *Social Leaders and Public Persons: A Study of County Government in Cheshire Since 1888*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963. For a consideration of differences between rural and urban factors on local politics see N. Rao, *The Making and Unmaking of Local Self-Government*, Aldershot, Dartmouth, 1994, pp. 103-105, pp. 109-110 and pp. 168-169.

surveys were carried out only in 1965, 1985, 1990, and 1994.¹⁰² Their findings throw some light on the issues central to this study; attitudes towards party politics; expectations of the councillor as a representative; and trust in councillors to act up to those expectations.

In comparing electors' 'images' of what they thought their local councillors were like with what they would like them to be, the Maud committee reported that 74 per cent believed their councillor to be 'someone belonging to a political party' whilst only 40 per cent stated that their 'ideal' councillor would hold party membership.¹⁰³ Twenty years later the research for the Widdicombe committee reported that a little under two-thirds of respondents thought 'party politics in local government to have increased over the past decade'.¹⁰⁴ In 1965, some 77 per cent of respondents agreed that voting in council elections decided how things were run locally: in 1985 this figure had declined to 60 per cent.¹⁰⁵ By 1990 a slight increase had occurred to 68 per cent.¹⁰⁶ But 1994 saw a decline to 54 per cent.¹⁰⁷ In 1986 research identified a greater cynicism in attitudes towards the workings of the local electoral system 'than that found by the Maud Committee'.¹⁰⁸ To further test the electorate's feelings in regard to the party system in local government, Young and Rao asked respondents in 1994 the same question as the Widdicombe survey:

¹⁰² Maud committee, *Research Vol. III*. Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. III*. Bloch and John, *Attitudes to Local Government*, Young and Rao, 'Faith in Local Democracy'.

¹⁰³ Maud committee *Research Vol. III*, Table 127, p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. III*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, table 6.13, p. 94.

¹⁰⁶ Bloch and John, *Attitudes to Local Government*, table 25, p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ Young and Rao, 'Faith in Local Democracy', p. 101.

¹⁰⁸ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. III*, p. 100.

In most areas all councillors come from one of the political parties and councils are organised on party lines. There are some areas where most councillors are independent and the council is not organised on party lines. Which do you personally think is the better system ... the party system or the non-party system ?

Table 1.1. Trends in attitudes towards party politics in local government.

Which do you personally think is the better system ?	1985 %	1994 %
The party system	34	34
The non-party system	52	33
Don't know/can't choose	14	33

Source: Young and Rao, *'Faith in Local Democracy'*, p. 104.

Young and Rao noted that the 'growing politicisation' of local government brought a 'growing public acceptance of the role of party politics in local government', but there was also a striking stability in support for the party system. Moreover party identifiers' views corresponded with the 'traditional stances of their parties' with Labour 'most closely associated with politicisation', Conservatives, accepting it with 'reluctance' and Liberal Democrats taking 'the most independent line'.¹⁰⁹

That the party system has a resonance for the electorate is reflected in the high proportion of respondents who vote for a party irrespective of the

¹⁰⁹ Young and Rao, *'Faith in Local Democracy'*, p. 104.

candidate. Young and Rao found that a bare overall majority of respondents vote for a party, regardless of the candidate's quality.

Table 1.2. How people vote in local elections

	%
I vote for a party, regardless of candidate	52
I vote for a party, if I approve of the candidate	28
I vote for candidate, regardless of party	6
I do not generally vote at all	14

Source: Young and Rao, *Faith in Local Democracy*, p. 105.

Labour party identifiers most favoured the party system and voted for party irrespective of candidate, with Liberal Democrats least likely to act in that fashion.¹¹⁰ Party, then, has a greater resonance for the Labour voter.

The work of Young and Rao indicates that whilst the party system in local government receives the support of only a third of the electorate, party affiliation is still a key criterion for electors in considering voting intention. Party is used to 'locate' a vote in accordance with political preferences, but at the same time, many using that criterion would prefer a non-party, local electoral system.

¹¹⁰ Young and Rao, *Faith in Local Democracy*. Young found a similar pattern of responses in 1983, concerning the election of a Member of Parliament. In this respect 58% vote for party regardless of candidate, 24% for a party only if approving of the candidate, 5% for the candidate irrespective of party and 12% generally not voting at all. Young, *Political Attitudes*, p. 17.

Do electors, behaving in such a fashion, expect their councillors to act as party loyalists? Electors' expectations of their councillors are inescapably conditioned by the prominence in local government elections of national party politics. Equally important are electors' attitudes towards the balance needed between a councillor's own personal views, those of his or her party and those of the people he or she represents. The results of what respondents thought the 'most important' influence on councillors should be (or indeed, what was their focus of representation), by Young and Rao's own admission, are 'startling'.

Table 1.3. Most important for councillors to take into account:

	%
His or her own views	1
The interests of the ward he or she represents	40
The interests of all people in the Council's area	52
His or her party's views	2

Source: Young and Rao, *Faith in Local Democracy*, p. 109

Whilst selecting a candidate by party, the electorate expect the focus of representation not to be that party, but the electorate themselves. The expectation that councillors should focus almost as much on their own specific electoral area as on the needs of the authority as a whole acts as a counter-weight to the policy-broadening influence of the party group. Young and Rao conclude that in a system dominated by the party group:

there is an overwhelming expectation that councillors should place local interests - either at ward level or across the local area - first.

And there is also a clear indication that the public thinks there are limits to the role of party politics.¹¹¹

The public then, want councillors to be loyal to their electorate in preference to their party.¹¹² But do they consider that councillors can be 'trusted' to do this? Young and Rao inquired of respondents:

How much do you trust local councillors of any party to place the needs of their area above the interests of their own party ... just about all the time, most of the time, only some of the time or almost never ?

Less than one in three thought councillors could be trusted to do so either 'all' or 'most of the time'. Fourteen per cent thought they could never be trusted. The majority of respondents possessed a wary cynicism about their councillors, who could be trusted 'only some of the time'. Thus the electorate expect that for the councillor:

their overriding concern should be the representation of local interests. That they are not widely trusted to do so betrays a degree of cynicism; that electors should then vote the party ticket

¹¹¹ Young and Rao, 'Faith in Local Democracy', p. 109.

¹¹² This may reflect a carefully drawn distinction between the local and the national approach to political parties. Indeed, an ICM poll for the Observer reported that, in regard to the recent change of political allegiance of MP Emma Nicholson, 'when asked where a politician's first loyalty should be, 47 per cent said 'party' compared with 45 per cent who were for conscience'. ICM Poll of 500 voters in Torridge and West Devon. *Observer*, 7 January 1996.

regardless of the qualities of their candidates appears perverse.

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Such 'cynicism' in the expectations electors have of their councillors may well be reciprocated in councillors' expectations of the electorate. Such a situation would undoubtedly loosen the bonds of the representative relationship, a matter to which we shall return in chapter three. Rao presents pressing evidence of elector's concern that councillors should indeed represent their local area above the demands of party. The electorate's trust in councillors to do so however, is limited.¹¹⁴

Table 1.4. Trust in councillors to put the interests of the area above party

	almost always/ most of time	Some of the time	almost never
Party Identification	%	%	%
Conservative	36	49	13
Labour	29	53	14
Liberal Democrat	37	54	9
Other/None/DK	21	47	21
All respondents	31	51	15

Source: Rao, *Representation in Local Politics*, p. 29.

Labour supporters display the least trust that the councillor will represent area over party compared with Conservatives and Liberal Democrat supporters. Rao goes on to comment that 'few electors find party acceptable when it leads their councillor to act against the local interest'. Furthermore there is a powerful demand that the councillor should 'set

¹¹³ Young and Rao, 'Faith in Local Democracy', pp. 114-115.

¹¹⁴ Rao, 'Representation in Local Politics'.

aside party considerations in the face of a pressing local issue'. Rao notes that the representative process comprises the 'represented, the party and the representatives' and furthermore that the councillor's 'party mandate may well take precedence over the electoral mandate'.¹¹⁵

There is however, a fourth element of the representative process, the party group, which indeed may take precedence over the wider local political party and is a further mandate for the councillor to consider. Indeed, the traditional tripartite relationship between the party, the councillor and the electorate should then be seen as - a four cornered relationship which includes the party group as a distinct and separate element of the local representative processes.

Rethinking the role of party

Sir Ivor Jennings notes that J.S. Mill completed *Considerations on Representative Government* without mentioning parties, while 'a realistic survey of the British Constitution to-day must begin and end with parties and discuss them at length in the middle'.¹¹⁶ Although concerned with central government, it is equally important today to consider the impact of political party, and more specifically the party group, within British local government. The importance of the party group is well recognised, but the interference that 'group' may cause in the representational process, and its ability to act as a loyalty-generating source, remain to be fully investigated. The group can be considered as an integral part of a wider political party, but also as a discrete body. Its members act as a decisional

¹¹⁵ Rao, 'Representation in Local Politics'.

¹¹⁶ W.I. Jennings, *The British Constitution*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1947, p. 31.

reference group, the actions of which are of distinct community interest,¹¹⁷ which is separate from the influence of the group on the policy-making process.¹¹⁸ Indeed much of the literature considers the party group in relation to the councillor as a decision and policy-maker.¹¹⁹

The blurring of representational responsibilities between party and electoral area is further confused by the councillor's management function. Can representation be separated from what councillors do in committee? Indeed, if it is not, councillors may pursue representation through the management function.¹²⁰ Councillors' activities have often been considered by separating out from representation time allocations between council and committee work. Representation becomes marginalised to dealing with electors problems, casework, welfare work or public consultation. Such a narrow approach to representation can not fully account for the relationship between the councillor, the electorate and

¹¹⁷ S.J. Eldersveld, *Political Parties: A Behavioural Analysis*, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1964, pp. 380-381.

¹¹⁸ See Jones, *Borough Politics*. Also see, J. Dearlove, *The Politics of Policy in Local Government: The Making and Maintenance of Public Policy in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1973. D. Green, *Power and Party in an English City: An Account of Single Party Rule*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1981.

¹¹⁹ Bealey, Blondel, and McCann, *Constituency Politics*, Dearlove, *The Politics of Policy in Local Government*, T. Karran, "Borough Politics" and "County Government": Administrative Styles in the Old Structure', *Policy and Politics*, 10 (3), pp. 317-342.

¹²⁰ J. Stewart, 'The Role of Councillors in the Management of the Authority', *Local Government Studies*, 16, July/August, 1990, pp. 25-37. pp. 28-29.

important local issues.¹²¹ Some councillors may not however view dealing with electors problems as 'being amongst their most important tasks'.¹²² Others may see casework as the 'routine way of organising local representation'.¹²³

If the councillor is faced with a party group decision that is in conflict with the opinion of the electorate, patterns of time allocation will tell little about the quality of the representative processes, and still less about how councillors synthesise the representation of an electoral area with the conduct of council business and the demands of the party group. The party group is a product of an electoral process, and the very vehicle through which the councillor experiences the demands of representation. Little is

¹²¹ Rao, *The Making and Unmaking of Local Self-Government*, pp. 149-174. N. Rao, *Managing Change: Councillors and the New Local Government*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1993, pp. 25-39. A. Bloch, *The Turnover of Local Councillors*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1992, pp. 12-15. K. Young and N. Rao, *Coming to Terms with Change: The Local Government Councillor in 1993*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1994, pp. 17-29. These texts compare the time allocation made by councillors in regard to their various roles for the years 1964, 1976, 1985 and 1993. Young and Rao used Maud, Robinson and Widdicombe data with their own 1993 research. Interestingly, table 3.1 p. 18. with figures 3.3 to 3.6, pp. 25-26, shows that although councillors claim that dealing with constituent or ward issues are the most important activities they undertake, they spend less time on these matters than attending and preparing for, committee and council meetings. See also, Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. II*, pp. 41-53.

¹²² For a discussion of councillors' approaches toward electors' problems see, A. Rees and T. Smith. *Town Councillors: A Study of Barking*, London, The Acton Society Trust, 1964, pp. 46-49, p. 47. H. Heclo, 'The Councillor's Job', *Public Administration*, 47 (2), 1969. pp. 185-202, pp. 190-193. Indeed, an exclusively representative role may be unattractive to councillors. *Taking Charge: The Rebirth of Local Democracy*, Commission for Local Democracy, Municipal Journal Books, 1995, p. 16.

¹²³ Lambert, Paris and Blackaby, *Housing Policy and the State*, p. 141.

known of how the party group interposes itself between councillor and community, and thereby becomes an important player in the representative process. Still less is known about the ways in which the organisation, discipline and loyalty expected by the party group act as a 'pull' on the councillor's representative 'focus'.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The aim of this study is, then, to analyse the nature of the impact on local representation exerted by the party group, to consider the extent and depth of group influence as a focus for representation, and to examine how councillors experience and balance competing representative tensions. It asks why councillors focus loyalty on the group, and whether their political affiliation influences this attachment. The thesis is divided into four parts. The first is entitled *Dilemmas of representation*, the second, *Theatres of representation*, the third, *Crises of representation* and the fourth, *Conclusions*.

The first part (chapters 1, 2 and 3), considers the development of party within local government and the tensions that are created by the conflicting demands for representation made on the councillor by the electorate and the party group. It looks at the current understanding of the party group and the approaches of the three main national political parties to the organisation of councillors. It also examines attitudinal similarities and differences to representation between councillors of the three main political parties, as revealed by a survey of 629 councillors for this study. The second part of the thesis (chapters 4, 5 and 6) applies a theatrical metaphor to the councillor as a representative. The councillor performs a

series of representative acts - speaking and voting - in a range of open and public, or closed and private, *theatres of representation*. Councillors' performances are open to critical review by these private and public audiences. The open theatres of representation considered are the council, committee, public meetings, the press and electronic media. The closed theatres of representation considered are the party group, the local political party and other private meetings. This part looks at the influence of the group, the location of any issue and political affiliation on the councillor's use of the *discretion* attached to their office. Discretion allows the councillor to select both their acts of representation and the theatre within which they will perform to solve a crisis of representation. A *crisis of representation* is generated for the councillor when the group demands public loyalty to its decisions whilst the electorate demands action from the councillor in opposition to the group's decision. This part examines councillors' self-reported likely acts of representation and their actual action in a crisis of representation.

The third part of this thesis (chapters 7, 8 and 9) contains three separate case studies each of which considers an *actual* crisis of representation experienced by councillors. The case studies set out the context of each crisis, how the councillors concerned reacted and the influence of the party group and affiliation in each case. They provide an illustration of event-driven democracy; that is, the stimulation of sections of the community into protest as a result of a decision or policy of the council, or one with which it is associated.

The final part of the thesis consists of a single chapter which establishes the impact on local representative democracy of the existence and

activities of political party groups. It also establishes the party group as the very body which councillors come to represent.

As described in the account of the research methods set out in appendix 1 the author was able to use his own position as both a Labour county and district councillor, and thus a member of two party groups, to apply an element of participant observation to the research. Thus it was possible to observe councillors in what might be called their natural habitat, the party group. Such observation provided both a richness of material, and a confirmation of the results of the questionnaire and the interviews conducted. In addition the author's closeness to the issues and key actors within the three case studies also added to the analysis of the issues involved by enhancing access.

The common bond of councillors operating in a group system and the problems all councillors experience when a crisis of representation occurs, subjecting them to the competing pressures of electorate and group, is something which transcends party affiliation.¹²⁴ The analysis which follows is designed to increase our understanding of the relationship between the councillor, the party group and the electorate and to assess the influence of the group over the processes of local democracy. It also raises questions about the validity and sustainability of the processes of local democracy.

¹²⁴ Clements went as far as to note that in Bristol there was 'more in common between politicians of opposing parties than between them and those they represent', R. Clements, *Local Notables and the City Council*, London, Macmillan, 1969, p. 190.

2. THE PARTY GROUP IN LOCAL DEMOCRACY.

Jones and Stewart described the problem of party politics in local government as a dual one, arising from the 'conduct of the group' and 'the extent of group discipline'. Whether a group's approach to discipline was firm or relaxed lay 'at the heart of the democratic processes of local government'. Despite this importance, political groups were unconsidered 'in all reviews of organisation and management in local government'.¹ Moreover the group can now be said to be an intermediary, positioned between the councillor and the electorate. This chapter addresses the factors that have enabled the group to achieve this position in the processes of local representation. In doing so, it offers an approach to understanding the party group in its political and legal aspects as an entity, membership of which can be distinguished from political affiliation.

The chapter first sets out the current understanding of the process by which councillors come together in identifiable party groups. It examines the factors that enable the group to maintain a cohesive and disciplined approach to the conduct of local representation. Secondly, it accounts for the differing approaches to the concept of party 'group' within and between the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. Thirdly, it considers the legal construction of the group. Fourthly it sets out an approach to understanding the influence of the group over local representation and the handling of representational or 'locational' issues by councillors.

¹G.W. Jones and J. Stewart, 'Party Discipline Through the Magnifying Glass', *Local Government Chronicle*, 30 October 1992, p. 15.

PARTY GROUP, PARTY, AND DEMOCRACY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL.

The organising of councillors into definite party groupings for the conduct of council business, the influence of those groupings on the processes of local representation, and the degrees of cohesion they exhibit will be demonstrated in this chapter. Group cohesion, and the varying reasons across the main political parties for its existence, means that councillors often act differently from the ways in which they would act as independent representatives. The group demands loyalty, and the councillor must either comply with or dissent from it. Thus the relationship between the individual councillor and the individual elector is not such that they interact upon one another in an 'ideal representative system'.² Indeed, a 'crisis of representation' arises when the views of the group and electoral pressures collide over specific issues. The ability to generate such crises places the group in an intermediary position between councillor and represented and indicates the strength of the group system.

The independent existence of the party group as an important element of political party structure was demonstrated by Gyford and James in a model comprising the party at headquarters, the party in Parliament, local party units and the local authority party group.³ As a discrete (and indeed discreet) unit of party structure it is important to consider the influence of the group over its membership. This influence includes its ability to generate loyalty, its provision of a theatre for representative activity, and the willingness of councillors, as party affiliates, to subordinate their

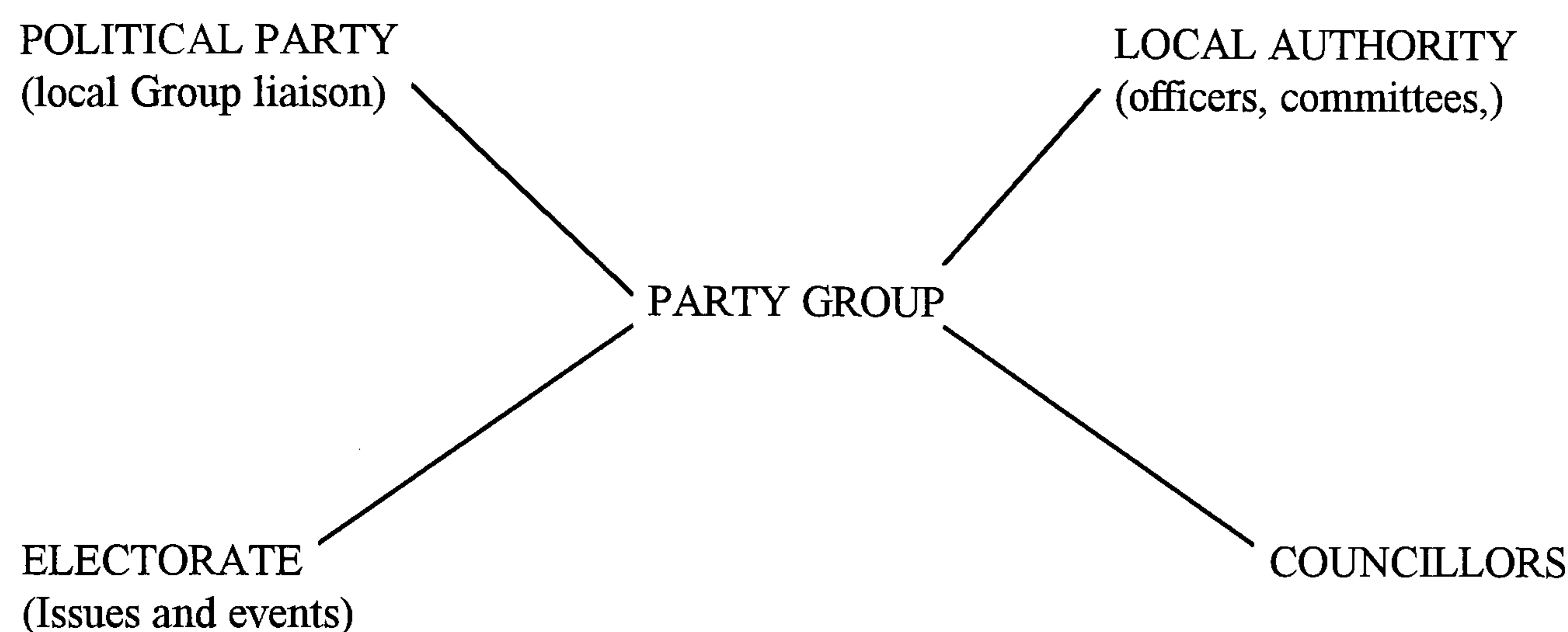
² L.J. Sharpe, 'The Politics of Local Government in Greater London', *Public Administration*, 38 (2), Summer, 1960, pp. 157-172. pp. 170-171.

³ Gyford and James, *National Parties and Local Politics*, p. 7.

relationship with the electorate to the group. The diagram below presents the group as holding a central position in local democracy placed between the political actors as a filter of communication.

Figure 2.1.

Political linkages



As membership of the group entails expectations of public adherence to group policy and decisions, it exerts a pull on the councillor's representational activities, and is a powerful alternative to demands for representation made by the electorate. The imbalance between the demands for councillor loyalty made by the group and the electorate holds the key to understanding the current experiences of local democracy and the outcome of the competition for the councillor's loyalty.

Group expectations of councillor loyalty create an 'exclusive' political decision-making environment, the outcomes of which may conflict with the expressed wishes of sections of the electorate. This is a major source of tension in the representational process, a tension which need not be of a partisan nature, but related to particular issues or decisions. Even so, the councillor's election, often as a result of party affiliation alone, produces

an affinity with the group, drawing the councillor away from the electorate.

THE CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF PARTY GROUP

Studies have confirmed that party group is now prevalent within local authorities.⁴ The very existence of large numbers of councillors elected on a shared political platform requires them to organise to ensure their political success, or to oppose a majority party. In 1967 the Maud committee considered the largely urban phenomenon of councils operating on 'party political lines', with political discussion and decision-making taking place in groups which operated 'outside the committee structure'.⁵ Indeed, Maud referred to a minority of authorities where parties had a 'stranglehold' on 'day-to-day operations' and councillors followed the party line with a 'forced' and 'unnatural' regularity.⁶

The committee noted the distinctions in approach to the party group system between Conservative and Labour parties. Conservative Central Office were described as 'wary' of the group reducing the council to a 'rubber stamping' exercise, but felt the system desirable to attain 'co-ordinated action and to ensure that information is available to members'. The Labour Party were more supportive of the role of party politics as a device for 'voter recognition' and to 'ensure a consistent direction of

⁴ See, Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. I*, K. Young and M. Davies, *The Politics of Local Government since Widdicombe*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1990. Game and Leach, 'The Role of Political Parties in Local Democracy'.

⁵ Maud committee, *Vol. I, Report of the Committee*, para 24, p. 6.

⁶ *Ibid*, para 33, p. 8.

policy'.⁷ Maud, however, made no study of the work of party groups.⁸ Volume 5 of its research reports did note that party group was 'fundamental to the influence of party politics in local government'.⁹ It also observed that 'almost invariably, party groups of all political persuasions meet before each council meeting, to receive information about the business and in most instances to decide on a party line (even though this may not be obligatory)'.¹⁰

Reflecting on this, Maud commented:

Whether a party group is engaged in vetting recommendations originating in committees, or considering a line to be taken in council or committee, it is a closed organisation which the electorate may not be able to influence. In so far as the decisions of the group are 'binding' on the member he can be regarded as a delegate of the group or party organisation rather than a representative of the electorate. There is a possible contradiction between the stimulus to public interest and contact caused by the election campaigns and the appeals of party controversy on the one hand, and the tendency towards an inward-looking

⁷ Ibid, para 376 and para 377, pp. 110-111.

⁸ Ibid, para 383, p. 112.

⁹ M. Harrison and A. Norton, Maud committee, *Vol. V, Local Government Administration in England and Wales*, Chapter 5, 'Some Effects of the Presence or Absence of Party Politics on the Operation of Local Authorities', para 27, p. 103.

¹⁰ Ibid, para 37, pp. 105-106.

organisation in the party group, unresponsive to the needs of the electorate as a whole, on the other.¹¹

In sum the group serves to distance the councillor from the represented. It sets itself up as the beneficiary of the aggregation of political support that flows from the processes of a local democracy. Local government and democracy may be 'impoverished by the strait-jacket of party politics', which constrains public involvement, but some defend it nonetheless as the most appropriate method of ensuring that local decisions are democratically made.¹² Moreover, secrecy establishes the group as a forum within which representative activity is conducted away from the gaze of the represented, in turn enabling the group to influence the ways in which councillors behave in more open and public settings.

The Maud committee produced the foundations of a working definition of group politics and its impact on the representational relationship between the councillor and the electorate. The important characteristics were its closed and secret nature, its existence as a decision-making mechanism outside and alongside the council as a representative body, its acceptance by Conservative and Labour parties as having a valuable policy co-ordinating role, and its ability to invert the position of the councillor as representative of the community to one of 'delegate' of the group. Subsequently, these components were to be added to and elaborated by other inquiries.

¹¹ Maud committee, *Vol. 1, Report of the Committee*, para 383, pp. 112 - 113.

¹² For a consideration of the participatory processes and councillors' reactions to them as party politicians see P. Chaberlayne, 'The Politics of Participation: An Enquiry into Four London Boroughs', 1968-74, *London Journal*, 4 (1), 1978, pp. 49-68. p. 65.

The sources of group cohesion

Nearly 20 years later the Widdicombe committee considered the organisation and activities of party groups, the importance of group discipline, and the phenomenon of group members voting *en bloc* in council and committee. Widdicombe received advice from its researchers on the importance of these factors as an indicator of the ability of the group to direct, if not control, the activities of councillors in council and committee.¹³ They were important because Widdicombe found party label predominant in 80 per cent of councils.¹⁴ Subsequently, little evidence was found to 'sustain the notion of a rising tide of politicisation beyond the obvious and trivial observation that most councillors wear a party label'.¹⁵ The party label marks out the cohesiveness of groups within council and committee and councillors' 'marked reluctance to vote against group decisions'.¹⁶

Party groups maintain cohesion by the adoption of varying degrees of discipline, the effect of which is to elevate the private group meeting above the formal arena of the council and its committees. This condition is judged by the extent to which councillors are considered bound by its decisions; and measured by the extent to which they vote *en bloc* in council and committee meetings.¹⁷ Widdicombe's research team identified

¹³ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. I*, chapter two, 'The Patterns of Local Politics', pp. 23-40.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 25.

¹⁵ Young and Davies, *The Politics of Local Government since Widdicombe*, p. 61.

¹⁶ P. Saunders, *Urban Politics: A Sociological Interpretation*, London, Hutchinson, 1979, p. 221.

¹⁷ Young and Davies, *The Politics of Local Government Since Widdicombe*, pp. 43-50.

stronger cohesion within Labour groups compared to Conservative groups, with 49 per cent of Labour groups, but only nine per cent of Conservative groups never having experienced votes against decisions 'previously agreed within groups'. Group cohesion was stronger in council than committee with 92 per cent of Conservative and 99 percent of Labour groups, usually or always voting together in Council and 79 per cent and 85 per cent respectively so acting in committee.¹⁸ Examining the extent to which councillors were either 'routinely bound', 'bound on special issues only' or 'not bound', Young and Davies subsequently identified an increase in group discipline in their own findings in 1989 over the 1985 Widdicombe committee results.

Table 2.1. Mandating by Party: effect on members of group decisions

	1985	1989	Variation
	%	%	
Not bound	6	13	+ 7
Routinely bound	68	71	+ 3
Special issues only	26	16	- 10

Source: Young and Davies, *The Politics of Local Government Since Widdicombe*, Figure 10, p. 46.

Young and Davies noted the move amongst both parties in the direction of 'routine mandating' with 92 per cent of Labour and 50 per cent of Conservative authorities adopting this practice. Looking for a more direct measure of group cohesion they examined the extent to which councillors of majority groups actually voted together at council or committee or

¹⁸ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. I*, Tables 2.3 and 2.5, pp. 27-30.

never voted with the opposition.¹⁹ They concluded by noting the largely urban phenomenon of councillors being increasingly bound by, and supporting, the group in both council and committee.²⁰

A behaviour pattern is discernible from the Widdicombe research and the work of Young and Davies, with group cohesion greater in council than committee. However, an analysis of voting patterns in council and committee may not produce a subtle enough measure of group influence on the representative activities of the councillor. Equally it says nothing about any of the other theatres of representation within which councillors act. A measure of cohesion based on councillors' voting as a group in council or committee, the frequency of cross-voting or the degree to which councillors feel bound by group decisions, is insufficiently sensitive to capture the realities of group discipline. Concentrating the analysis on majority groups also underestimates the extent of group cohesion and discipline. To examine this we need to distinguish between a councillor's votes and a councillor's speeches. We also need to differentiate the open and closed theatres in which those acts are performed, rather than simply whether the group is in the majority.

Widdicombe's principal research team noted the duality of party group existence; first, its relationship to the council, of which it was an important decision-making body (particularly for the majority party), but which gave it no formal recognition. Secondly, the group and its councillors have

¹⁹ Young and Davies, *The Politics of Local Government Since Widdicombe*, tables 6-7, pp. 46-49.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 44. pp. 47-48. p. 51. The urban nature of politicisation was also noted by the Maud Committee, *Vol. I, Report of the Committee*, para 24, p. 6.

relationships with the political party outside the council. Relations with the party vary 'within and between parties and types of authority'.²¹ Indeed, groups are rarely 'homogeneous' and social characteristics of gender, age, class and ethnicity, add to internal divisions and external variations.²²

Party group: a disciplined approach to representation

Group cohesion is maintained, but only in part, by group discipline. The adoption of a 'strict' or loose interpretation of discipline (or standing orders), is important to understanding the influence of the group over its membership. Such interpretation is often reflective of councillors' political values and political affiliation.²³ However the use of a disciplined approach to council affairs (notwithstanding the absence of 'disciplinary' mechanisms or procedures), can be the product of political circumstances, rather than an ideological approach to representation. Indeed, the early introduction of a party 'caucus' to council affairs has been undertaken with reluctance and deprecated by some councillors as undermining the council as a representative body.²⁴ The current phenomenon of group cohesion has developed over time and some resistance has occurred to adopting a cohesive approach to speaking and voting, even to the extent of refusing to attend group meetings.²⁵ Equally some councillors have indicated a

²¹ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. I*, p. 82.

²² Ibid, p. 88.

²³ For a discussion of the interpretation of discipline see Bulpitt, *Party politics in English Local Government*, pp. 99-103 and 120-121.

²⁴ Young and Garside, *Metropolitan London*, p. 61.

²⁵ For a consideration of party group cohesion see Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*, interesting examples are given on p. 97, p. 145, and p. 249.

'strong resentment against group control' and against the 'principle of obeying majority decisions'.²⁶

Such literature as does exist on the development of a cohesive approach to group activity indicates its uneven progress across both time and place but also indicates a longstanding tendency for councillors to operate as identifiable groups, with varying degrees of success in maintaining councillor loyalty.²⁷ The group 'converts a collection of individual councillors elected under a common party label, into an effective political force'. Group unity however cannot always be guaranteed without effort.²⁸ It is the effort required to secure that unity that is often criticised for restricting the 'freedom of the individual member', but which at the same time provides support. Group unity will in part rest on councillors' ability to influence group decisions, to freely express themselves, influence party policy and 'dispose of any doubts and disputes'.²⁹

²⁶ Bealey, Blondel and McCann, *Constituency Politics*, p. 372.

²⁷ For a discussion of the development of group politics, the political conditions encouraging a group approach to council affairs and examples of differing cohesion amongst councillors in the conduct of council business see, Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*. A. Saint, *Politics and the People of London*. Young and Garside, *Metropolitan London*. Also see, K. Young, 'Political Party Organisation', in G. Rhodes (editor), *The New Government of London: The First Five Years*, London, Weidenfield and Nicolson 1972, pp. 16-49. Also, in the same text see K. Young and G. Rhodes, 'The Electoral System and Elections', pp. 50-84. Young, *Local Politics and the Rise of Party*. Clements notes that the 'hegemony of the two major parties in Bristol', goes back to the early 1920s, R. Clements, *Local Notables and the City Council*, p. 172.

²⁸ J. Gyford, S. Leach and C. Game, *The Changing Politics of Local Government*, London, Unwin, 1989, pp. 172-173.

²⁹ W.E. Jackson, *Achievement: A Short History of the LCC*, London, Longmans, 1965, p. 53. A similar point is made by Rees and Smith, *Town Councillors*, differences of opinion within the ruling Labour group are

Such free expression within group is itself not guaranteed. The group as a centralised and hierarchical decision-making process often makes adequate questioning of its leadership and their decisions, difficult for its 'less well placed members'. Even so, this, alongside feeling the 'party's pulse' and cajoling 'members to follow the agreed line' by the chief whip, can still accumulate to 'an exhibit of democratic leadership in action'.³⁰ The leadership however must not 'offend the core political values and commitments of back-benchers',³¹ whilst any disputes that are played out in the group risk backfiring and strengthening the leadership.³²

The result of group discipline and cohesion is to ensure that representation is conducted in private group meetings and not so much in the observable and accountable public theatres of council and committee. Discipline may indeed extend to communication with the press, but such a firm approach to group discipline may lack support within the very group adopting it, and be the target of criticism by both political opponents, and party members.³³

The defining point is the degree to which disciplinary mechanisms exist within groups or to which discipline operates as an informal process. It is here that party affiliation may have something to tell about the

examined, pp. 86-94. The importance of the group leadership reflecting currents of political opinion within the group is commented upon, p. 90.

³⁰ For a full discussion of discipline in practice in Herbert Morrison's London County Council see B. Donoghue and G.W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973, pp. 191-195. p. 193. p. 194.

³¹ G. Stoker, *The Politics of Local Government*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1991, pp. 95-98. p. 98.

³² P. Saunders, *Urban politics*, pp. 221-222.

³³ For an example see Young, 'Political Party Organisation', pp.31-32.

organisation and activities of councillors as discrete groupings. Once decisions are made in the private group meeting, the group expects the councillor's loyalty and public support, or at least avoidance of opposition. It is that expectation and the disciplinary mechanisms available to ensure compliance, that sets the private party group between the councillor and the electorate and which ensures that representation is conducted privately.³⁴ Indeed, even criticism of party rebels has been publicly 'more in sorrow than anger' with harsher accusations of treachery kept private.³⁵

In Wolverhampton Borough Council, Jones noted the tendency for approaches to group discipline to fluctuate over time, depending on personalities and the contentiousness of any issues. Labour discipline could be of a loose kind, requiring only 'explanation' of deviations from group decisions, as cohesion rested not on 'coercion' but 'agreement underpinned by social ties'. Such expulsions as did occur were 'rare' and reserved for the long term rebel, 'out of tune with the party'.³⁶

In Wolverhampton at least, the group system did not develop because 'the Labour Party happened to conduct its affairs in that way. It arose to enable the Town Council to fulfil its functions in the twentieth century'.³⁷ It did however prompt the 'informal get togethers' of the Conservative and Liberal Party groups, in the early years of the century, to develop into an 'anti-socialist caucus'. This caucus met in response to the organised

³⁴ D. Green, *Power and Party in an English City*, Labour group discipline is discussed in Chapter 7, 'Group Discipline', pp. 75-89.

³⁵ R. Butterworth, 'Islington Borough Council: Some Characteristics of Single Party Rule', *Politics*, Vol. I, May, 1966, pp. 21-31. p. 25.

³⁶ For a full consideration of Labour group discipline see, Jones, *Borough Politics*, pp. 183-186. pp. 183-184.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 185.

Labour threat, but which lacked Labour's 'discipline and compulsion'.³⁸ Elsewhere, the 'deliberate policy of the Labour Party' is seen as responsible for bringing 'the formal group system into being'.³⁹ Indeed, organisation by one party may generate its own organised political opposition, even if the move to greater solidarity and organisation amongst some councillors is a reluctant one, rather than one of political predisposition toward a group system.⁴⁰ Conservatives have similarly blamed their political opponents for the need to fight elections on party grounds.⁴¹ Jones traced the development of the Wolverhampton anti-socialist councillors' adoption of a group approach and the pressures they experienced to conduct their affairs in a cohesive fashion.⁴² Conservative group discipline was less structured than Labour's and often manifested itself as 'moral' or some other pressure, to maintain unity, rather than expulsion from the group.⁴³

Group unity ensured not only that a minority can act cohesively against a majority, but also that the majority group can be sure its decisions become decisions of the council. Here, as elsewhere the group is arguably the most important and influential decision-making forum of the council.⁴⁴ In Sheffield Hampton noted the council managed on 'strict party lines with

³⁸ Ibid, p. 190.

³⁹ Bealey, Blondel and McCann, *Constituency Politics*, p. 370.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 373. Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government*, p. 100. Maud committee, *Vol. I, Report of the Committee*, para. 379, p. 111. Also, *Vol. V*, para. 32, p. 104. Jones, *Borough Politics*, p. 190.

⁴¹ Young, *Local Politics and the Rise of Party*, pp. 35-55, particularly pp. 43-44. Also p. 190. Young and Garside, *Metropolitan London*, pp. 58-59.

⁴² Jones, *Borough Politics*, pp. 187-194.

⁴³ Ibid, pp. 200-201.

⁴⁴ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p. 221. Hampton, *Democracy and Community*, p. 61. Stoker, *The Politics of Local Government*, p. 98.

regular group meetings'. Despite any conceptual differences between Labour and Conservatives in regard to the proper influence of the group over its members, both parties expected their members to support group decisions 'within the council chamber' and had whips to 'supervise group management and discipline'.⁴⁵ Indeed, the Conservative group leader could appoint 'other group officers' and with sole discretion, 'issue whips on any matter before the city council'.⁴⁶ Hampton found group unity maintained, with protestations of independence rarely resulting in cross-voting, and loyalty to the party expected and usually received.⁴⁷

Loyalty of the councillor to the group has even been sought before election by both Conservative and Labour parties.⁴⁸ Indeed all Labour candidates, are required to give an undertaking to abide by the standing orders of their Labour group if elected.⁴⁹ The approach of the group leader or leadership toward group loyalty and discipline also bears upon councillors' adherence to group policy or decisions. The automatic imposition of the 'whip' on all decisions, as a rule rather than an exception, is symptomatic of attempts to control councillors' actions.⁵⁰ Even in

⁴⁵ Hampton, *Democracy and Community*, p. 61.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 66.

⁴⁸ Both Dearlove, *The Politics of Policy in Local Government*, p. 109. and Green, *Power and Party in an English City*, p. 33. considered assurances of loyalty being required before a councillor secures election.

⁴⁹ *Labour Party Rule Book*, Rules, 5A.3 (c) and 5B.5, London, The Labour Party, 1995, pp. 29-31.

⁵⁰ The automatic or selective imposition of the whip has been considered by Bulpitt, *Party and Politics in English Local Government*, pp. 100-101. Green, *Power and Party in an English City*, p. 77. Groups are able to adopt an approach to the imposition of the whip that suits the political arithmetic of the council as well as policy, personal and wider environmental considerations. A strict interpretation and imposition of the

decentralised structures, with a controlling party supporting decentralised decision-making the group system prevails. Stoker and Lowndes noted in their study of a Tower Hamlets neighbourhood, that Globe Town's Liberal Democrats 'found it necessary to maintain group discipline through pre-meetings prior to committees'. The Globe Town area committee consisted at the time of only five Members, four Liberal Democrats and one Labour.⁵¹

The complex relationship between loyalty and discipline is such that party groups can operate coherently without a rigid approach to discipline or disciplinary mechanisms, but that where such mechanisms exist their use is a rarity. Loyalty to the group is indicative of an approach to representation at the local level as well as reflecting the needs of council decision-making.⁵² Group loyalty exists despite, rather than because, of 'disciplinary mechanisms' and thus we must look elsewhere for sources of loyalty.

The councillor's relationship to both the electorate and party group is mediated by the discretion which attaches to the office of councillor. As a fit and proper representative, the councillor may be expected to follow his or her own judgement. The discretion to do so is fettered when the

whip sees democracy based on the principle of majority rule. Green discusses the majoritarian approach to democracy taken by some Labour councillors in Newcastle compared to Aneurin Bevan's concept of democracy, pp. 76-77. In conducting their affairs party groups can adopt a 'majority rule' principle or a 'unanimity principle' see, Dunleavy, *Urban Political Analysis*, pp. 140-144.

⁵¹ G. Stoker and V. Lowndes, *Tower Hamlets and Decentralisation: The Experience of Globe Town Neighbourhood*, Luton, Local Government Management Board, 1991, pp. 22-23.

⁵² Jones, *Borough politics*, pp. 185.

councillor feels bound to respond to either expectations of loyalty to the group or the electorate. Yet the councillor retains the ability to choose between alternative actions - 'voting' or 'speaking' and whether to undertake those acts, in 'open' or 'closed' theatres of representation. Their use however is just as open to influence by the party group and what Young and Davies identified as a 'tightening of party political organisation'.⁵³

Coherence, group discipline and the councillor's scope of representation

The influence of the party group is based on first, the presence of a common attitudinal or political perspective amongst its councillors, drawn together by membership of a political party outside the council chamber. Secondly the phenomenon of group cohesion, as a consequence of the loyalty given to it by the members and the discipline it imposes (or implies).⁵⁴ Research for the Widdicombe committee identified the sources of group cohesion as either *normative*, that is, centred on an ideological commitment as a source of a strong or loose attachment to group discipline, or *situational*, that is where circumstances dictate the internal cohesion of the group.⁵⁵ A number of factors underpin the need for group discipline: the political arithmetic of a council; personal and

⁵³ Young and Davies, *The Politics of Local Government Since Widdicombe*, p. 50.

⁵⁴ Wiseman goes as far as to comment that 'nothing is less to be desired than open disagreement between members of the same party', 'at least on important issues' or decisions sought by a committee chair.

H. V. Wiseman 'The Working of Local Government in Leeds: Part II. More Party Conventions and Practices', *Public Administration*, 41 (2), 1963, pp. 137-155. p. 141.

⁵⁵ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. I*, p. 82.

political relationships; the distribution of power and positions within the group; and the relations between the group and its own leadership.⁵⁶

Such 'cohesion' as might exist risks disruption by 'elements of territoriality', and 'long established localist sentiments'.⁵⁷ The ways in which 'localist sentiments' are perceived and responded to by the group of course goes to the heart of the issue of political representation. Despite the general spread of party politics in local government, local loyalties can persist and occasionally 'run counter to party solidarity'. Councillors in these circumstances are 'well entrenched in their communities' and their role is primarily one of 'defending their local interest regardless of party considerations'.⁵⁸ For much of urban England, however, this is not the case, and the extent to which the group can contain within itself 'localist sentiments' and therefore representative demands on issues emanating from wards or divisions, is important for any assessment of the power of the group.⁵⁹

The group may be able, whilst reflecting and managing localist sentiments, to also eliminate their expression from the public arenas of representation. The expression of 'localism' may be tolerated internally within the group. However, when issues affecting 'localities' spill into the public arena the councillor is faced with the choice of focusing on either the locality before the party, and thus expressing dissent from the group, or conforming with it, so focusing on group before locality. Eulau *et al*

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 82-83.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 82.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 89.

⁵⁹ For a consideration of urban and rural differences see Young and Davies, *The Politics of Local Government Since Widdicombe*, pp. 63-67.

distinguished between the 'style' and 'focus' adopted by the representative, the former referring to the 'criterion of judgement' used by the representative and the latter to 'a geographical unit, a party, a pressure group or an administrative organisation'. The councillor can focus on the locality as both a 'free agent' or delegate, but if focused on the group can adopt only a delegate style - bound by group instructions.⁶⁰

In a comprehensive discussion of representative 'role' and 'focus' Rao indicates that such distinctions enable us to tell whether the representative 'acts more as a delegate or more as a trustee' and importantly whether the representative is more a 'party man, a constituency servant, or a mentor'.⁶¹ To the question of representative focus, for the British councillor at least, can be added the party group, as distinct from being a 'party man'. Whether he sees himself as a delegate, politico or trustee, the group is best placed to demand the focus of the councillor, over and above those other 'clients' noted by Rao. The attitudinal predispositions of the councillor toward representation assists in magnifying the pull of the group, as it is easier for the councillor - whichever style is adopted - to distance him or herself from the electorate than from the group. The more - ward focused and 'tribune' orientated the councillor the greater the pull needed by the group, by exaltation or discipline, to maintain group coherence and loyalty.⁶²

⁶⁰ H. Eulau, J. Whalke, W. Buchanan and L. Ferguson, 'The Role of the Representative: Some Empirical Observations on the Theory of Edmund Burke', *American Political Science Review*, 53 (3), September 1959, pp. 742-756.

⁶¹ Rao, *The Making and Unmaking of Local Self-Government*, pp. 34-35.

⁶² For a full discussion of representative role and style see, Eulau, Whalke, Buchanan and Ferguson. 'The Role of the Representative'.

As Jones noted, as well as representing a 'geographical' area the councillor may also act as a representative of a broad section of the community, a particular organised group, another local authority or individual citizens. The process is however, primarily 'defensive and reactive'.⁶³ Indeed, it may be from a decision of the councillor's party group that the represented seek protection. When such a situation occurs the councillor's view of his or her self as a local representative, or as reflecting an ideology or party, is thrown into sharp relief. Indeed, the councillor's attachment to party may also vary in intensity and purpose as indicated by Corina's typologies. His party politician, ideologist, partyist, associate and politico-administrator vary in the nature of their relationship with the group.⁶⁴ Irrespective of which of Corina's typologies a councillor may fall into, they conduct representation within the group. Thus even for the councillor with the loosest attachment to party the group is an important arena for representation. The group is a decision-making forum and a place where ward issues are settled. On the other hand the

Newton, *Second City Politics*. Gyford, *Local Politics in Britain*. Rao, *The Making and Unmaking of Local Self Government*.

⁶³ G.W. Jones, 'The Functions and Organisation of Councillors', *Public Administration*, 51 (2), Summer, 1973, pp. 135-146. p. 142. Also see, N. Rao. *Managing Change: Councillors and the New Local Government*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1993, pp. 18-19 and p. 25. She also notes the tension between representation and decision-making, p. 30.

Young and Rao found that a majority of councillors gave 'first preference to dealing with individual problems... while ward commitments came a close second', Young and Rao, *Coming to Terms with Change? The Local Government Councillor in 1993*, York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1994, pp. 24-27. p. 24.

⁶⁴ L. Corina, 'Elected Representatives in a Party System', *Policy and Politics*, 3 (1), September, 1974, pp. 69-87. For a consideration of Corina's typologies see, B. Barker, *The Operation of Bristol Labour Party: A View from the Edge*, School of Advanced Urban Studies, Working Paper 27, Bristol University, 1983, p. 9. pp. 20-22.

councillor may have only a loose attachment to electoral area which in turn creates a 'representative vacuum' which is filled by the party group.⁶⁵

In a subtle analysis of patterns of community leadership Glassberg categorised the extent to which councillors see the borough, or their ward, as the 'scope of representation'.⁶⁶ Those with a ward scope were classified as 'classic parochials' or as ascribing to an 'ideology of localism' or 'localists'. The localist approached ward representation in a broader political context than the parochial, to make sense of, and understand local issues within a national framework. The ward has distinctive interests to be articulated while the localist continues 'to serve in borough-level politics'.⁶⁷ Glassberg's approach toward representation is useful for understanding the ability of the group to draw the councillor toward an authority-wide perspective, or at least containing within the group, the ward focused councillor. Indeed, in a party political system of local government, the party group may be the only theatre in which local issues are seriously considered. Furthermore, the 'critical tension' between city-wide or ward-based representation may result in the councillor's first loyalty being to the group, not the electorate.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ H. Hecló, 'The Councillor's Job', He placed councillors into three broad categories: the committee member, the constituency representative and the party activist.

⁶⁶A. Glassberg, *Representation and Urban Community*, London, Macmillan, 1981.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 16. Glassberg describes the similarities and distinctions between the parochial and localist in detail, pp. 79-105.

⁶⁸ Lambert, Paris and Blackaby, *Housing Policy and the State*, pp. 159-160.

It is a norm in British local government, identified by Glassberg, that councillors should adopt a broad focus.⁶⁹ The numerical superiority of the broadly focused councillor serves to weaken localist sentiments but this however, does not wholly account for the ability of the party group to exert pressure on the parochial or localist to widen their scope of representation. Moreover, crisis situations may arise in which a local community demand a local focus and the group demand loyalty to the group. Such a 'crisis of representation' can affect any councillor, whatever the 'scope of representation'.⁷⁰

Although the councillor may focus on an electoral area, the pull of the group will create tensions for that orientation. If the councillor's orientation is towards policy, he or she will attitudinally focus on the group rather than the community. The councillor's willingness to articulate and act upon the interest of an electoral area needs to be considered in the context of the theatres within which the councillor is prepared to act. A localist or parochial may be prepared to both articulate and vote in support of local interests but the crucial question concerns the theatre within which those activities are conducted, and the willingness of the councillor to shift from the secrecy of the group to a more open forum. The extent to which this move to more public theatres can be contained indicates the power of

⁶⁹ A broad focus of representation is mainly a feature of urban politics, as Glassberg's research was itself located within urban communities. Rural England and Wales is different in this regard. See, Young and Davies. *The Politics of Local Government Since Widdicombe*. Rao, *The Making and Unmaking of Local Self-Government*.

⁷⁰ See, D. Muchnick, *Urban Renewal in Liverpool*, Occasional Papers on Social Administration, the Social Administration Research Trust, London, Bell & Sons, 1970, pp. 105-107. p. 106. He considers the pressures on councillors resulting from city-wide party programmes, to adopt a wider representative focus than their own immediate ward.

the group to direct councillor activity and confine dissent to its own private meetings. Moreover, the group may act as a defence mechanism, protecting the councillor from 'extra-party pressures' or their own 'ward party', let alone the electorate.⁷¹

If representative acts - speaking and voting - are undertaken within the group and not repeated in public, then, despite the local focus of the councillor, the group becomes the prime arena for the expression of local interests. But councillors' activities are not confined to the council chamber and will spill over into other theatres. If councillors accept that the group can 'bind' them in those theatres, the ability of the localist to pursue local issues is restricted and, in the end, neutralised. More subtly, councillors may be granted freedom by the group to pursue local issues, if no question of policy arises, but are expected to support the group when wider policy collides with local opinion.⁷²

THE PARTY GROUP AS A THEATRE FOR REPRESENTATION AND DECISION-MAKING.

Three elements of the group system interpose the group between the councillor and the electorate. First, the secrecy of its activities as a closed

⁷¹ A.P. Brier, 'The Decision Process in Local Government: A Case Study of Fluoridation in Hull', *Public Administration*, 48 (2), Summer 1970, pp. 153-168, p. 166.

⁷² Councillors adopting a 'borough as a whole' focus, Glassberg, *Representation and Urban Community*, or the broad policy orientation of the policy advocate, broker or spokesperson, Newton, *Second City Politics*, conflict with the orientation of the localist councillor. They will also conflict with the narrower focus of sections of the electorate, identified by Young and Rao, 'Faith in Local Democracy'.

theatre of representation. Secondly, the restricted access to the group meeting for non-councillors, access being available to officers, by invitation and to some party members, beyond this however, access to group meeting is in the hands of the group itself.⁷³ Thirdly, the expectation of loyalty to the decisions made at group meetings.

The privacy of the group and its status as a political forum creates a degree of reluctance amongst officers and councillors to meet in such a way which may add to the blurring of responsibilities.⁷⁴ It also raises a confusion of constitutional roles between the workings of central and local government and relationships between ministers and civil servants, and between councillors and officers. It has also been argued improper for officers to attend group meetings.⁷⁵ Today however, such insulation is difficult to sustain and officers and councillors work closer together than used to be the case.⁷⁶ Even so the officer need not 'accept instructions from an individual councillor, however exalted his status'.⁷⁷

⁷³ Access to group meetings is facilitated by the main political parties' national rules and model standing orders.

⁷⁴ For a full consideration of the nature of officers attendance at group meetings see, Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. I*, tables 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, pp. 116-120 and p. 144. Also, *Report of the Committee*, para. 6.173-6.177, pp. 152-153. Gyford, Leach and Game, *The Changing Politics of Local Government*, pp. 131-132 and pp. 204-207.

⁷⁵ H.V. Wiseman, 'The Working of Local Government in Leeds: Part 1, Party Control of Council and Committees', *Public Administration*, 41 (1), Spring 1963, pp. 51-69. p. 52. Wiseman provides an interesting discussion of his nine years as a Leeds City councillor and Labour group member.

⁷⁶ M. Laffin and K. Young, *Professionalism in Local Government*, Harlow, Longman, 1990, p. 92.

⁷⁷ W. Hampton, *Local Government and Urban Politics*, London, Longman, 1991, p. 86.

Widdicombe discovered that officers rarely attended group meetings and such attendance as did occur was to aid group decision-making on special issues where professional advice was required.⁷⁸ Indeed, Green reports that in Newcastle between January 1976 to October 1978 'officials were invited to only 3 [group] meetings' where they were 'confined to providing information and answering questions'.⁷⁹ Although officers attend party group meetings, they remain acutely aware of the need for 'even handedness' and the dangers of becoming both too close to the majority group and too distant from the minority group. These matters can be overcome by formalisation of officer availability to all groups.⁸⁰ Attendance by officers as does occur reflects the importance of officers as a 'main source of information' for councillors.⁸¹ The group then plays an important role in adjusting, in councillors' favour, the balance of power between them and officers.⁸² Equally, the stability provided by 'well-entrenched party rule' and 'party organisation' has also 'promoted rather than constrained professional influence'.⁸³

⁷⁸ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. I*, p. 144.

⁷⁹ Green, *Power and Party in an English City*, p. 64.

⁸⁰ Laffin and Young, *Professionalism in Local Government*, p. 97.

⁸¹ Dearlove, *The Politics of Policy in Local Government*, p. 179.

⁸² For a discussion of the role of the party group in redressing the relative power of the officer and member see, Bealey, Blondel and McCann, *Constituency Politics*. Jones, *Borough Politics*. Newton, *Second City Politics*. For a general discussion of the interrelationships between officers and members see, H. Elcock, *Local Government: Politicians, Professionals and the Public in Local Authorities*, London, Methuen, 1982. See particularly chapter 5 'The Local Government Officer: Professionals and Politicians', pp. 91-105. For a detailed discussion of the relationship between officers and members see Laffin and Young, *Professionalism in Local Government*.

⁸³ Laffin and Young, *Professionalism in Local Government*, p.27.

PARTY APPROACHES TO THE ROLE OF THE GROUP.

Attendance at group meetings by observers from the political party is governed by national rules or local convention and access is granted to group meetings on a speaking, but non-voting basis. The Labour Party national rules provide for a number of representatives of the local government committee (or borough and district parties) to attend group meetings, receiving all documentation.⁸⁴ All members of the appropriate Labour group have the right to 'attend meetings of the party management committee'.⁸⁵ This contact is further underpinned by an appeal for enhanced communication between group and local party thus:

the provisions for consultation between party and group set out in these model standing orders are the minimum arrangements required. Parties and groups are encouraged to secure the greatest possible degree of co-operation and consultation on all matters concerning local administration in their area.⁸⁶

The Liberal Democrats national model standing orders for council groups provides for 'one representative of each local party within the council's area' to attend group meetings on a non-voting basis. The group is able to invite 'other members of the local party, either for a particular item, a meeting, or indefinitely'. They may also invite 'duly approved and selected prospective candidates for the council and PPCs (prospective Parliamentary candidates) or MPs from within the council area'. Notes

⁸⁴ *Labour Party Rule Book*, 'Rules for Labour Party Local Government Committees', section 12, IX.1, p. 60.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, IX.2, p. 60.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, section 13, 13A11 (b), p. 63.

attached to these model standing orders point out that 'communication must be balanced by practicality' and that non-voting members may be omitted in 'favour of regular reports to local party meetings'. They also provide for attendance by party chairs, other Liberal Democrat group leaders or 'experts to reinforce the group's talents', as well as encouraging a wide distribution of minutes and agenda to 'keep people involved and informed'.⁸⁷

The Conservatives are not so prescriptive in the relationship between the group and local party units with Conservative Central Office offering 'encouragement to those seeking advice on such communication, to invite the chair of the Association and agent to group meetings.' Equally encouragement is given to 'groups to send representatives to Association meetings'. The relationship between local Conservative parties and the group is 'decided on a local basis by individual groups and local Associations'.⁸⁸ Communication is also encouraged through the Local Government Advisory Committee, although these bodies do not exist in every constituency and their composition is 'a matter for local Associations'. There is no provision for the 'local Association to have automatic right to send representatives to Conservative group meetings'.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *Model Standing Orders for Liberal Democrat Groups*, section 2. 'Membership', B i), ii), iii) and notes, Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors, Hebden Bridge, 1994, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Interview with Conservative Central Office, Local Government Officer.

⁸⁹ Gyford, Leach and Game, *The Changing Politics of Local Government*, p. 163.

Such communication is formalised in model rules by both the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats.⁹⁰

Whilst officers and local party members can attend group meetings the community represented has no such access. National party rules may not preclude attendance by outside bodies or individuals at group meetings, on any basis, but, this is at the group's discretion (the local party could act as a conduit for such communication). The group has a collective representative discretion (mirroring the councillor's individual representative discretion) to either grant or refuse access to its meetings to the very community represented. Of all the non-councillors attending group meetings, the electorate experiences the most restricted of access.

The filter of political affiliation has an important bearing on the tripartite relationship between electorate - councillor and group. Viewed through the prism of political affiliation, any variations in representative behaviour may result from a differential approach to the group system by councillors of different political background. The use of political affiliation in this way will indicate whether the influence of the group on the councillor as a representative cuts across the political spectrum, or has a stronger influence on councillors of a particular political affiliation.⁹¹ In turn it

⁹⁰ For a discussion of the relationship between council groups and the party see, Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. I*, pp. 98-102. Gyford, Leach and Game, *The Changing Politics of Local Government*, chapter 5, 'Party Politics', pp. 161-187. For the Conservative party's flexible approach to group and party rules and communication see Newton, *Second City Politics*, pp. 92-95.

⁹¹ For a consideration of the influence of party affiliation and organisation on councillors, see, J. Brand, 'Party Organisation and the Recruitment of Councillors', *British Journal of Political Science*, 3 (4), 1973, pp. 473-486.

indicates whether the influence of the group system is indeed all-pervasive. As political affiliation is reflected in the membership of a national political party, to examine the influence of the group over the councillor as a representative, it is necessary to compare the 'national' party expectations of loyalty to the group, and how national political organisations interpret the party group as an entity.

The importance of the activities of party groups to their national political parties is reflected in their varied attempts to bring cohesion to the group system. However, any document that purports to be a 'model' for the cohesive organisation of councillors, is as much a construction of political ideology, culture and attitudes toward representation, as it is an attempt to ensure the existence of recognisable political party organisation on individual councils. Similarly such models provide valuable clues to national party expectations of councillor loyalty to the group.

The Labour Party and the party group

The latest version of the Labour Party's rule book was adopted at its 1995 annual conference and sets out the rules concerning the organisation of the group and the relationship between the councillor and the group. It excludes any consideration of the relationship between the councillor and the electorate, and lays no preconditions for, Labour members to hold surgeries or conduct ward or division specific tasks.⁹²

The rules clearly prescribe what is expected of the Labour councillor in regard to 'Action by Individual Members'. Labour councillors are precluded from submitting or moving 'resolutions or motions or

⁹² *The Labour Party Rule Book.*

amendments at any meeting of the council, unless such ... have first been submitted to and received the approval of the group'. Labour members are able, 'without consultation [to] ask questions at meetings of the council, provided the tendency of such questions is not likely to be in conflict with the policy of the group'.⁹³

The Labour councillor who wishes to publicly express dissent from group policy and represent local interests, must then concentrate on the impact of the policy and not its merits. Labour members must be clear that the intention of any question asked is not to criticise the group. A Labour district councillor interviewed for this study commented:

I have two big issues in my ward that are causing quite a stink, so I got people to give me a petition, I can hand that in and everyone knows where I stand, but I haven't broken any rules. I just make sure I am careful when the report comes to committee. It gets difficult when you want to oppose something and people are watching in the gallery, especially the press but so too is the entire whips office.

Labour councillors are 'expected not to speak or vote at meetings of the council in opposition to group decisions, unless the group has decided to leave the matter to a free vote'. On 'conscience issues (e.g. religion, temperance)', abstention is possible providing the councillor 'first raise the matter at a group meeting in order to ascertain the feeling of the group'. When a council or committee act in a quasi-judicial capacity, such as

⁹³ Ibid, 'Rules for Local Government Labour Groups', 13A8 (a)-(b), p. 62.

licensing decisions where councillors cannot fetter their discretion, 'each member shall form his or her own judgement according to the evidence'.⁹⁴

The emphasis in normal circumstances is on group loyalty, and on the councillor having to seek permission to dissent. Thus all issues are whip issues. The Memorandum accompanying the 'Labour Councillors' Handbook', points out the need for 'effective action in the council and on its committees and sub-committees' and identifies the need for 'a reasonable measure of group discipline', clearly focusing the Labour councillor on the group thus:

any differences of individual opinion must be thrashed out within the group and not in public; for it is a serious source of political weakness and embarrassment to have public conflict between representatives and nothing can be more fatal to electoral success... Members of the group are expected to abide by group decisions and not to speak or vote in opposition in the council, unless the group has decided to leave the matter in question to a free vote.⁹⁵

Individual Labour groups may however impose different interpretations of discipline.⁹⁶ Such ability to 'interpret' is located within the Memorandum which, despite emphasising expectations of loyalty to the group, also

⁹⁴ Ibid, 13.8 (c), p. 62.

⁹⁵ *The Labour Councillors' Handbook*, Appendix 4, Memorandum 6.3.1. London, The Labour Party, 1995, p. 73.

⁹⁶ For a consideration the groups ability to interpret standing orders see Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government*, particularly pp. 99-103. pp. 120-121. Gyford, *Local Politics in Britain*, p. 78.

encourages a flexible approach to the interpretation of standing orders thus:

The desirable amount of elasticity depends to some extent on the atmosphere of the particular council and the personnel of the group; too great rigidity would be unwise. The maximum amount of flexibility should be allowed for members to raise issues that are not contrary to party or group policy and whenever possible, submitting such non-political matters to a free vote.⁹⁷

With this degree of flexibility, the strict interpretation of standing orders by many Labour groups, even on local issues, becomes all the more surprising. Whilst membership of a Labour group is conditional upon accepting the party's rules, which in turn grants specific authority to the whips to act on disciplinary matters, the disciplinary and appeal procedure is carefully prescribed within model standing orders.⁹⁸

The power of the group rests on these rules; particularly the condition that any councillor, who, after an appeal has upheld a decision to 'withdraw the whip without a time limit being determined, becomes ineligible to be a Labour candidate at any level of election whilst not in receipt of that whip (this condition does not apply when the suspension is for a fixed period)'.⁹⁹ Retiring Labour councillors who have had the whip withdrawn indefinitely are not eligible for membership of any panel.¹⁰⁰ Where an

⁹⁷ *The Labour Councillors' Handbook*, p. 73.

⁹⁸ *Labour Party Rule Book*, 'Rules for Local Government Labour Groups', 13A.10, pp. 62-63.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 13A.10 (4), p. 63.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 5B4, p. 31.

appeal upholds the indefinite suspension of the whip, the councillor can after six months 'apply to the Labour group for re-admission. In such cases the Labour group shall be responsible for restoration of the whip'.¹⁰¹ The indefinite suspension of the whip can cut short the political career of the councillor, who also runs the risk of immediate expulsion from the Labour Party in the event of standing for election against an officially endorsed Labour candidate.¹⁰²

The loyalty of the Labour councillor is clearly to the Labour group and the representative acts of the Labour councillor are also focused on the group, rather than the open theatres of representation that are the council and its committees. Although the rules make reference only to the conduct of the councillor within the council and its committees, Labour groups may take it upon themselves to extend the scope of their disciplinary reach to other theatres of representation. Chapters 4 and 5 consider this phenomenon in detail.

Loyalty to group decisions is underpinned by democratic procedures and by a deliberative environment conducive to member input. Group meetings should be 'conducted in a comradely fashion, in such a way as to maximise participation'. The rules also eschew 'harassment or intimidation of members on the basis of gender, sexuality or race'.¹⁰³ In other words if all councillors can participate freely in private group meetings to pursue an issue, none should need to dissent from the result of that process in public. As Gyford indicates, 'clearly group organisation and procedures

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 13A.10 (5), p. 63.

¹⁰² Ibid, 2A.4 (a), p. 9.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 13A.2 (c), p. 61.

are not ends in themselves'.¹⁰⁴ Organisation and procedure, however, clearly impact on the process of representation at the local level. In practice it is for Labour groups to mitigate or magnify that impact.

The Liberal Democrat approach to party group

The 'Model Standing Orders For Liberal Democrat Council Groups' was published in 1994 by the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors, and was 'based on Liberal Democrat groups' best practice'.¹⁰⁵ That this document emanates from the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC), rather than the national Liberal Democrat party, reflects the uncertainty and shifting nature of the relationship between the national party organisation and its councillors represented by an organisation whose origins are uncertain. This local and central organisational separation arose in 1978 when, the 'formal links between national party organs... and local government virtually ended'. The nature of that separation and the original purpose of the Association of Liberal Councillors was 'so that councillors could be serviced independently of the party's national bureaucracy, which was felt to be increasingly indifferent to local government'.¹⁰⁶

The model standing orders provide a firm appreciation of the expectations of group loyalty that impact on Liberal Democrat councillors and the disciplinary powers underpinning that 'expectation'. Although not emanating from a national 'party' in the same way as Labour group model

¹⁰⁴ Gyford, *Local Politics in Britain*, p. 78.

¹⁰⁵ *Model Standing Orders For Liberal Democrat Council Groups*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ R. Pinkney, 'Nationalizing Local Politics and Localizing a National Party: The Liberal Role in Local Government', *Government and Opposition*, 18, 1983, pp. 347-358. p. 350. p. 353.

standing orders, they are an attempt to construct a unified and cohesive approach to group activity and organisation.

The Model Standing Orders for Liberal Democrat Council Groups go as far as to contain a section entitled 'Group Loyalty' which presents a clearly stated expectation on Liberal Democrat councillors 'to publicly support all group decisions'. The note appended to the section expands on this expectation:

Some people maintain that Liberal Democracy means there should not be group discipline and group lines - this is simply not the case. If we are to operate effectively on the council to achieve our Aims, there has to be group loyalty and group discipline. Every candidate who comes for approval should be asked to agree to these standing orders and this clause at the time of approval.¹⁰⁷

Loyalty expectations are related to three areas; organisational, policy and local ward matters, recognising thereby the differentiation of councillor activity. The specific acknowledgement of a ward 'focus' to representation distinguishes these standing orders from those of the Labour Party. On matters of 'deeply held conviction or conscience' where councillors are unable to support the group, they are asked 'to inform the group leader or group whip in advance and refrain from speaking or voting against the group position'.¹⁰⁸ Equally, if a councillor is unable to support the group on any 'organisational, policy, or local matter s/he should inform the group

¹⁰⁷ *Model Standing Orders For Liberal Democrat Council Groups*. section 7, 'Group Loyalty', p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, section 7 ii), p. 6.

secretary/committee spokesperson/ group leader or whip or ward councillor as appropriate in advance'.¹⁰⁹ The Liberal Democrat who does not attend group meetings or fails to make their intentions known 'on matters discussed at the group meeting', is still expected to abide by group decisions. 'It is not sufficient to abstain from voting'.¹¹⁰

The model standing orders make provision for disciplinary matters thus:

A member shall be excluded from the group if s/he has persistently conducted himself or herself in a manner seriously in conflict with the provisions of Paragraph 1 (Aims) or paragraph 6 (Group Loyalty) of these standing orders, and a motion to exclude him/her has been passed by a two thirds majority of the voting membership of the group.¹¹¹

No such restrictions on the disciplinary processes exist for the Labour councillor who may be excluded from the group for a single incident of dissent and on a simple majority vote. Labour party standing orders are more specific on disciplinary offences and more prescriptive in regard to representative acts, than are those of the Liberal Democrats. The reflection in national model standing orders of variations in political attitudes towards representative democracy, indicate the real distinctions concerning group loyalty across the parties. As one Liberal Democrat county councillor and former group leader interviewed for this study stated:

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, section 7.B, p. 7.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, section 7.C, p. 7.

¹¹¹ Ibid, section 2.B.E, p. 2.

I have been a member of this county for 15 years and have seen the size of the group both chopped down and expand and in all that time we have never withdrawn the whip from any member, despite having numerous differences of opinion and people speaking and voting against the group.

A stark distinction between the approach of the Liberal Democrats and Labour Party to the issue of discipline is indicated by the affect on a sitting councillor of withdrawal of the whip. The Liberal Democrats (and Conservative Party) have no constitutional bar on candidacy for any councillor having the whip withdrawn. This distinction was underpinned by an officer of the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors in an interview:

You must understand that the party's constitution devolves power to the local party. It is they who decide if someone is a fit and proper person to be a candidate and being an approved or selected candidate is not dependent on being a member of the Liberal Democrat group; so you could have the whip withdrawn and still be selected by the local party if that's what they want. There is a difference between an approved candidate and a selected candidate, once you have been approved as a candidate then you can be selected by a local branch.

Liberal Democrat model standing orders recognise the representative nature of local politics. The Liberal Democrat councillor is not only expected to be loyal to the group but also adopt a community-focused approach to representation. Liberal Democrat councillors are expected to keep in touch with their local residents by regular newsletters, outside

election periods, copies of which should be kept by the group secretary.¹¹²

This community politics approach was adopted at the Liberal Party Assembly of 1970, which resolved:

A primary strategic emphasis on community politics; our role as political activists is to help organise people in communities to take and use power, to use political skills to redress grievances, and to represent people at all levels in the political structure.¹¹³

Despite the rule given freedom of representative manoeuvre, not specifically recognised in national model standing orders as existing for the Labour councillor, the Liberal Democrat still experiences a crisis of representation in the same way as both Labour and Conservative councillors. Indeed, community politics could create problems specific to Liberal Democrats, in balancing the need for representative focus on the electorate, with expectations of group loyalty.

To ensure a cohesive and unified approach to the organisation and activities of Liberal Democrat party groups model standing orders contain a firm rejection of the concept of the Liberal Democrats as merely a collection of individuals, rather than a cohesive party grouping at the local

¹¹² Ibid, section 11, p. 8.

¹¹³ R. Pinkney. 'Nationalizing Local Politics and Localizing a National Party, from I Hopton, Directory of Liberal Party Resolutions, London, Liberal Publication Department, 1978, pp.143-4. p. 351.

level. The firm expectation, on all Liberal Democrat councillors is of 'loyalty' to the group.¹¹⁴

The Liberal Democrats' popular image as community politicians can be compromised by their own model standing orders which state an expectation of group loyalty and discipline.¹¹⁵ These expectations are similar in tone, if not in content, to those that exist for the Labour councillor. Both parties, for example, require the group to be informed or made aware of the possibility of any act which may conflict with a group decision. The parties also have similar provisions for dealing with matters of 'conscience'. The expectation on both the Labour and Liberal Democrat councillor, in conflict with the group, is clear however, they neither speak, nor vote, against the group. The question remains do Liberal Democrat and Labour groups, in practice, act on the expectations of group loyalty, so explicit in standing orders?

The Conservative approach to party group

The Conservative party approach to ensuring cohesive and recognisable Conservative groups is distinct from that of both Labour and Liberal Democrats. The Conservative party nationally has had to reconcile the ordinary Conservative's 'values of localism ... emotive symbolism of the values of the smaller place, fear of strong central institutions, and a distaste for the presence of nationally-orientated and controlled parties in

¹¹⁴ For the Liberal's approach to party discipline see, R. Pinkney, 'An Alternative Political Strategy? Liberals in Power in English Local Government', *Local Government Studies*, 10 (3) May/June, 1984, pp. 69-84, particularly see, p. 75. p. 77.

¹¹⁵ *Model Standing Orders for Liberal Democrat Groups*, section 7, pp. 6-7.

local affairs', with Conservative Leaders 'colluding in the subordination of local government to central authority through the medium of party'.¹¹⁶ This political balancing act is not required of the Labour Party or Liberal Democrats who see strong central and local institutions in a different light.

These political antecedents make it difficult for the Conservative party nationally to attempt co-ordination of group organisation. Yet the publication by Conservative Central Office, of the 'Model Constitution for Conservative Groups', is just such an attempt to balance the philosophical rejection of central control and party interference, with the need to promote a cohesive and recognisable form to Conservative groups. It is from such 'form' that Conservative councillors become more than Independents using party label to secure election, but an organisation through which the more ideologically inclined Conservative or 'political elite', can pursue a policy objective over any localist interest.¹¹⁷

The existence of a model constitution for Conservative groups was however *unknown to any of the Conservative councillors interviewed for this research*, which included four group leaders (it was also unknown to a metropolitan Conservative group political assistant). Conservative group organisation is very much a product of local circumstances and political traditions, handed down, developed and evolved, rather than a creation of the national party. The existence of the 'Model Constitution' since 1977 however implies that it may very well have been incorporated, over time, into the terms of reference of many Conservative groups. This terminological difference, terms - of reference, as opposed to Liberal

¹¹⁶ Young, *Local Politics and the Rise of Party*, pp. 219-220.

¹¹⁷ See Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government*. Saunders, *Urban Politics*. Glassberg, *Representation and Urban Community*.

Democrat and Labour use of standing orders - implies a difference of emphasis in the way rules are constructed and applied to regulate the relationship between the councillor and the group.

Compared to the high recognition factor amongst Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors of their own national model standing orders (every member of the two interview sub-groups was aware of such documents), the Conservative councillor reflects a political tradition that is suspicious of central party interference. The existence of the model constitution, dating as it does from 1977, compared with the more recent versions of the Liberal Democrats (1994) and the Labour party (1995), provides less of a clue as to the expectations of group loyalty required of the Conservative councillor. But, nonetheless some indications are inherent within them.

The Model Constitution takes a similar approach to the Liberal Democrats in terms of the nature and scope of group discipline:

The group may withdraw the privilege of membership of the Conservative group from any member when the action of that member is considered to be against the best interests of the party.¹¹⁸

As with the Liberal Democrats, withdrawal of the whip requires a two thirds majority of the group but this condition is only advisory as the group may impose other penalties. The advisory nature of the model

¹¹⁸ *Model Constitution for Conservative Groups*, London, Conservative Central Office, 1977.

document was emphasised in interview by the Conservative Party's local government officer:

*This document is referred to as national guidelines for standing orders and it is only advisory, most Conservative groups have their own local standing orders drawing on these guidelines, or more likely not at all.*¹¹⁹

Again, as with the Liberal Democrats, local Associations are able to approve and select candidates that may have had the group whip withdrawn. He explained:

you see the local Association have the power to approve candidates. If the whip is withdrawn the local Association decide if the councillor is able to stand as the Conservative candidate. In fact the position is exactly the same with our Members of Parliament and if the MP's that have had the Parliamentary whip withdrawn were re-selected by their local party, they would be able to be the official Conservative candidate.

He added rather ruefully 'Labour can tell its people what to do, we can't, unfortunately'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Interview with Alan Mabbut, Local Government Officer, Conservative Central Office.

¹²⁰ Alan Mabbut, Local Government Officer, Conservative Central Office.

The procedure for selection of candidates contained within the model rules for Conservative and Unionist Associations states:

Whenever it may be necessary to select for support a local government candidate the branch or committee shall recommend a candidate to the Executive Council and if he (or she) is approved by the Executive Council they shall present him (or her) to a general meeting of the branch for adoption.¹²¹

A sitting Conservative councillor needs to make a written application to the Executive Council for re-adoption and the decision 'should be taken in reasonable time having regard to mutual convenience'.¹²² All of which serves to emphasise the decision on candidacy rests with the local party organisations, not the disciplinary mechanisms of the group.

The distinction between the Conservative /Liberal Democrat and Labour Party approach to the impact on the councillor's re-selection and political career should not be over-stated. Despite misrepresentation of that situation by Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors in interview, the national standing orders and rules of the Labour Party are clear, and only the 'indefinite' withdrawal of the whip excludes the councillor from re-selection by the local party.¹²³

¹²¹*Model Rules For Constituency, Branch and European Constituency Councils*, section 19 (2) (b), 'Procedure-Local Government Candidates', Reading, The National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations, 1993, p. 11.

¹²² *Ibid*, Section 19 (2) (c), p. 11.

¹²³ *Labour Party Rule Book*, 5B.4, p. 31. 13A10, 4, p. 63.

National Conservative Party attempts at ensuring cohesive and recognisable Conservative groups, is reflective of the underlying political philosophy of Conservatism and ideals of independence emanating from the 'localism' of its local representatives. An important distinction is drawn by the Conservative Party nationally between its councillors as representatives and its local party organisation and structure. The national party is more concerned with regulating local party units via the national model rules than organising its councillors into cohesive groups to which loyalty is owed.¹²⁴

The question remains as to whether freedom from central party influence, indicative of the organisation and activities of Conservative groups, is transferred by those very groups, to its members and their ability to represent the electorate. The central Conservative Party may have the loosest of impacts on the structure and functioning of the party group of the three main parties, but do its groups impose such a loose rein on their councillors? Such freedom from central party control need not imply for the councillor an equal freedom from group control.

THE PARTY GROUP: A LEGAL ENTITY

The group through which councillors make collective decisions has no clear legal construction. Prior to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 the group existed outside of legislation.¹²⁵ As a result of the

¹²⁴ *Conservative Model Rules for Constituency, Branch and European Constituency Councils.*

¹²⁵ H. Maddick and E.P. Pritchard, 'The Conventions of Local Authorities in the West Midlands: Part I - County Borough Councils',

Widdicombe committee an attempt was made to control certain aspects of group activity. The committee recommended that local authorities should be statutorily required to include provisions in their standing orders...for the composition of such committees and sub-committees [as have delegated powers] to reflect as far as practical, the composition of the council as a whole'. The chief executive of an authority was to be responsible for the 'detailed application of this rule'.¹²⁶

The Widdicombe committee was concerned with minority party rights within the processes of local government but noted that the 'corporate nature of the current system [of decision-taking in local government] does not recognise the existence of adversarial party politics'. This factor in turn caused particular difficulties in authorities which were 'controlled by the majority party, with the minority party acting as an opposition' not contributing to the formulation of decisions. The committee recognised that political parties had 'created arrangements of their own, outside and alongside the formal statutory framework, whereby they can develop their policies in a one party setting.' Indeed, policies would often be 'developed in meetings of the full party group'. The committee went as far as to comment that the formal decision-making process of a council can become 'a hollow ritual devoid of substance if the issue has been pre-determined elsewhere'.¹²⁷

Public Administration, 36 (2), Summer 1958, pp. 145-155. Maddick and Pritchard stated that a local authority made 'official diary entries and provides accommodation for a political group which in local government law does not exist'. The legal situation has changed little in the intervening 39 years since that observation, p. 146.

¹²⁶ Widdicombe committee, *Report of the Committee*, s. 5.54, p. 81.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, s. 5.7, p. 69.

Despite recognising the central importance of the party group to the processes of local government the Widdicombe committee offered no definition of the group to which legislation could turn. The group remained as it had prior to the Widdicombe committee investigation and report, that is, undefined in law. Indeed, the 1989 Act which regulated the appointment of political advisers/assistants to party groups contained the following footnote to section nine:¹²⁸

there is nothing to prevent members forming themselves into political groups in order to secure the ten per cent qualifying seats, [for the appointment of political assistant] e.g. a number of Independents or, theoretically members of two wholly distinct parties - perhaps customarily and/or nationally in opposition to one another - who determine to do so provided that which they agree amongst themselves can properly be described as a 'political group' (of which there is no statutory definition), e.g. by agreeing some common, local policies.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ The Widdicombe committee's report considered the form of administrative support or political assistance given to party groups. They identify that officers of an authority may be seconded to work for, or specifically recruited and appointed, to serve a party group. The committee was concerned that in some local authorities officers had been 'singled out by the political parties as being sympathetic sources of advice'. The committee went on to make recommendations to control the appointment of such staff. *Report of the committee*, paras 6.170-6.172. pp. 151-152. and para 6.179 (a) and (b), p. 154.

¹²⁹ Local Government and Housing Act, 1989, *Encyclopaedia of Local Government Law, Vol. 2*, Sweet and Maxwell, 1995, sub-section (5)-(7), (10), p. 3697.

The Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, provide a basis for a 'legal' understanding of the group.¹³⁰ Section 7 of the regulations state that the 'Members of an authority are to be treated as divided into different political groups when there is at least one political group in existence constituted in accordance with regulation 8'.¹³¹ To be legally constituted as a party group (despite the lack of a legal definition), members must comply with Regulations 8 (1) to (5) (b), which require written notice to the proper officer of the council indicating that 'the members of the authority who have signed it wish to be treated as a political group'. The notice should specify the title of the group, its leader and deputy leader. Changes in details previously given under this regulation must also be notified to the proper officer.¹³² A group must comprise a minimum of two members, if falling below two it 'shall cease to be constituted'.¹³³

These regulations are not specifically to define the party group but to facilitate the proportional allocation of committee places, reflective of the size of party groups on a council. Proportionality was introduced as a consequence of the recommendations of the Widdicombe committee and via the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (subsequently amended by the 1990 Regulations).¹³⁴ The Maud committee had identified as far

¹³⁰ The Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 (S.I. 1990 No 1553), *Encyclopaedia of Local Government Law*, Vol. 3, Sweet and Maxwell, 1995, pp. 273-276.

¹³¹ Ibid, section 7, p. 273.

¹³² Ibid, Section 8 (1), to (5) (b), pp. 273-274.

¹³³ Ibid, Section 8 (2), p. 274.

¹³⁴ Local Government and Housing Act, 1989, *Encyclopaedia of Local Government Law*, Vol. 2, section 15, pp. 3707-3709.

back as 1967 that proportionality was as an already important factor in Swedish local government.¹³⁵

A definition of party group based on the allocation of committee places and the regulations concerning the 10 per cent of seats required before a group can appoint a political assistant, would be simplistic in the extreme. The current legal situation does however acknowledge that the process of councillors coming together in identifiable groupings for the conduct of council business arises from a number of causes not necessarily related to political parties outside the chamber. Indeed, a legal definition could dangerously restrict the room for political manoeuvre by councillors depending on the results of local elections. Thus the law outlines what a party group must do to be legally recognised as such. It does not go on to set out an adequate definition of a party group and say exactly what it is once it has been legally constituted, save for a minimum number of members required to register as a group. Indeed, it says little about what groups can and cannot do, save for committee composition and the appointment of support staff.

The lack of any statutory definition led a Labour council leader to state that:

we have not given notice that we are a group, when obviously we are, as that would mean we would have to give more places to the opposition. They are small in number and if the Labour group gave the legal notice that it was a group we would have to give the opposition some of our places. The electorate has chosen us overwhelmingly, so why should we give places up

¹³⁵ Maud committee, *Vol. I, Report of the Committee*, para 27, p. 7.

when we don't have to? But obviously I expect all Labour members to support the group whip, this is after all a political point, not a legal one.

AN APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE PARTY GROUP.

There is a duality to the councillor's relationship with the group. First, it is a 'theatre' in which the councillor undertakes acts of representation, that they may or may not choose to transfer to any other setting. Secondly, the group itself, by laying a superior claim to the loyalty of the councillor, over the electorate, becomes that which is 'represented'. The decision of the group is thus that which the councillor is expected to pursue, at least in public.

As a result of group expectations of loyalty it has an impact on the ability of the electorate to 'participate' in local affairs and influences the representative activities of the councillor. It is the ability of the group to place itself at the centre of the local representative processes, as far as its members, are concerned, that is the defining element of the group system and its impact on representation.

The party group in government and opposition

That councillors elected as candidates of a political party meet in private to consider issues for decision, 'disseminate information' and decide voting strategies' reflects a governing and opposition approach to council business.¹³⁶ Whilst this takes no account of the impact of this 'coming

¹³⁶ Saunders, *Urban Politics*, p. 221.

together' of like-minded councillors, it does identify what is essentially the 'exclusivity' of the group.

To ensure that the group operates effectively, either as a governing machine, or opposition bloc, councillor loyalty to decisions is necessary to enhance the party's political success within the council as a representative of sectional interests.¹³⁷ Or, does the narrowing of political focus encouraged by the group system within a governing/opposition model draw the councillors' loyalty toward the need for group cohesion and thus away from representing local interests?

Parkinson notes that political divisions can be exposed by secretive or dogmatic decision-making as a result of a governing approach where council leaders attitudes were that a 'party intent on governing was bound to break a few eggs'.¹³⁸ By accepting government and opposition adherence to a party line become a necessity for practical political decision-making.¹³⁹ This approach in turn reinforces the need for secrecy and a group system, designed to exclude political opposition and public

¹³⁷ Wiseman shows how the Labour group of Leeds City Council acted as a governing party. He also provides an example of apparent political embarrassment that can be caused by a 'free vote' for group members in council, H.V. Wiseman, 'The Working of Local Government in Leeds, Part I', pp. 52-53. Also see, 'The Working of Local Government in Leeds, Part II'.

¹³⁸ M. Parkinson, *Liverpool on the Brink*, Policy Journals, 1985, p. 153.

¹³⁹ Rees and Smith, *Town Councillors*, Labour councillors in Barking maintained their unity as a group *inter alia* their consciousness of being the 'administration or government in Barking', a government in which all members shared 'to a greater or lesser extent', pp. 88-89. See also, Jones, *Borough Politics*, pp. 67-68 and p. 204. Bulpitt, *Party Politics*, p. 123.

alike from policy and decision-making and thus distance the councillor from the represented.

Group: loyalty and dissent

Expectations of group loyalty is an experience common to councillors across the political spectrum and is coupled to the willingness of the councillor to accede to it. The occasions on which councillors defy, in one way or another, the decisions of the group, whether under pressure from the electorate or not, is seen as somehow acting pathologically. The group views disloyal behaviour as errant and not correctly focused on the proper recipient of councillor loyalty, that is the group itself. Acting against the group and reflective of the expressed wishes of the electorate or section of it, is the exception, rather than the rule.¹⁴⁰ Councillors who dissent from the group are often categorised as party 'rebels', which may be taken to imply some inherent tendency to be a professional dissenter.¹⁴¹

Dissent by the councillor from the group represents a rejection of majority decisions and undermines the influence on the policy process that the group provides for its membership.¹⁴² Equally, such dissent signifies a rejection of the notion of councillors as 'lobby fodder' for the group leadership.¹⁴³ Indeed, leadership style is an important element of group

¹⁴⁰ See, Hampton, *Democracy and Community*. S. Elkin, *Politics and Land Use Planning: The London Experience*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1974. Newton, *Second City Politics*.

¹⁴¹ Newton, *Second City Politics*.

¹⁴² Stoker, *The Politics of Local Government*, pp. 95-98.

¹⁴³ Gyford, Leach, and Game, *The Changing Politics of Local Government*, p. 173.

discipline.¹⁴⁴ As Cutler recalls, during his time as Leader of the GLC only three of 63 Conservative members were consistently dissident, 'a greenhorn, a professional dissenter and a councillor who had been out of step with the group for years'. Cutler claimed leadership success as a result of this 5 per cent dissent rate.¹⁴⁵ It is however, the elimination of councillor dissent from the group system that sets up the group and the electorate as competitors for councillor loyalty.

The party group as a product of political culture and processes

Councillors' political predispositions and attitudes towards representation display what they believe is the proper balance between the inputs to local democracy, made by the group and demanded by the electorate. Councillors' attitudes are examined in this work and provide evidence on the question of whether the group is of greater influence on acts of local representation by the councillor, than is the electorate. The predisposition toward representation produces a 'style' of politics that favours the closed and secretive processes of decision-making inherent in the group system. The strength of loyalty expectations generated by this style, makes the group the focus of councillor attention.¹⁴⁶ The group is also a 'theatre' for representation within which councillors can take part in decision-making, and stands aside from any other open or closed theatre in which councillors undertake representative activity. This position enables the

¹⁴⁴ Glassberg, *Representation and Urban Community*.

¹⁴⁵ H. Cutler, *The Cutler Files*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, p. 93.

¹⁴⁶ Eulau, Whalke, Buchanan and Ferguson, 'The Role of the Representative'. Rao, *The Making and Unmaking of Local Self-Government*.

group to influence the representative activities of the councillor in each and every other representative theatre.

An essential indicator of the influence of the group over the local representative processes is the extent to which councillors are 'bound' or at least influenced in their activities in various arena of representation, by the group, and whether that 'binding' process is mandatory. If bound, the councillor has no option but to act in a particular way, as this is enforced by a disciplinary machine, or is self-imposed, when the councillor believes in the right of the group to expect loyalty, without any recourse to disciplinary procedures. The councillor's relationship to his or her group is as much a product of personal political beliefs and attitudes towards how democracy should be done, as it is any fear of discipline by that party group.

The group, then, is a pivotal component of local representative democracy. It commands the loyalty of its members and will provoke a crisis of representation when it demands councillor loyalty, on local issues, above the electorate. It is a part of the closed processes of democracy, being accessible only to members of the particular group, a few party representatives, or on occasions council officers. Its exclusiveness is linked to a concept of representative democracy in the Burkean mould where the 'representative' must be free from the 'represented' to be able to 'represent' effectively and which results in the group becoming the focal point of representative activity.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Eulau, Whalke, Buchanan and Ferguson, 'The Role of the Representative'. Eulau and Whalke clearly identify Burke as a 'party man' and state that, 'above all freedom from local connections and instructions was for Burke a necessary and very practical condition to work for a Parliamentary party, be its leader, and accept the commitments of a party

Several factors combine to make it probable that the group will be a powerful player in local democracy. The secrecy that attaches to its activities, its impact on the relationship between the councillor and the represented, and its acceptance by councillors of the three main parties as a legitimate decision-making forum, all serve to sustain the group's position. To these factors can be added the all-pervasiveness of group within British local government, the scope of its reach across the theatres of representation available to the councillor, its loyalty-generating expectations and its linking of the local democratic system with the approach and priorities of national politics.¹⁴⁸ These factors serve to make it essential for any study of local politics and democracy to account for the impact of the group on the processes of representation.

The chapters that follow will consider the tension inherent in the processes of local representation as they are experienced by the councillor, as when a crisis of representation occurs and the party group and electorate make competing claims on the councillor's loyalty over a local issue. In such crises councillors are called upon to use the representative discretion which attaches to their office to select which representative acts to perform, the combination of those acts and the theatres within which they are to be employed. The thesis assesses the impact of the party group on the representative actions of the councillor. It does this through an analysis

man', H. Eulau and J. Whalke, *The Politics of Representation*, California, Sage, 1978, pp. 43-48. p. 47. Similarly the councillor - through the mechanism of party allegiance - could distance him or her self from the ward or division represented and focus representation on the party group.

¹⁴⁸ For a consideration of councillors' attitudes toward party politics in local government see, J. Blondel and R. Hall, 'Conflict, Decision-Making and the Perceptions of Local Councillors', *Political Studies*, 15 (3), 1967, pp. 322-350.

of the complex set of interrelationships between: the councillor as a representative of an electoral area; the location of significant local issues; the councillors political affiliation; their attitudes towards representation and the organisation and activity of the party group.

The tables within the following chapters may not necessarily add back to 100 due to the rounding of figures to a whole number, and non-response to questions.

3.COUNCILLORS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS REPRESENTATION.

The politicisation of local government created the political conditions in which the party group could become the prime focus of a councillor's representative attention. This chapter shows that local councillors are often willing to give this primacy to the party group.

Exploring the influence of the party group over councillors' representative activities requires an assessment of councillor attitudes towards the business of representing their electors. This analysis can show the extent to which councillors' strength of attachment to the electorate and party group is in turn influenced by their own interpretation of the nature of the representative process.

MEASURING ATTITUDES TOWARDS REPRESENTATION

The survey conducted for this study (and further described in appendix 1) sought to make a general assessment of councillor attitudes towards the organisation of local government in its representative aspects. This process involved reproducing some of the attitude statements used in the research for the Widdicombe committee, with which the responding councillors were invited to express agreement or disagreement.¹

The organisational focus of the Widdicombe survey was important because it tested beliefs in the ability of local government to reflect popular feeling, as well as attitudes towards the distribution of power within the local authority. These structural and power allocation issues in

¹Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. II*, table 7.1, p. 65.

turn influence councillors' assessments of their own position. Thus, councillors' attitudes towards the manifesto as a reference point for decision-making becomes important. So too does their willingness, or otherwise, to open up the decision-making process to enhanced citizen input. The party and the public can each, in different ways, present, the councillor with a counter-balance to organisational and professional power. This chapter seeks to understand which of those counter-balancing elements councillors are disposed to focus upon.

It does so by constructing a new approach to identifying councillors' specific attitudes towards representation which drew on statements used by the Widdicombe committee, in conjunction with statements specifically designed for this study. The statements used by Widdicombe to assess councillor attitudes were not all useful in identifying what councillors felt was the appropriate input to local political decision-making by the electorate. Nor did they sufficiently test the attitudes of councillors towards what motivates the electorate to seek involvement, or make it possible to discern whether councillors focused on the needs of the electorate, the party or the council when it came to making decisions.² It was accordingly necessary to devise new statements for these purposes, organised around six *indicators* of representation, attitude statements with which the responding councillors were invited to agree or disagree. These statements tested councillors' attitudes towards the nature of citizen involvement, who should take local decisions, the influence of the party manifesto and the motivation for electors' interest in local government.

² Ibid, table 7.1, p. 65.

The six *indicators* have been used to construct an *index of representation*. The index highlights the existence amongst the sample group of councillors of both positive and negative attitudes towards representation. The index enables the allocation of a representative score to the sample as a whole and to sub-groups within the sample. The most important factor shaping these sub-groups is party affiliation, and the chapter first considers these party comparisons in detail.

Having identified councillors' attitudes and orientations towards representation, the chapter then considers the influence of the party group on the councillor as a local representative. It considers the relationship between attitudes towards democracy and the importance given by the councillor to the party group. It also explores the link between predisposition and political affiliation, on the one hand, and acts of representation on the other hand. Acts of representation are defined as 'speaking', 'voting', 'abstaining', 'absenting' or 'complying'. The chapter then considers the venues, or theatres, within which such acts can be conducted: both public and open, or private and closed. Where it is useful to do so for illustrative purposes, material drawn from interviews with councillors is also presented here.

COUNCILLORS' ATTITUDES IN 1985 AND 1994.

As a result of the questionnaire survey for this research a total of 629 responses were received from a total of 1067 Councillors drawn from 20 councils across the West Midlands and surrounding region. This respondent group comprised 548 party affiliates, 64 Independents or members of other groupings, and 17 that did not respond to the party

affiliation question. Much of the analysis that follows is confined to the identifiable 'party' councillors. As part of the questionnaire five of the statements used by the Widdicombe committee's research study on councillors' attitudes were included. Those statements were:

Ordinary citizens should have more say in the decisions made by local government;

The way local authorities are presently organised prevents them from dealing adequately with today's problems;

The first concern of the elected members of the majority party is to implement the party manifesto;

*Back-bench members have little real influence over decision-making;*³ and

Council officials have too much influence on decision-making.

Comparisons between 1985 and 1994 are used only to suggest general developments in councillor attitudes towards representation, as the more limited and geographically restricted nature of the research for this work counsels caution in any comparison with a larger-scale national survey. However when allowance is made for the different geographical span and sample design of the two surveys, there are indications here that some

³ The term back-bench member is used here for convenience to distinguish between the position of the councillor that holds office either within the council as leader, deputy leader, chair or vice-chair of a committee or sub committee, or within the party group, from those councillors holding no offices. This distinction is of interest because as Widdicombe notes 'office-holding might be of some importance in shaping attitudes to local authority administration'. Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. II*, p.68.

developments may have taken place in the intervening decade, although it is worth noting what has *not* changed: as table 3.1 shows, the responses to 'the way local authorities are presently organised' and 'Council officials have too much influence' are remarkably similar in both years and display a consistency of attitude towards these aspects over the period between the surveys.

While it is impossible to disentangle the effects of *place* (a regional survey compared with a national) and *time* (an interval of nine years between the two surveys) it would nonetheless be reasonable to assume that some element of the difference between 1985 and 1994 responses can be attributed to councillor attitudes shifting over time. There are no time-series studies of councillor attitudes, in the sense of surveys of the *same individual councillors*. Between one survey and another, councillor turnover would be considerable,⁴ and successive cohorts of councillors are very likely to display changes in social and political attitudes.

It is difficult to assess the impact on comparisons between the two surveys of the difference in size and proportion of the total survey made up of councillors from the three main political parties. The smaller size of the 1994 survey and the almost equal number of Conservative and Labour respondents, compared to Widdicombe's respondent political party sub-groups, could be an influence on attitudinal variations between the two surveys. Equally though, any similarities are all the more striking for this difference in survey base. It should also be noted that by 1994 the Liberals had become the Liberal Democrats, and the social and political developments in that party could also have influenced the responses of

⁴ Bloch, *The Turnover of Local Councillors*.

Liberal Democrat councillors. Table 3.1 compares the findings from the statements used in both the 1985 and 1994 surveys, and the final column summarises the percentage shifts in overall response. In this table, as in some later tables, the response categories 'strongly agree/agree' and 'strongly disagree/disagree' are collapsed in order to avoid over reflecting different degrees of emphasis in response, in accordance with standard reporting practice.

Table 3.1. Attitudes to aspects of local democracy 1985 - 1994

Statement	1985				1994				Variation 1985-94
	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Base	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Base	
citizens more say	58	21	22	1529	72	18	9	621	+14
LAs not organised	50	14	36	1524	52	12	35	625	+ 2
Priority is manifesto	54	16	30	1529	43	17	37	609	- 11
back bench influence	37	13	50	1525	30	10	58	616	- 7
officers influence	48	20	33	1542	49	19	30	621	+ 1

Source: 1985 figures, Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. II*, table 7.1, p. 65

Bearing in mind the need for caution in comparing the results of the Widdicombe committee research and the research conducted for this study, two factors are interesting to note. First, the general similarity in responses to the statements concerning the organisation of local authorities, the importance of the manifesto, the role of back-bench councillors and the power of council officers. The results are close enough to suggest that despite both the passage of time and the very different geographical scope of the two surveys, there is a constancy in councillors' attitudinal predispositions to these aspects of the situation. Both the sample groups reflect similar levels of dissatisfaction with organisational issues and with the influence of the officers over decision-making.

The responses to these two topics are remarkably constant over the intervening period and indicate the existence of a feeling of distance between the councillor and the representative body of which he or she is an elected member. The reasons for the 11-point reduction in the importance allocated to the 'manifesto' are explored in more detail in the next section.

A reluctance to admit to any diminution of influence for the back-bench councillor was also common to the two surveys, although the inclusion of council leaders, deputy leaders, chairs and vice-chairs of committees and sub-committees (and opposition shadow roles) in those responses influences the results where the proportion of these office-holders differ between the two surveys. Widdicombe reported expected differences in attitude towards this aspect between leaders, other office-holders and back-benchers with some '18 per cent of leaders agreeing that back-

benchers have little real influence, compared with 34 per cent of other office-holders and 43 per cent of the back-benchers'.⁵

Leaders and office-holders are close to the council machinery and the levers of power, but as active members of their party group may be reluctant to admit that their position is anything other than 'first among equals'. Back-benchers on the other hand, with far less day-to-day contact with the council machinery open to them, will experience their own distancing from the council and their inability to input to decisions, in any other forum than the group, as indicative of their own lack of influence. Simply, leaders and other office-holders are reluctant to admit that the majority of their members have little influence, whilst back-benchers experience that very aspect first hand. The conclusion here is that councillors from the two surveys broadly share similar satisfactions and frustrations, at least on this point.

That two of the statements (local authority organisation and officer influence) show a similarity of response, is itself a *prima facie* argument for comparability, and an indication of the reliability of the measure. We can, therefore, regard substantial differences in the reported figures as reflecting real differences between the two samples. Thus the first statement, 'ordinary citizens should have more say', indicates a considerable 14 point difference in attitude between the two surveys, with the later sample showing a far more positive attitude.

⁵ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. II*, p. 69, and Table 7.7, p. 70.

ASSESSING REPRESENTATIVE ATTITUDE: INDICATORS OF REPRESENTATION.

To assess councillor attitudes towards representation a set of indicators is required which addresses the 'representative crisis' faced by the councillor as outlined in chapters 1 and 2. Councillors were accordingly asked to respond to six specific statements regarding aspects of the representative processes. Two of the statements were re-runs of the statements posed by the Widdicombe committee, regarding citizen 'say' and the priority to be accorded to the party manifesto, and the 1985 and 1994 results are compared in this section.⁶ Specifically excluded from the 1994 survey were the four statements which Widdicombe criticised as producing almost 'unanimous agreement', in other words, they had resulted in conventional normative responses which revealed little if anything of councillors' actual attitudes to the electorate.⁷ These four were replaced with statements constructed specifically for this survey, to test councillors' attitudes toward the value of citizen input to local government.

Councillors were asked to respond to the following six statements as indicators of their orientation to representation:

Ordinary citizens should have more say in the decisions made by local government;

⁶ Ibid, p. 65.

⁷ Ibid, pp. 64-67. Statements criticised by Widdicombe were i) councillors should represent the views of all the people in their Ward, ii) local councillors not central government should make local decisions, iii) most important role of local government is to represent the interest of people in the area iv) councillors are too busy to give much time to the public.

More should be done to interest people in local government;

More should be done to involve ordinary people in local decision-making;

It is for councillors rather than the public or pressure groups to make decisions on local issues and priorities;

The first concern of the majority party is to implement the party manifesto; and

People only become interested in local government when an issue directly affects them.

Statements 1 and 5 are a re-run of those used in the Widdicombe committees' research, and statement 4 is a re-working of '*It is for local councillors rather than central government to determine local needs and priorities*'. This has been developed to turn the attention of the councillor away from central government (to which attitudes had earlier been shown to be fairly uniform) towards the local community, and was framed in such a way as to reflect the idea of the community as a body of opinion, organised around some purposeful objective, and not simply the citizen as an individual seeking some generalised input.

In accordance with the precepts of attitude research, councillors were provided with a balance between three statements with a *positive* orientation toward the community and three which were indicative of a more *negative* attitude toward the community. The three community

orientated statements were; 'ordinary citizens should have more say in the decisions made by local government'; 'more should be done to interest people in local government'; and 'more should be done to involve ordinary people in local decision-making'.

These three statements use the concept of 'citizen input' as the focus of representative attention. The three key elements of citizen 'say', 'interest' and 'involvement' are discrete but linked aspects of input, as the councillor can (and in practice does) discriminate between them. The citizen can be provided with both the facilities and opportunities for enhanced 'say', but if local authorities and the decisions they take lack salience for the electorate, then this will depress levels of interest and thus lead to a lower degree of involvement. The councillor is thus both a gatekeeper to power, and a potential facilitator of enhanced citizen interest in the processes of local democracy. As the concept of event-driven democracy suggests, the councillor can channel citizen interest around specific issues and events of community significance into the political processes, thus raising interest and then involvement and ultimately citizen 'say'. This process is dependent of course on the councillor accepting the commitment to enhance 'say' rather than just enhance 'interest'.

The topic of 'involvement' enables councillors to respond to a generalised statement regarding increases in contact and communication between local government and the citizenry which do not conflict with the councillor as a decision-maker and final arbiter of local affairs. Most councillors expressed the wish that people were more interested in what they do, and this was not seen as threatening the councillor as a decision-maker, but expressing a more generalised interest in the activities of local government. The issue of enhanced citizen 'say' builds logically on the idea of interest

and involvement but has a sharper focus on a specific input to decision-making.

These three positive (or community-orientated) statements recognise, as did Arnstein, that there are logical steps of progression for citizen input to local government.⁸ The survey for this thesis allowed councillors to discriminate between citizen interest, involvement and say. This discrimination was necessary to determine the nature of citizen input that was congruent with councillors' own attitudes to the proper balance between the citizen and the councillor as a local decision-maker.

The three negative (or councillor-orientated) statements were 'it is for councillors rather than the public or pressure groups to make decisions on local issues and priorities'; 'the first concern of the majority party is to implement the party manifesto'; and 'people only become interested in local government when an issue directly affects them'.

These three statements present the councillor with an opportunity to display an orientation away from the community or citizen and toward the elected representative and his or her party as a focus of representation. In the first, councillors were presented with a statement which clearly sets out their office as the arbiter of local affairs and final decision-maker, over and above any input for the community. In the second they were also given the opportunity to express their attachment to the broad set of election promises that are made within a local manifesto. The final statement tests councillors' attitudes towards community interest in local affairs and

⁸ S. Arnstein, 'Ladder of Citizen Participation', *Journal of American Institute of Planners*, 35, 1969, pp. 216-224.

presents them with an opportunity to express their own scepticism towards the electorate as a focus for their representative activities.

More 'say' for the citizen

In order to establish the influence on councillors' representative activities and focus on the party group of the councillor's own political affiliation, the responses to the six statements are broken down by the important variable of political party affiliation. Only the responses of those councillors from the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat parties have been included in the following tables, the small number of non-party councillors being excluded for this purpose from all the following tables.

Table 3.2 shows responses to the statement 'ordinary citizens should have more say in the decisions made by local government'. The final column showing the percentage margin of agreement over disagreement, discounts those respondents who neither agree nor disagree.

**Table 3.2. Support for more say for citizens in decisions,
by political party**

	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Margin of Agreement	base
1985					
Labour	74	14	11	63	(496)
Liberal	87	8	3	84	(133)
Conservative	35	30	34	1	(595)
1994					
Labour	84	13	3	81	(223)
Lib Dem	92	6	2	90	(99)
Conservative	57	26	17	40	(223)

Source: 1985 figures, Widdicombe committee Vol. II, table 7.15, p. 75.

Comparisons of two very different surveys must be treated with caution because of the different geographical scope of the two works and the obvious differences in sample size and design. Even so, a general but striking observation is possible, that in both 1985 and 1994, the Conservative councillors were considerably less supportive of the idea of increased 'say' for the citizen in the decisions of local government than either their Labour or Liberal Democrat counterparts. Widdicombe discovered party differences to be considerable when responding to this issue, and those differences have remained.⁹ Comparison of the two sets of figures also indicates that in 1994 councillors generally showed a greater willingness to support an increased 'say' for citizens in local

⁹ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. II*, p. 75.

government, with an increase in positive responses to the item across all parties.

Table 3.2. presents a clear centre-left balance in favour of agreement with the proposition regarding citizen 'say', with Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors showing a close affinity on this aspect. What is not shown in the table is that Liberal Democrats, recorded the greatest 'agree strongly' response at 68 per cent, against 33 per cent Labour and 14 per cent of Conservative councillors. The table shows that the Conservative councillor records the greatest shift in opinion on this question, but Conservatives had the greatest amount of ground to make up in terms of a positive responses to the issue. Widdicombe also reported that the 'Liberals were almost unanimous in favour of more say' with 58 per cent registering strong agreement and similarly that only four of their 133 Liberals dissented from the idea of more 'say' for the citizen.¹⁰ This survey found a further increase in Liberal Democrat support for more citizen say, with 68 per cent agreeing strongly with the proposition and only two of the 99 Liberal Democrat respondents dissenting from the proposition.

These findings underpin the conclusion from the research for Widdicombe, that in response to this question, 'the party affiliation of the councillor was a uniquely powerful discriminator'. The findings also indicate the existence of a clear centre-left affinity on this issue, rather than a simple single party distinction.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid, table 7.15, pp. 75-76.

¹¹ Widdicombe identified the problem for attitude measurement generated by a safety net response of 'neither/nor', stating that 'the often large proportions of councillors who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement [citizen 'say'] complicate the picture', finding some 21 percent of councillors in this category. Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. II*, p.

Citizen input does not necessarily result in a transference of power from the elected representative to the community. Councillors can quite rationally indicate they favour more 'say' for the citizen whilst retaining final decision-making power as the legitimised public representative. Decisions thus made are filtered through the party group. Despite this, the responses indicate however general support for the concept that citizens should have a 'say' - and more of it.

Interest in local government

Councillors across all parties overwhelmingly shared the view that the interest of the local community in the activities of local government should be increased, although on this issue the Conservative councillors lag behind their Labour and Liberal Democrat counterparts. Table 3.3 shows the responses to the statement 'more should be done to interest people in local government' and in this case the degree of agreement is shown, as the overall results are so strongly skewed in that direction.

Table 3.3. Support for more interest in local government, by political party

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Margin of Agreement	base
Party	%	%	%	%	%		
Labour	46	50	3	*	*	+96	(224)
Lib Dem	54	42	4	-	-	+96	(97)
Con	25	60	14	1	-	+84	(224)

76. In this study 18 per cent of councillors selected the neither/ nor response option and this slightly lower proportion was reflected across the political parties.

On the question of raising the level of community interest in the activities of local government the three parties record high levels of positive agreement. This supports the view that councillors across all parties wish the electorate to give a higher level of attention to local government. That position is evenly supported across the three main political parties as a positive relationship with the concept of representation, as defined and experienced by the councillor however and not by the represented. Conservative councillors record the lowest level of agreement to this statement and when the 'agree' categories are compressed Conservatives are some 11 per cent behind both the Liberal Democrats and Labour councillors' responses.

The responses clearly indicate that councillors feel the electorate should be encouraged to take an interest in the activities of local government. The high margins of agreement to this proposition - across the parties - indicate the underlying acceptance amongst councillors for a more interested electorate. This argument is supported further by looking at the responses from councillors to a similar proposition, that more should be done to involve ordinary people in local decision-making.

Involving people in local government

Table 3.4 shows responses to the statement 'More should be done to involve ordinary people in local decision-making'. Once again, the shift in responses call for different degrees of agreement to be shown here.

Table 3.4. Support for more 'involvement in local decision-making' by political party

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Margin of Agreement	base
Party	%	%	%	%	%		
Labour	24	57	15	3	*	+78	(223)
Lib Dem	51	43	4	2	-	+92	(95)
Con	10	42	25	21	2	+29	(219)

The centre-left agreement on the concept of a 'citizen orientation' is again displayed in responses to the proposition concerning enhanced citizen involvement. Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors indicate a high level of support for unspecified actions to ensure greater citizen involvement. These responses mirror almost exactly those given to the issue of greater citizen 'say'. There is clearly less enthusiasm from Conservative councillors for action to ensure greater citizen involvement. Labour and Liberal Democrats express a stronger desire to see an enhancement of citizen involvement in local government, with the Liberal Democrats recording the highest level of compressed 'agree' responses to the proposition, standing at 94 per cent compared to 81 per cent Labour and 52 per cent Conservative. Only two Liberal Democrats of the 95 who responded to this statement, and seven of the 223 Labour councillors, disagreed with the proposition that more should be done to 'involve' citizens in local government. Yet again party affiliation is shown to be an important discriminator of councillor attitudes towards this aspect of democracy. This point is further underlined by the margin of agreement which places the Conservative councillor some 49 points behind Labour and 63 points behind the Liberal Democrats.

Councillors should decide

Table 3.5 shows responses to the statement 'it is for local councillors rather than members of the public and pressure groups to make decisions on local issues and priorities'.

Table 3.5. Support for 'local Councillors should decide' by political party

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Margin of Agree- ment	base
Party	%	%	%	%	%		
Labour	14	43	18	21	4	+32	(222)
Lib Dem	9	44	15	29	3	+21	(98)
Con	29	51	7	12	1	+67	(224)

An interesting link has emerged here with the propositions set out in tables 3.1 and 3.2. Whilst some 74 per cent of all councillors, in the sample group respond positively to the idea that ordinary citizens should have more 'say', 66 per cent of them 'agreed' or 'agreed strongly' that councillors, rather than the public, should make the *decisions* on local issues and priorities. A majority of councillors across all political parties, including the Liberal Democrats, took this position. In all parties, however, a far larger proportion of the responses fell into the 'agree' rather than the 'agree strongly' category.

The compressed results indicate the striking divergence in responses between the centre-left and Conservative councillors who express more and stronger agreement with this statement and far greater support for an unhindered role for the councillor as the arbitrator of local issues and decisions. Some 80 per cent of Conservatives, against 57 per cent of

Labour and 53 per cent of Liberal Democrats fell into the compressed 'agree' category. Again, the margin of agreement underlines the strength of attachment of the Conservative councillor to the view that 'councillors should decide'. The sheer scale of the disparity between centre-left and Conservative councillors is indicative of an attitude toward representation which is peculiar to the Conservative, who seemingly wishes decisions to be unfettered by citizen input. Councillors of all parties however, clearly draw a boundary between a citizen orientation and involvement in local government, and their carefully guarded position as the final arbiters of local issues. The centre-left perspective is somewhat more willing to see decisions kept closer to the community, but a large majority of the centre-left still supports the councillors role as final decision-maker.

Implementing the manifesto

Councillors were asked to respond to the statement 'the first concern of the elected members of the majority party is to implement the party manifesto'. This question was asked in 1985 by the Widdicombe committee, so table 3.6 compares the 1985 findings with the findings of this survey.

When presented with a statement which specifically addresses the priority given to the concept of the party and party policy, councillors could respond normatively to this statement, thinking that the manifesto *should* be implemented as a priority; while recognising that political circumstances and varying degrees of attachment to particular manifesto items may result in those policies not being implemented for lack of political will. Or, councillors may take a 'positive' orientation toward the manifesto and report the fact that it is given priority in practice.

Table 3.6. Agreement that implementing the party manifesto has priority, by political party

	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Margin of Agree- ment	base
1985					
Labour	79	9	19	+60	(496)
Liberal	33	21	56	- 23	(133)
Con	49	20	44	+ 5	(595)
1994					
Labour	67	13	20	+47	(222)
Lib Dem	33	20	47	- 14	(95)
Con	32	21	47	- 15	(222)

Source: 1985 figures, Widdicombe, *Research Vol. II*, table 7.17, p.78.

A minority party may view the majority group's implementation of manifesto policies in wholly negative terms, as they would oppose politically those policies, but when faced with commenting on their own manifesto may then provide normative responses or positive commitment to it. Even so, research for Widdicombe noted that 'half of the Conservative councillors acknowledged the pre-emptive claims of the manifesto, even when they sat as minority members on Labour controlled councils'.¹² Care must be taken, then, in interpreting the responses.

In 1994 some 47 per cent of all councillors agreed that the manifesto is given priority, which indicates the levels of acceptance amongst

¹² Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. II*, p. 78.

councillors that the party manifesto should be the first concern of at least the majority party members and is also a powerful indicator of the acceptance of 'party' as a councillor's representative focus. The responses must be treated with some caution and an appropriate interpretation placed on the meaning of the term 'party'. It is clear that both in 1985 and 1994 it is the Labour councillor that places a far greater emphasis on the manifesto, than either Conservative or Liberal Democrat councillors.

There are differences between the responses for this work and the findings of the Widdicombe committee, presented in table 3.6 which at first glance suggest a softening in this 'manifestoism'.¹³ The variations in responses could too easily be inferred as representing a shift away from party, but the exclusion in this research of London boroughs and the predominance of district councils over metropolitan areas, prohibits such an interpretation. The research for Widdicombe covered seven metropolitan county councils, 16 London boroughs and 18 metropolitan district councils in England.¹⁴ This survey contained only three metropolitan boroughs from a total of 20 local authorities. The Widdicombe research, whilst noting its 'fairly strong phrasing of manifestoism' reported that '52 per cent were prepared to go along with it' and in addition that 'there was notably more agreement in the London boroughs and the metropolitan counties'.¹⁵ Whilst 47 per cent of the 1994 survey of 20 authorities (14 of which were district councils) responded in agreement with manifestoism, Widdicombe found in 1985 that 44 per cent of district councillors also agreed. The findings of this survey thus underpin rather than undermine Widdicombe's results, and

¹³ Ibid, table 7.17, p. 78.

¹⁴ Ibid, table 1.2, p. 16.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 76.

support that type of authority exerts a powerful effect on attitudes to the manifesto.

Given this impact of the type of local authority involved in the surveys and the apparent effect on the findings, it may be concluded that the sample design reduced the number of representatives of the more politicised style of politics. Equally, there could also be a trend away from the manifesto as a first priority. This would be consistent with the earlier findings, although it is important not to discount the actual scale of agreement, noted in Widdicombe's observation that 'it would appear that councillor's acceptance of obligations which derive from election on a party platform is both more widespread and more long-standing than casual observation would suggest'.¹⁶

That said, in this survey the Labour councillors in agreement with the proposition exceed the total of 'neither/nor', responses and 'disagrees' which stand at 33 per cent. The reverse is true with the responses received from both Liberal Democrats and Conservative councillors, Labour councillors score highest over Conservative and Liberal Democrats in both the 'agree strongly' and 'agree' categories. Party, in the guise of a manifesto placed before the electorate, is clearly still a higher priority for Labour councillors than their counterparts in either of the other two major parties, both of whom display a considerable negative margin in response to this statement.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 78.

People's interest influenced by the impact of issues

Table 3.7 shows the responses to the statement 'people only become interested in local government when an issue directly affects them', and clearly indicates a level of scepticism amongst councillors in regard to the motivations of those they represent.

Table 3.7. Agreement with 'people are only interested in local government when an issue affects them', by political party

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Margin of Agree- ment	base
Party	%	%	%	%	%		
Labour	25	54	7	12	2	+65	(224)
Lib Dem	29	58	4	8	1	+78	(99)
Con	35	50	6	7	2	+76	(224)

The stated support amongst councillors for an increased 'say' for the public in decisions made by local government is counterpointed by the equally firm view that people only become interested in local government when an issue directly affects them. Some 83 per cent agreed with that proposition, reflecting a well-entrenched cynicism amongst councillors of all parties. That attitude is displayed to a slightly lesser degree amongst Labour councillors than those of the other two parties. When the responses are as high as presented in table 3.7. the questions of degree fade in significance, the clear and conclusive majority in all parties indicate a deep feeling amongst the political representatives of the community that the citizenry are primarily motivated by self-interest.

The Liberal Democrat figure of 87 per cent in agreement with the statement, the highest response amongst the three parties, is intriguing, as

this appears at first sight to sit uneasily with the Liberal Democrat approach to local 'community politics'. In fact, the response may actually reflect the Liberal Democrat experience of organising local campaigns and motivating the local community around particular issues and events, in which the electorate do not share the same level of general interest or commitment. Councillors specialising in a community-orientated approach may be the more acutely aware that the community will only be interested in issues of direct relevance to it. At the same time, the community politics approach becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as it encourages local communities to fix on very local issues that affect their own interests.

Across all parties the majority of responses to this statement fall into the 'agree' rather than the 'agree strongly' category, it is however, again, the margin of agreement which underscores the depth of councillors' scepticism toward the electorate. The responses show that the levels of agreement with the statement exceed, for all parties, the total of the 'neither/nor' and 'disagree' responses. Such negative attitudes towards the electorate, when displayed by their representatives, seriously call into question some of the assumptions of representative democracy and lend support to the notion of event-driven democracy. Other research indicates that the scepticism is mutual, councillors' scepticism about the electors being mirrored by the unwillingness on the electors part, to trust councillors to place the interests of their electorate above those of their political party.¹⁷ This mutual scepticism is potentially damaging to the fabric of local representative democracy and probably sustains the councillors' propensity to make the group the centre of their representative attention.

¹⁷ Young and Rao, 'Faith in Local Democracy', p. 109.

AN INDEX OF REPRESENTATION

Responses to the six statements indicate an orientation amongst councillors that is indicative of both a sharing of attitude between the centre-left and centre-right on particular aspects of representation. In order to further explore councillors' attitudes towards representation and the ways they understand and make sense of their day-to-day experiences as councillors, the six statements have been used to construct an index of representation. This index was designed to assess councillors' overall orientations towards representation and to locate the electorate within their 'mental map'. This process enables us to gauge the strength of representative attachment to the electorate, which can then be compared to the countervailing pressures generated by the party group.

The index uses the six statements sorted into their negative and positive categories, and takes the sum of the responses received to present a numerical score for councillors' attitudes toward representation.

The figures presented in table 3.8 below are a total of responses to the positive, community-orientated statements, from all 'party' councillors. The final column in table 3.8, showing the margin of agreement, is the total 'agree' figure remaining after the 'disagree' and 'neither agree/ nor disagree' responses are taken from the sum of the replies. It has been calculated thus to avoid artificially inflating the margin of agreement by including those that 'neither agreed/nor disagreed' in that total.

Table 3.9 presents the responses to the negative orientation statements, which focus the councillors' representational attention away from the community. Similarly the final column in table 3.9 showing the margin of

agreement is the sum remaining after the total of the 'disagree' and 'neither agree/nor disagree' responses have been taken from the total.

Table 3.8. The positive index: raw scores

	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Margin of Agreement
ordinary citizen have more say	404	94	47	+ 263
more done to interest people	499	41	5	+ 453
more done to involve people	384	93	60	+ 231

From these raw figures an index can be calculated. The index scores could range from -3.00 that is no 'agree' response given to the three statements, and all responses are to disagree, to a maximum score of 3.00, which would be achieved were 'agree' responses to be given to all three items by all respondents. The total of agree (or positive) responses sums to 1287. This figure is then divided by the total number of party councillors (548) to produce a score 2.34 from a maximum of 3.00. This is the score from all the relevant respondents: an analogous score can be calculated for councillors of different political affiliation for the purpose of inter-party comparison.

A similar approach is taken to the negative index, which likewise can range from a score of -3.00 to a maximum of 3.00: table 3.9 displays the

raw data. The total number of 'agree' statements on the negative index is 1062, which, when divided by the respondent group of 548, produces a score of 1.93 from the range of -3.00 to 3.00 maximum.

Table 3.9. The negative index: raw scores

	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Margin of Agreement
Councillors to make decisions	357	71	116	+ 170
Concern is manifesto	251	94	194	- 37
interested only when affected	454	32	61	+ 361

The positive and negative indexes present an overall picture of councillors' attitudes towards community and representation. These can be further refined, using the index to examine the pattern of attitudes across the main three political parties. The results presented below display these variations.

The influence of political affiliation on councillors' attitudes to representation

How far do the variations in attitudes towards representation reflect the councillor's membership of a particular political party? This question can be answered by calculating the two representative indexes for each sub-group of councillors, defined in terms of their political affiliations.

Table 3.10. The influence of councillors' political party affiliation: the positive index

		Agree	Neither	Disagree	Margin of Agreement
Give people more say	Labour	187	29	7	+ 151
	Lib Dem	91	6	2	+ 83
	Con	126	59	38	+ 29
Do more to interest	Labour	216	6	2	+ 208
	Lib Dem	93	4	0	+ 89
	Con	190	31	3	+ 156
Do more to involve	Labour	182	34	7	+ 141
	Lib Dem	89	4	2	+ 83
	Con	113	55	51	+ 7

Again, the total responses are calculated, the raw data being shown in table 3.10. The final column shows the total margin of 'agree' responses over 'neither agree/nor disagree' and 'disagree' responses. The index is derived by taking the total positive 'agree' figures for each party, dividing them by the number of respondents in each sub-group to produce the positive index score on the range of -3.00 to 3.00 for each party as shown in table 3.11.

Table 3.11. The positive index score by political party

	Total positive agree responses	Total respondents	Positive index score
Labour	585	224	2.61
Lib Dem	273	99	2.75
Con	429	225	1.90

This approach is then replicated to create a negative index. First the raw data are displayed in table 3.12. The final column shows the resultant 'agree' figure after taking the 'disagree' and 'neither agree/nor disagree' responses from the 'agree' replies.

Table 3.12. The influence of councillors' political party affiliation: the negative index

	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Margin of Agree- ment
Councillor decides				
Labour	126	40	56	+ 30
Lib Dem	52	15	31	+ 6
Con	179	16	29	+ 134
Manifesto				
Labour	149	29	44	+ 76
Lib Dem	31	19	45	- 33
Con	71	46	105	- 80
Interested when affected				
Labour	178	15	31	+ 132
Lib Dem	86	4	9	+ 73
Con	190	13	21	+ 156

Using the same approach as with the positive index the following negative index score on the range of -3.00 to 3.00 for each party affiliation is derived, and the results shown in table 3.13.

Table 3.13. The negative index score by political party

	Total agree responses	Total respondents	Negative index score
Labour	453	224	2.02
Liberal Dem	169	99	1.70
Con	440	225	1.95

The party affiliation and positive and negative representative index scores can then be viewed thus:

Table 3.14. The index of representation

	Positive index score	Negative index score
Labour	2.61	2.02
Liberal Dem	2.75	1.70
Conservative	1.90	1.95
All councillors	2.34	1.93

Analysis by political party indicates a clear-cut attitudinal difference between political affiliates and the existence of a centre-left alignment when it comes to a positive attitude towards representation based on a generalised approach to the concept of 'citizen input' to local government. However, the negative scores of Labour and Conservative councillors converge, and on this measure the Liberal Democrats stand out as by far the lowest group on the negative index. The reason, however, is not hard to find in table 3.12. Labour councillors are strongly oriented toward the

party manifesto, while Conservatives are the most inclined to assert that 'councillors should decide'. The result in terms of the 'closure' of the decision process in both these parties is remarkably similar, even if it reflects quite different orientations to decision-making.

Comparing the two representative scores indicates that Liberal Democrat councillors maintain the highest positive attitude towards representation and the community and the lowest negative attitude.

VARIETIES OF COUNCILLOR ATTITUDE TOWARD REPRESENTATION

The responses to the six statements used as indicators of representation compare councillors' attitudes to the concept of 'community input' to local government and their attitudes to their own position as decision-makers. The responses fall into a clear pattern bearing upon three distinct issues: citizen/community involvement; community motivation for interest; and the councillor as decision-maker.

Within each of these sets of responses there exists a variation across party, and the centre-left and centre-right axis shifts according to the issue or statement itself. Clearly, party affiliation and the very fact of 'party' itself are powerful factors shaping councillors' attitudes toward representation and the electorate. The responses reported are considered here in more detail and interview material is introduced both to illustrate and elaborate the points. Details of the interviews conducted with councillors from the three main parties are to be found in Appendix 1.

Councillor attitudes towards citizen/community involvement

When considering councillors' responses to issues of community/citizen involvement in local government, a distinction emerges between Conservative councillors and those of the centre-left. Conservative councillors respond with clear agreement with the need for more citizen *interest* but that does not lead the Conservative councillor, to support greater *involvement*, for they respond far less positively than the other parties on the issues of involvement and 'say' for citizens. The variation in attitudes between Conservative councillors and those councillors from the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties is marked.

The idea of citizen involvement finds most favour with Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors, although they are responding in generalised, rather than specific terms. To support involvement in general terms is not to deny the need for a wider perspective, which many councillors perceive to be the task of themselves as elected representatives.

Local communities, as will be seen from the case study material in chapters 7 - 9, demand a more specific and more potent involvement, always around issues of significance to them as a particular community. The 'involvement' which councillors support may not be the involvement that communities demand, which is issue-specific, rather than policy-general. Although Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors are distinguished by their support for involvement, their perspective may be at variance to that sought by the community.

Community motivation for interest

Councillor attitudes towards the motivations of communities to take an interest in local politics transcends party affiliation. There is an overwhelming scepticism amongst councillors of all parties towards the electors they represent, with the attribution of purely self-interested motives reflected in similar proportions across the party divide. The location of councillors within a party political organisation, in a council setting, is the factor common to all councillors, and appears to be a powerful determinant of their response. This common experience appears to outweigh their background as members of different political organisations who bring different philosophical and political interpretations to bear on the business of being a councillor.

A Conservative district councillor illustrated this point, commenting:

I've attended public meetings and consultations and no one comes but as soon as a factory unit is being built nearby or the school little Johnny goes to is under threat you have to beat them off with a stick.

These comments were echoed in similar terms by a Liberal Democrat councillor thus:

Liberal Democrats support and encourage community action and campaigns, we're good at it and we're known for it, but sometimes I wish people would stop thinking that the community, started and ended at their front door.

This type of comment was echoed in many of the interviews and by councillors of all political parties. Councillors applied the term 'NIMBY' ('Not In My Back Yard') to the electorate with considerable regularity. As a Liberal Democrat county councillor commented:

we can't all have the green belt on our doorstep, it is possible to travel to green areas, but some people think they should live next door to trees and fields and that no development should ever take place. You have to get the right balance.

Councillors' responses indicate that the generally high level of scepticism towards the electorate's scope of interest in local affairs, is reflected in similar proportions across the three main political parties. Councillors across parties then are sceptical of electors' motivations, and see the nature of the interest expressed by the very electorate they represent as transient.

The councillor as decision-maker

Responses to those issues which bear upon the councillor as a decision-maker indicate that whatever their expressed attitudes are towards the need for citizen interest and involvement, for many decision-making remains the responsibility of the elected representative. This decision-making responsibility, legitimised by public election, is jealously guarded by councillors, as without it they have little, other than the virtue of elected office, to distinguish them from any individuals or groups motivated by concern for issues and events of local significance and demanding a 'say'.

The responses from councillors to the two statements in this category show a centre-left affinity around citizen input and a Liberal Democrat/Conservative affinity around the role of the party manifesto. All parties record a majority of respondents agreeing that the councillor should remain the decision-maker, over and above any community involvement in local affairs. Conservative councillors are unambiguous in their willingness to proclaim the decision-making role of the councillor, whilst more than half of the Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors agree.

The strength of Conservative councillors' attitudes toward their position as local decision-makers and arbitrators of local affairs is indeed seen as a virtue. A Conservative district council committee chair commented:

All councillors listen to people but there would be no purpose in being a councillor if you are constantly asking your constituents what to do next, once elected they want you to get on with it. If there is a considerable disagreement between what we want to do and what local people think they have their chance to judge at the council election, that is why I support annual elections, people don't forget over a year and if they disagree they can elect someone else.

This statement reflects a localist view, in that the electorate have the opportunity to overcome their partisan attachments and to 'punish' the council or their councillor at an election when they feel he or she has not represented the locality. This argument turns a blind eye to partisan attachments amongst the electorate. It is a view - the classic view, perhaps - which maintains that political parties have a negligible impact on

decisions, or at least an impact which can be negated by the significance of local issues. It supports the concept of the councillor as a 'representative' exercising judgement on particular local issues. How does this square with realities of party group control of local authorities and its impact on the councillor's experiences of representation?

THE PARTY GROUP AND PARTY REPRESENTATION

Political parties have a two-fold influence on councillors' experiences of representation. There is first the actuality of councillors securing election as the nominees of political parties, and being thus beholden to the organisation, and secondly, party affiliation as an indicator of political philosophy. Councillors, then, share experiences as party nominees and as holders of political opinions which, as we have seen, are themselves reflective of attitude towards representation. Scant attention has been given to the fact that councillors not only represent their wards or divisions, but also the political party, to which they owe a debt of allegiance for the very tenure of their seat. That debt may be subject to periodic reminders, as one Labour district councillor reflected:

Whenever I go to a district party or GMC (General Management Committee), not so much my own ward, I am always reminded by someone that they raised the money, walked the streets, canvassed, and leafleted in all weathers, and it was they that won the seat for me. As a result they should be able to tell me what to do in the council chamber, as though I didn't do all those things myself.

In a similar vein a Conservative councillor reported that:

The local Association certainly does not attempt to mandate councillors in any way but we are made well aware of the opinions of prominent Association members and they are seriously considered, not formally you understand, in council, but in another place.

Councillors of the three parties indicate a focus away from the community they represent. For the Labour councillor this is towards party, for the Conservative towards the office of councillor itself. This is a view shared, though not so intensely, by Liberal Democrats. Not that Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors are completely free of any focus on party election commitments, or the continuity of those commitments through their term of office, but they claim greater room for manoeuvre than do their Labour counterparts when considering the specifics of representation. Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors are less likely to claim - or defer to - an electoral mandate to justify policy decisions on local issues, and are correspondingly less accustomed to it being used to underpin disciplinary action against individual councillors.

A Liberal Democrat district councillor put it in proportion:

Yes we have a manifesto, if you want to call it that, but we like to think that it reflects the feelings and opinions of local people, not what we think as a political party. Of course we do have our own politics to keep sight of in all of this.

This shared experience of party membership and partisanship is the beginning of a process which draws the councillor's representative focus away from the community itself, towards the party. The party controls councillors' electoral opportunities through its selection procedures and once elected the councillor, as a party nominee, is subject to magnified pressure to adhere to a party as it manifests itself in the party group. This pressure draws the councillor away from the community he or she represents. The group and the wider party also hold the key to the councillor's tenure of office, as one de-selected, former Conservative district councillor bitterly complained:

I found I was less and less willing to support them and after I spoke in favour of a Labour motion, I did not vote for it however, they withdrew the group whip. The next thing I knew was they had selected some 20 - year - old hairdresser to stand as the Conservative candidate in my ward. What could I do, I had to stand against her as an Independent just to save face, that is why I am no longer a councillor, but at least neither is she.

The power of the party group, granted by the present system of local government, has been described as 'inordinate'.¹⁸ Indeed, the groups power may be limited only by the need to respect the restraints of its own composition of individuals and factions. It is not the community or the opposition councillors that restrict group power, but the need to ensure that the balance of party opinion is accounted for in the allocation of positions and responsibilities within the group itself. Ken Livingstone, one-

¹⁸ Commission For Local Democracy, Final Report, *Taking Charge: The Rebirth Of Local Democracy*, Municipal Journal Books, 1995, p. 16.

time leader of the Greater London Council, accepted that the limits to political power lay within the group itself. He states that the lack of balance within the Labour group, in terms of an acceptable allocation of positions and power across the composite elements of the group (he uses the term left and right wingers), is 'a recipe for disaster'. He goes on to report that as a result of his election as leader of the Greater London Council in 1981 and the complete control taken by the left, it took the controlling Labour group a year to settle down to a point when it then became 'possible to achieve a proper balance representing the various factions within the group'.¹⁹

The group is a focal point for councillors as representatives and it is through the party group that we observe the 'significant impact of parties on the operation of local authorities'.²⁰ This impact of party group on council affairs not only emulates its Parliamentary counterpart but may exert greater control over its members than the equivalent Parliamentary Party. Widespread practices and procedures ensure that 'subsequent council or committee meetings will have been pre-empted: the proceedings will be cut and dried and the result a foregone conclusion'.²¹

¹⁹ K. Livingstone, *If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish It*, London, Fontana, 1987, p. 140. Livingstone goes as far as to document the power of the party group in considering alleged illegal activities by a member. The group was to decide if withdrawal of the whip was appropriate, but as Livingstone reports, when faced with alleged wrongdoing by one of their own, 'we [the group] behaved exactly as the Police usually do. We took no action'. Group power and discipline extends as far, in this case anyway, as consideration of alleged legal wrong doing, p. 295.

²⁰ T. Byrne, *Local Government in Britain*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1983, p. 116.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 117.

Councillors require a stable reference point for evaluating their experiences of representation, one which matches their underlying attitudes toward representation. The party group provides that stability and attitudinal framework, but in turn influences the focus and activities of councillors and the outcomes of their activities as representatives.

A MODEL OF COUNCILLOR PREDISPOSITION AND REPRESENTATIVE OUTCOMES

Representative discretion: acts and theatres

The pattern of scores on the index of representation indicates that councillors view representation in ways that are characteristic of the shared environment within which they experience and make sense of the processes of representation. That environment is composed of two distinct sets of shared experiences. First, those that are common to all councillors, irrespective of party allegiance and that arise from council membership. Secondly, there are experiences that are shared by most councillors but which are felt differently, depending on their party allegiance: these are the experiences which accrue from the councillors' membership of the party group. Party groups will show variations in the intensity, degree and rigidity with which they try to encourage their members to focus their representative activities on the group, variations which exist between and within political parties.

The assumptions councillors make about representation dictate the 'proper' balance between the councillor as a decision-maker and representative, and between councillor and citizen input to local affairs. They have an

immediate relevance to the councillor's orientation towards the focusing of representative activity - as something which stresses the community or the party group. In turn such assumptions will influence the ways in which councillors use the discretion attaching to their office to select both the nature of their *representative acts* and the *theatre* in which those acts will be performed.²² This discretion extends to the transference of acts between the theatres of representation as the issue, and public reaction to it, develops. The discretion available is not infinite in that councillors have a limited number of activity options and theatres from which to select when faced with issues of community significance, and with pressure for loyalty exerted by the party group. The theatrical metaphor is deliberate and, arguably, of particular appropriateness to the business of political representation.

'Representative acts' are here taken to mean the range of options open to a councillor who is disposed against a particular decision. At one extreme, he or she may speak against a decision, or may simply cast a vote against it or abstain from voting in its favour. A councillor may play safe by complying with the group line, or may avoid the issue by absenting him or herself. 'Theatres of representation' are the forums in which these acts might take place. They may be open and public, or they may be the closed and private theatres of the party group meeting or meetings of the party outside the council. There are, in addition, private meetings without party significance in which dissent might be registered. Figure 3.1. indicates the range of theatres for any acts of representation that are considered in this

²² The Commission For Local Democracy have commented that 'the council and committee chambers become little more than a political theatre where decisions are given formal effect', Commission For Local Democracy, Final Report, *Taking Charge*, p. 15.

work and categorise these into open and closed theatres and private meetings.

Figure 3.1. Theatres of representation and representative acts

Open Theatres	Closed Theatres	Private Meetings	Representative Acts (support or oppose the group)
Council	Party Group	Senior Councillors	Speak
Committee	Local Party	Other Councillors	Vote
Press / Media		Officers	Abstain
Public Meeting		Community Group	Comply
		Other Agency	Absent
		M.P.	

Each of the representative acts detailed in figure 3.1, carry different risks, or exact a greater or lesser price for dissent when undertaken in opposition to a group decision. That price is in turn related to the theatre within which the act was conducted. A councillor will need to assess the potential cost of any act of dissent before acting and the cost will increase the more open the theatre becomes. Similarly the cost of dissent will vary for the combination by the councillor of any act of speaking and voting, in any theatre, and indeed with the nature and content of any act of speaking itself. Chapters 4 and 5 will show that councillors clearly distinguish between theatres for representation when considering acts of representation.

The representative activities under the private meeting heading are of a different nature and involve different processes than the open and closed theatres of representation. It is the open and closed theatres of representation that are of interest here, as representative activities undertaken in these arenas are quantifiable and as such provide more of an insight to the ways in which councillors use their representative discretion and the impact of the party group on that discretion. The representative activities of voting and speaking, assessed by means of the councillor questionnaire, can be used by the councillor in either open or closed theatres. To appreciate fully the power of the party group it is necessary to compare the ways in which councillors enact their representative role in the group, and the ways they do so in the open theatres of representation.

While party groups have differing degrees of openness to party members and to officers of the council, as far as the general public are concerned the party group is a closed theatre of representation; they are unable to experience directly its processes, which remain backstage. The results of group meetings are observable by the public only when they transfer to the open theatres of the council or committee, when group decisions are endorsed by councillors in a public setting.

The choice of representational activity, and the choice of the various theatres of representation in which to enact it, remain at the discretion of the councillor. The councillor can choose which of the representative activities to undertake, on which issues he or she will undertake them, and the theatres in which those acts will be carried out. Discretion translates into councillor choice, the choice between loyalty to the party group or to some manifestation of local community feeling. For the most part, such choices do not need to be made, and most councillors would hope to avoid

them. They arise only in the case of a conflict between party policy and a local issue of importance to the councillor and the community.

What is a local issue?

Willingness to use any or all of the representative actions available, and to use them in either open or closed theatres of representation, stems first from the councillor's predisposition towards representation. This predisposition, as we have seen, may view the councillor as final arbiter of community issues, may view the motivations of the electorate's interest in local affairs as self-seeking, and view the party group as the proper focus for representative activities.

Secondly, the choice of action (or inaction) and of the appropriate theatre, is affected by the nature of the issue, and by location of that issue as internal or external to the councillor's own electoral area. An issue of significance to the community (and to the councillor), can exist on a number of associated levels. These can be distinguished as the *supra-local*, extending beyond the local authority area (often nationally determined issues); *authority-wide*; *local* (that is internal to the local authority but affecting less than the entire local authority area); and *electoral-area only* (that is, arising in a particular ward or division).

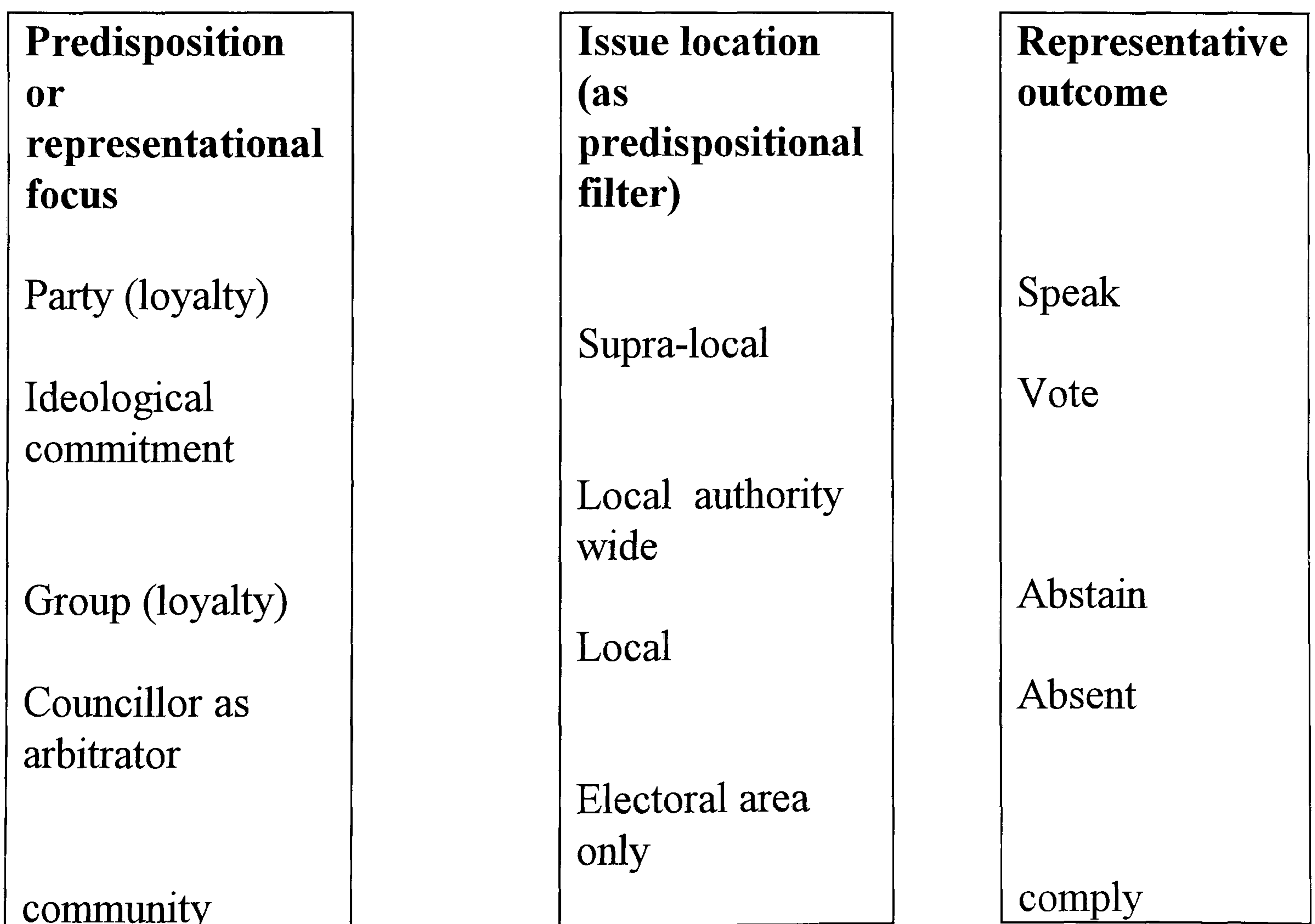
The location of any issue of significance to the local community combines with the councillor's already existing predisposition toward representation. The location of an issue calls upon the councillor to use the representative discretion available, to select the appropriate representative outcome, balancing their own predisposition toward representation with the actual

location of the issue, and its significance for the authority or local community.

The outcome - how a councillor decides to act and indeed where - may be influenced by a range of other variables. For example the length of service of the councillor, position on the council, age, gender, educational or social class background, but the process by which the councillor travels from bringing a representative predisposition to bear upon an issue, to choosing a course of action will be essentially the same.

This process is represented diagrammatically below:

Figure 3.2. The process of representative outcome



The locational level of the issue will then work together with the councillor's existing predisposition toward representation to produce a particular representative outcome, in either open or closed theatres of representation. This model stresses the importance both of issue itself and of the location of that issue for the councillor. How in practice it operates is the subject of the next part of this thesis.

PART II

THEATRES OF REPRESENTATION

The model presented in chapter 3 identifies the range of representative options available to the councillor and locates them in various open or closed theatres. The model indicates that councillors' acts of representation can be conducted in any of these theatres and can move across from the closed party group through the party meeting to the open theatres of the council, committee, public meeting or the media.

This section considers how councillors employ the representative discretion attaching to their office. The term representative discretion is used in this thesis to indicate the freedom attaching to the office of local councillor to select acts of representation, and any combination of those acts to be performed on any local issue. Councillors can also use their discretion to decide in which theatres of representation their acts will be performed and indeed the issues on which they will act (or not). This discretion, and the power associated with it, is not unfettered, as the councillor must balance the pressures for councillor loyalty exerted by the party group (and of course the local and national party) and by the electorate. Equally, the decision as to how to employ representative discretion is influenced by the nature of a local issue, geographical location, and the interest in it taken by both the immediate constituency and the wider community.

This section will consider how the councillor reacts when pressure from the electorate on a local issue collides with the position of the party group, thus creating for the councillor a crisis of representation, which he or she must resolve. Chapter 4 considers the councillors likely acts within the open theatres of representation that are the full council, committee, a public meeting, the local press and the electronic media. Chapter 5 considers how the councillor would react to a crisis of representation

within the closed theatres that are the party group, the local party and other private meetings. Chapter 6 then compares councillors' hypothetical acts with their actual behaviour in a crisis of representation.

A significant local issue that generates a crisis of representation can be located either inside or outside of the ward or division represented by the councillor. As such, issue location can be seen as an important discriminator of the councillor's use of their discretion to solve a crisis of representation. The section examines councillors' acts of representation, speaking and voting, against issue location, both inside and outside the electoral area they represent and considers the differentiated approach to representation councillors take as a result of such issue location.

Central to understanding the influence of the party group within local representative democracy is the need to consider the impact of party affiliation on the use by the councillor of their representative discretion in a crisis of representation. Do councillors of different political affiliation act differently when faced with a crisis of representation, or do councillors across the political spectrum act in broadly similar ways? Does the political affiliation of the councillor indicate the attention he or she will give to representational matters of a locational or geographical impact and indicate their willingness to pursue such local issues in opposition to the decisions of their own party group? It is in answering these questions that the evidence and analysis set out in this section explains the relationship between the councillor's political affiliation and their likely and actual representative behaviour. Put simply, is political affiliation an indicator of the councillor's willingness to undertake representative action that reflects either the opinion of their electorate, or policies of their party group?

4. THE OPEN THEATRES OF REPRESENTATION AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE PARTY GROUP

In order to understand the influence of the party group on the processes of representation this chapter will consider the use of the councillor's representative discretion in the open theatres of representation: that is, the council, committee, public meeting, local press and electronic media. It will present an analysis of councillors' propensity to use the various open theatres in regard to issues located both inside and outside their own electoral area.

The chapter will consider the effect of party affiliation on variations in councillors' willingness to undertake acts of representation in these different theatres, and discuss how issue location influences councillors' representative discretion. It will introduce the concept of representative crisis, which occurs when the councillor is faced with competing demands to represent the community and to follow the party group, and consider the evidence on councillors' responses to such a crisis.

THE COUNCILLOR: REPRESENTATIVE THEATRE AND ISSUE LOCATION.

Influences on the open processes of representation

Councillors were presented with the following two propositions, via a questionnaire:

*If a group of electors from **your** ward/division were opposing a decision or policy of your party group on the council and you agreed with them on the issue please indicate how likely you are to speak out against the decision or policy of the party group.*

*If a group of electors from **outside** your ward/division were opposing a decision or policy of your party group on the council and you agreed with them on the issue please indicate how likely you are to speak out against the decision or policy of the party group.*

The response option to these statements were: very likely, likely, depends on the issue, not very likely and not at all likely. The statements were then repeated replacing 'speaking' with 'voting'.

The respondents were also presented with five specific open theatres of representation: full council, committee, public meetings, local press and the electronic media. In the first and second of these the councillor can speak against a decision, vote against it, or do both, or neither. In the remaining three theatres they can only speak against it. The less formal nature of public meetings compared to council and committee suggested that councillors should only be questioned about speaking in this theatre. Councillors were asked to indicate how likely they were to vote or speak against the party group in each of the theatres presented, as appropriate.

The three key factors in the question are, first location of the issue, (internal and external to the councillor's own electoral area). Secondly, the assumed pre-existence of a group policy or decision. Thirdly, the councillor's agreement with the position of the electors.

Location of an issue is important as it tests the willingness of councillors to act differently depending on the closeness of an event to their own electoral area, or its location within that area. The pre-existence of a group decision or policy sets the councillor between the group and the community and presents the 'representative crisis' in clear terms, that is, which of the two will be the recipient of the councillor's representative outcomes in open theatres of representation. The councillor's agreement with the position of the electors is an important element in the employment of the councillor's representative discretion.

There is a distinction between a pre-existing group decision and the process of formulating group policies or decisions. The councillor may contribute to debate and voting as a part of the process of policy formulation. In this policy process the councillor is freer to 'represent' a local interest, assuming that local interest has been articulated. The councillor is undoubtedly freer to speak or vote at this stage which takes place in the closed arena of the group, than at any subsequent stage, when adherence to that position is required by the group. The point is illustrated by a Conservative county councillor:

Before we have made a final decision on any issue the individual councillor is able to represent, if that is the correct word, any view, whether from their own constituents or from their own initiative. Once we have a decision then, in this county group, we support that decision. We do tend to be understanding if an individual county councillor has a particular problem with the impact of the decision on his own division. At the end of the day though we are all Conservatives.

A pre-existing group decision, then, presents the councillor with a set of alternative centres for representative focus, and at times, a clear cut decision on an issue with which the group and the community may be at odds. As the case study material in part 3 of the thesis indicates the councillor may still experience the dilemma of representing the group or the local community whether he or she is in the majority or minority group.

How are such conflicts handled? Agreement with the community position places the councillor alongside the community rather than the group. If the councillor agrees with the community but acts with the group, then it is the group that benefits from the councillors' representative action. By exerting a powerful pull on councillor loyalty the group is able to place itself as an intermediary between the councillor and the community. In turn this loyalty demand produces the conditions by which the group, and not the electorate, can become the principal beneficiary of local representative democracy.

Faced with a crisis of representation councillors decide whether to speak or vote and in which theatre of representation to act. Do councillors discriminate between theatres and acts and do they display a preference for a particular theatre and act? And is their choice strategy affected by the location of the issue concerned, as inside or outside the councillor's own electoral area? To examine this point further, tables 4.1 and 4.2 present responses to the statements presented to councillors regarding how likely they were to speak and vote against the group and in support of the community, for issues located inside (table 4.1) and outside (table 4.2) the ward or division represented.

Table 4.1. Internal issue: representative action and theatre: all councillors

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	base
Full council	Speak	46	27	24	(533)
	Vote	25	29	42	(526)
Council committee	Speak	57	24	16	(535)
	Vote	33	30	34	(531)
Public meeting	Speak	51	33	14	(535)
Local press	Speak	35	31	30	(527)
Electronic media	Speak	29	30	35	(519)

Table 4.1 indicates that for issues located in their own electoral area, councillors across the three political parties are more likely to speak than to vote against the group in either full council or committee. The committee as a theatre is more popular amongst all councillors for both acts of representation compared to full council, councillors being more likely to use the theatre of a public meeting to speak out than full council. The local press or electronic media however is seen as less acceptable than the full council as a theatre for speaking against a decision.

The significance of the 'depend' responses indicates that councillors were either avoiding the question or that a genuine assessment of a real issue would be necessary before the councillor would be willing to decide on

which representative act to undertake and in which theatre to perform that act.

Councillors were then asked to respond to the statement how likely they were to speak or vote against the group and in support of the community when an issue was located outside their own ward or division. Table 4.2 presents the responses.

Table 4.2. External issue: representative action and theatre: all councillors

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	base
Full council	Speak	21	36	37	(515)
	Vote	17	32	44	(508)
Council committee	Speak	28	36	30	(520)
	Vote	24	33	36	(509)
Public meeting	Speak	25	43	26	(519)
Local press	Speak	16	39	40	(516)
Electronic media	Speak	13	37	43	(511)

Table 4.2 indicates that for issues located outside the councillor's own electoral area, there is a greater likelihood that councillors would speak out rather than vote against the group. At the same time, councillors are less likely to vote or speak out in any of the open theatres of representation when the issue is outside their own electoral area.

The impact of issue location on the councillor's disposition to act within council or its committees is interesting. There is a 25 per cent and 28 per cent variation between councillors 'likely' to speak out in council or committee respectively, when an issue is located outside rather than inside their own electoral area. There is however only an eight per cent and nine per cent variation between those that would vote against in council or committee. The issue location seems to affect councillors' likelihood of speaking more than that of voting.

A similar pattern exists for issues outside compared to issues inside the councillors electoral area, with councillors more likely to speak at a public meeting than in full council, but less likely to use the press than full council or committee. The location of the issue then results in a similar pattern of likely behaviour regarding speaking and voting and the theatres for those acts, but indicates that councillors are simply less likely overall to act against the group when the issue is outside their own electoral area.

The location of an issue and representative outcomes by political party affiliation

To fully assess the impact of the party group on representative democracy it is necessary to consider if the patterns identified in tables 4.1 and 4.2 are replicated across the party spectrum, and whether political affiliation is as powerful a discriminator of councillors' representative behaviour in a crisis of representation, as it is of their predisposition toward democracy. Put another way does party affiliation enable a councillor's likely representative behaviour to be predicted?

Table 4.3 shows responses from Labour councillors to a crisis of representation arising inside their own electoral area.

**Table 4.3 Internal issue: representative action and theatre:
Labour councillors**

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	base
Full council	Speak	25	32	41	(218)
	Vote	10	21	65	(215)
Council committee	Speak	38	30	29	(220)
	Vote	17	25	55	(218)
Public meeting	Speak	40	40	19	(222)
Local press	Speak	21	37	39	(218)
Electronic media	Speak	19	34	44	(218)

The Labour councillor differentiates between representative acts and theatres for issues located within their own electoral areas. Full council is clearly not the theatre Labour councillors select to oppose the group and support the community. They are more likely to use a committee or a public meeting to speak out and the local press also comes close to the full council for this act.

The Labour councillor's rejection of the electorally legitimised forum of the full council is made all the more pointed by a preference for the public meeting. The location of an issue within the Labour councillors' electoral area tempts a relatively low proportion of councillors to either speak or vote against the group in any open theatre and in no case does the response rate rise above 50 per cent.

Labour councillors indicate a lack of willingness to speak or vote against the group, even when the issue is located within their own ward or division. It remains now to be seen whether the location of an issue outside the Labour councillor's electoral area magnifies that unwillingness. Table 4.4 shows Labour councillors' responses to a crisis of representation arising outside their ward or division.

**Table 4.4. External issue: representative action and theatre:
Labour councillors**

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	base
Full council	Speak	13	26	54	(210)
	Vote	8	20	65	(210)
Council committee	Speak	18	28	49	(213)
	Vote	16	20	58	(212)
Public meeting	Speak	20	37	38	(212)
Local press	Speak	9	32	52	(210)
Electronic media	Speak	9	33	53	(212)

The responses in table 4.4 indicate a dramatic decline in the likelihood amongst Labour councillors that they would speak against the group in any of the open theatres of representation when the issue is outside rather than inside their electoral area. For the Labour councillor the act of voting in council or committee, is less likely to be used whether the issue is internal

or external to their electoral area and as such issue location makes little impact on his or her vote. They are very unlikely to vote against the group in council or committee whether their ward or division is affected or not.

The two sets of responses to issues located internal and external to the area represented, are reflective of a similar pattern of likely representative behaviour across all councillors. They clearly indicate that for the Labour councillor the impact of issue location does have some salience in that representative action against the group is less likely when the issue is external to the area represented, in each and every open theatre of representation. A differentiated pattern of representative behaviour exists in terms of both acts and theatres, with speaking a more likely representative outcome than voting and speaking in a public meeting more likely than in full council, committee or the media.

To assess the actual extent to which councillor representative action is influenced by party affiliation and issue location, table 4.5 shows the responses of Liberal Democrat councillors to a crisis of representation arising from their own ward or division.

Committee rather than full council represents a preferred theatre for representative action for the Liberal Democrat as with the Labour councillor. The Liberal Democrats however express a considerably higher degree of likelihood of using any of the open theatres of representation when compared to their Labour counterparts. Liberal Democrat councillors are more likely to speak within the council rather than a public meeting or the media, compared with Labour councillors. Liberal Democrats do however indicate a high degree of willingness to use the open theatres of representation that exist outside the council chamber, especially when the

'depend' response option is taken into account. Liberal Democrat councillors would rather speak than vote and would rather speak in council committee than any other theatre, but also indicate a likelihood that they would both speak (and vote) against the group in council or committee when the issue is related to their own electoral area.

**Table 4.5. Internal issue: representative action and theatre:
Liberal Democrat councillors**

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	base
Full council	Speak	59	28	11	(97)
	Vote	43	37	15	(95)
Council committee	Speak	66	27	5	(97)
	Vote	50	36	12	(97)
Public meeting	Speak	56	34	8	(97)
Local press	Speak	44	31	22	(96)
Electronic media	Speak	37	30	27	(94)

Although Liberal Democrats indicate the same differentiated pattern of behaviour between speaking and voting, they are simply more likely to undertake those acts in opposition to the party group than are Labour councillors. The Liberal Democrat then, is more likely than the Labour councillor both to speak and vote against the group when the issue is located within their own area. Is this so when the issue shifts, outside that

electoral area? Table 4.6 shows responses from Liberal Democrat councillors to a crisis of representation arising outside their own electoral area.

**Table 4.6. External issue: representative action and theatre:
Liberal Democrat councillors**

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	base
Full council	Speak	28	46	23	(97)
	Vote	28	48	18	(94)
Council committee	Speak	36	45	16	(97)
	Vote	31	51	12	(94)
Public meeting	Speak	32	50	15	(97)
Local press	Speak	20	54	22	(96)
Electronic media	Speak	17	46	31	(94)

Liberal Democrats are, like Labour councillors, less likely to speak and vote against the group in all open theatres when the issue is external rather than internal to the electoral area represented. There is a stark difference between Labour and Liberal Democrats in reported likelihood of undertaking any representative act in any open theatres. The Liberal Democrat councillor reports to being considerably more likely to focus on the community and act against the group than the Labour councillor, wherever the location of the disputed issue. Liberal Democrats are then more inclined to speak and vote in committee than full council and prefer a

public meeting to full council when the issue is located outside their own electoral area: but they prefer a council theatre when the issue is located within their own area. This may seem a curious response when a public meeting would bring them closer to those they represent than speaking for them at a council meeting itself, and suggests the power of the symbolism of the council.

Clearly a pattern is emerging of a differentiated approach to the selection of acts of representation and theatres in which they can be employed. It is only the degree of the variation in likelihood of acting that is influenced by the political affiliation of the Labour and Liberal Democrat councillor. It remains now to be seen if the Conservative councillor maintains that differentiated pattern of behaviour and where, if any, an affinity exists on the political spectrum around the selection of representative acts and theatres.

Table 4.7 shows the responses from Conservative councillors to a crisis of representation arising in their own electoral area.

The pattern of responses identified for both the Labour and Liberal Democrat councillor is reflected amongst Conservative councillors who clearly focus action on the committee, while recording a strong likelihood of speaking and voting against the group in full council.

**Table 4.7. Internal issue: representative action and theatre:
Conservative councillors**

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	base
Full council	Speak	62	23	12	(218)
	Vote	32	34	30	(216)
Council committee	Speak	72	17	8	(218)
	Vote	43	32	21	(216)
Public meeting	Speak	60	24	11	(216)
Local press	Speak	45	26	24	(213)
Electronic media	Speak	35	26	30	(207)

In comparison with the Liberal Democrat the Conservative councillor is marginally more likely to speak against the group in council, committee and public meetings although the difference is not considerable, being only three, six and four percentage points greater, respectively, than the Liberal Democrat responses. The variation between likelihood of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat speaking in the press or electronic media is too close for comparison. The Liberal Democrat councillor however is more likely to support their act of speaking against the group with a vote, than is the Conservative, in both council and committee; the margin of difference in favour of the Liberal Democrat over Conservative, voting in either council or committee being 11 per cent and seven per cent respectively. The Labour councillor is less likely to undertake either act of

representation, in any of the theatres when compared with both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillor.

The public meeting is marginally less preferable a theatre for the Conservative councillor than the council and again a likelihood of using the media exists but to a lesser degree than the council chamber. The Conservative councillor then sees him or herself as the articulator of local concerns rather than a voter against the group. This supportive articulating role in relation to the community needs to be considered in relation to the strong predisposition (identified in chapter three) amongst Conservative councillors, for councillors themselves making decisions on local issues.

Table 4.8 shows the responses from Conservative councillors to the prospect of a crisis of representation arising outside the ward or division represented.

The Conservative councillor records, as with both Labour and Liberal Democrat, a similar dramatic decline in likelihood of speaking and voting in open theatre when the location of the issue is outside, rather than inside, their electoral area. The pattern remains similar in that they are more likely to speak than vote and are more likely to undertake those acts in committee than full council, and they also record a very slight preference for speaking at a public meeting than in full council.

**Table 4.8. External issue: representative action and theatre:
Conservative councillors**

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	base
Full council	Speak	26	41	25	(208)
	Vote	20	37	33	(204)
Council committee	Speak	35	40	19	(210)
	Vote	28	36	26	(203)
Public meeting	Speak	27	46	21	(210)
Local press	Speak	20	38	35	(210)
Electronic media	Speak	16	36	39	(205)

The results show that for the Conservative councillor the location of the issue is as important a consideration when applying representative discretion to the selection of action and theatres, as it is for their Labour and Liberal Democrat counterparts. When the issue is located outside the councillor's electoral area the Conservatives are virtually indistinguishable from Liberal Democrat councillors. The Conservative is marginally more likely to speak than the Liberal Democrat when the issue is located within the ward or division represented but the Liberal Democrat is marginally more likely to speak when the issue is located external to the area represented. This close affinity of the centre-right is surprising because of the Liberal Democrats' concentration on community representation.

The responses indicate the existence of a pattern of behaviour common to councillors across the political spectrum and which varies only in the degree to which political affiliation and issue location influences representative behaviour in the party group system of local government. Deviation from that pattern of behaviour is definable by political affiliation but divergences that do occur are usually of a marginal nature.

In overall terms the pattern of behaviour displayed among councillors is that they are more likely to speak than vote against the group and that the location of an issue, inside or outside of their own electoral area, makes no difference to that pattern, only its intensity. When faced with a crisis of representation councillors clearly distinguish between the acts and open theatres of representation available to them. They are more likely to speak than vote against the group in committee rather than full council and more likely to speak in a public meeting than full council. Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillors are marginally more likely to speak in full council when the issue is located within their own ward or division.

Councillors are more likely to speak in full council or committee than in the local press or electronic media. Even so, the local press and indeed, the electronic media may report what councillors say in any open theatre. However councillors see this in a very different light to directly approaching the press or media. All councillors are more likely to speak at a public meeting than in either the local press or electronic media and prefer the use of the local press to television or radio. Location of an issue, inside or outside the councillor's own electoral area makes councillors more likely to act in any of the open theatres available than when the issue is outside their ward or division.

THE USE OF REPRESENTATIVE DISCRETION

The influence of party affiliation

The use of representative discretion by the councillor will result in different representative acts being employed in various open theatres of representation, dependent on the location of an issue, inside or outside the electoral area represented. When councillors are faced with the representative's dilemma of focusing representative loyalty on the group or community and use their discretion to select acts of representation and theatres in which to employ them, clear patterns are discernible. It is only the likelihood of undertaking such acts which varies between the parties and which in turn gives an indication of the influence of party group affiliation on representative outcomes. The councillor is more likely to speak than vote against the group when faced with community opposition to a group position or decision and is more likely to speak than vote whatever the location of the issue. The only exception is the Liberal Democrat councillor, who is as likely to speak and vote in full council on an issue external to their own electoral area.

The Labour councillor is less likely to oppose the group by speaking or voting, than either the Liberal Democrat or Conservative, whatever the location of the issue. The likelihood of a councillor speaking and voting against the group and in support of a community position on an issue is greater for councillors of all parties when that issue is located within their own electoral area than when external to it. In that Labour councillors in no case exceed a 50 per cent likelihood of speaking and voting against the group, they display the greatest of loyalty to the group, against the perceived wishes of the local community.

The Conservative councillor is more likely to speak and vote than the Labour councillor but only more willing to speak than the Liberal Democrat, who in turn is more likely, when an issue is internal to their own electoral area, to vote against the group. The location of an issue as internal or external to the councillor's electoral area, is a clear determinant of the likelihood of the councillor acting in a representative capacity.

The Conservative councillor's marginally greater willingness than the Liberal Democrat to speak against the group in open theatres for an issue located within his or her own electoral area has been considered earlier. The closeness between the two parties as 'speakers' indicates that the community orientation of the Liberal Democrat appears to converge with Conservative councillors' view of the councillor as a decision-maker to result in similar outcomes, albeit from different orientations. In interviews however, both Liberal Democrats and Conservatives stressed the need for group loyalty, a willingness to be loyal, and an orientation toward the group as a focus of representation, which superseded any other orientation.

The Conservative and Liberal Democrat expressions of the need for group loyalty is counter-balanced by their willingness to speak against the group if necessary, but only after a process of negotiation, conducted within the group or with its leadership. The group then remains an important focus of representation, even if there is an expression of a likelihood to speak against it from councillors of a particular political affiliation. This is considered in greater detail in chapters five and six.

Councillors of all parties are more likely to use a public meeting than the press or electronic media to speak against the group in a crisis of representation. The Labour councillor is more likely to speak out at a

public meeting than at either full council or committee wherever the issue is located, while the Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillor is more likely to use either council or committee than a public meeting when the issue is internal to their electoral area. Councillors are then less likely to vote than speak when faced with a disagreement between their own group and the community, whatever the issue location. They are also more likely to undertake representative acts in any theatre when the issue is located within their own electoral area. The Labour councillor is considerably less likely than the Conservative or Liberal Democrat to oppose the group in any theatre, for any issue location.

Political affiliation and issue location appear to be important factors in the councillor's use of representative discretion. The use by the councillor of his or her representative discretion however raises a number of questions as to why the councillor is more likely to speak than vote against the group, speak and vote against the group in committee rather than in full council, speak and vote when the issue is inside rather than outside their own electoral area, and use a public meeting to speak out rather than the press or media. Integral to understanding these issues is the influence exerted by the party group over the application of representative discretion by the councillor when faced with conflicting demands on the focus of representative activity.

Crisis of representation, the use of representative discretion and impact on representative outcome

Representative action

A crisis of representation occurs when the councillor is expected, or pressurised, to undertake certain representative acts, in open theatres of

representation, in support of conflicting positions held by the party group or the community, and the councillor agrees with one of the opposing positions. This crisis situation may not be connected to an isolated incident but may be an on-going issue which requires the councillor continually to apply representative discretion in response to pressure or expectations, or even to change their position as the issue develops. The 'crisis' may therefore be a long term process of development of the councillor's own position and the reconciliation of conflicting pressure to undertake certain representative acts in specific theatres of representation.

As chapter 3 showed the councillor may abstain from acting or absent themselves from any theatre in which they would be expected to maintain a position in support of either the community or the group. The location, impact and salience of an issue however heightens the representative crisis, and in some circumstances the options of absenting and abstaining will no longer be available: an open act of defiance of the group, or support for it against the community, is needed and representative discretion will be required to solve, or abate, the crisis.

The research discloses that the representative act of speaking presents the councillor with less of a problem than that of voting and the two activities are not necessarily mutually supportive and applicable as acts of representation. Speaking against group policy may be an open act of defiance of the position of the party group, but if it is not supported by a vote, the party is not threatened with defeat and the issue is secured at least in the council chamber. This unwillingness to support the act of speaking with a vote is particularly important as the construction by councillors of cross-party single issue alliances, as the case study in chapter 7 indicates, could add an uncertainty and fluidity to the passage of

particular decisions through council and committee. Party group discipline operates to ensure that such alliances do not hold in the council chamber but are confined to those open theatres of representation that lack a decision-making function.

A councillor may speak against the group in the knowledge that its position will remain secure if he or she does not add to any vote against that position. But it is not only the likely success of the group's position that influences councillor willingness to speak, as a Labour district councillor reported:

I will speak against the group but if I know I am going to lose I don't vote. I'll speak to raise the issue in the open, to get a point over, or score a point if you like, but there's no point to voting if you're going to lose. The group are more lenient if you don't go as far as voting, nothing is gained by voting and being expelled from the group and still losing on the matter whatever it is, but I will raise the issue.

A Labour councillor from the same authority added:

With the size of our majority there are so many arguments in the group with areas of the district set against each other, what's happening here is that arguments are spilling into the council and we sort of agree to disagree as long as you don't go too far, speak yes and you'll get a slap on the wrist, vote and you're out. You can't give the Tories a chance to embarrass the party, mind you there's only three of them and we can embarrass ourselves without them.

Voting against the party group is seen as a symbolic act of defiance that will result in expected retribution by the group: speaking is seen as an issue-raising and recognising process. Speaking need not refer to discourse, debate and attempts at persuasion, but might be no more than the isolated and atomised act of a verbal contribution as an identifiable representative act available to the councillor. 'Speaking' in this sense requires no debate, no discourse and no justifying logic or attempts at persuasion as it can be a purely symbolic act of local representation.¹

Even the act of speaking has its critics, as a Conservative group leader explained:

The majority of members that run into this problem [speaking in open theatres against the group] are simply not very bright, the bright councillor finds a way around the problem with officers and appropriate senior councillors, the, shall we say, dim councillor is simply not up to this. Frustration is the problem, the dimmer councillor can not frame suitable and acceptable alternatives and win support for them, or develop a compromise, they only see questions and solutions as having a yes or no answer. It really is just

¹See, D. Prior, J. Stewart, and K. Walsh, *Citizenship: Rights, Community and Participation*, London, Pitman, 1995, pp. 75-77. pp. 86-87. They set out deliberation as 'a process of realising the public interest', p. 75 and highlight the distinction between debates as a 'statement of party positions rather than the discussion of issues', p. 87. Speaking, however, need not result in deliberation, merely a symbolic representative act, a statement of a position which may or may not be held by the councillor speaking, but which fulfils some representative obligation they may feel in relation to their own electorate.

intelligence and loyalty, with those two concepts present there are no problems of fitting in with what we decide.

The variation in councillor willingness to speak or vote is related to the impact of those acts on the group of which the councillor is a member. The Labour councillor, although considerably less willing than Liberal Democrats and Conservatives to speak and vote against the group, is not alone in differentiating between the two acts. Labour councillors were far more ready in interview to refer directly to the group as the reason for this, one Labour councillor simply stating:

If you want a one word answer it's 'fear' that's why I've never gone as far as voting against the group, they can be a vicious lot when roused and it's normally going against the group that rouses them. You see some of our people are much more likely to come to a group meeting than to a council meeting and once a decision is made they don't expect to have to go to council to support it again, vote against and you're in trouble.

A former Labour chief whip added to this:

Look, it is the Labour group that make the decisions here not the public, if a member of the group wants to go against the group, even if it's for something in their own ward, then they suffer the consequences.

The same councillor reported that after ceasing to be chief whip and becoming chair of the district council, he had proposed, spoken and voted

for an amendment to a resolution in committee, against the decision of the pre-committee party group meeting. With the assistance of a number of other Labour councillors, and the combined votes of other parties, he defeated the group meeting's earlier decision. He added:

Frankly it was a very bad day, we had a horrendous group meeting the night before and the bitterness of that argument was still there, also I had spent all that day with the officers trying to cut my chairman's entertainment allowance, do you know there may not be a chairman's charity ball this year for the first time in decades because of what they want to do. By the time of that particular meeting I had had a bloody bowl full of the officers, so I moved and voted on that amendment, which was absolutely nothing to do with the chairman's allowance but spending money on Christmas lights in my area and of course I will no doubt suffer the consequences. If you want to know, which I suppose you do, no I wouldn't do the same in full council, that just isn't on.

The party group recognises however the need for the individual councillor to reflect a position or body of opinion existing within their electoral area. When a councillor has reached a crisis of representation for an issue located in his or her own electoral area, then varying degrees of flexibility are reported in the application of party discipline. A Labour county council deputy leader stated:

If an issue affects a member's own patch, we are sophisticated enough to understand their problem, they can come to an accommodation and speak in committee,

carefully mind you, but on their conscience, it can even go as far as council. Never criticise the council and certainly never the group, only criticise the policy, that is the watchword. We do not take this approach if the issue is not in the members patch, then they follow the group, it's up to the local member to protest.

Similar approaches to the issue of group discipline and the councillor speaking and voting have been expressed by both Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors. The latter express loyalty to the Liberal Democrat ideal and policies but are often trapped by the self-fulfilling element of their own 'community' approach to politics. Liberal Democrats are much more likely to speak and vote against the group because they have raised such expectations amongst their own constituents. One Liberal Democrat rather sadly reported that:

Now we have a balanced council, we could have some committee chairs and vice-chairs and I want one, I just pray nothing comes up in my area because if you go against a decision you damage your chances of a chair. The Labour lot wont support anyone for a chair if they have opposed a decision in public and for that matter why should my fellow Liberal Democrats? Community politics has its downside, but when push comes to shove if anything comes up I suppose I would back the voters, what else can you do? I just hope nothing comes up!

The emphasis here is on loyalty borne of circumstance, rather than predisposition.

Theatres of Representation

The selection of a theatre within the council for the acts of speaking and voting is dependent on the impact the councillor requires from the act and on self preservation for the councillor. The committee is clearly seen as a safer theatre within the council for speaking and voting. It is the often less formal and more deliberative nature of exchanges at committee and the possibility that the points raised by the individual councillor may become 'lost' in a wide-ranging general debate, which distinguishes committee from council. As committees are often less formal, ritualistic and symbolic than council, acts of defiance or divergence from group decisions have less impact in this business-like atmosphere than they would in the formalistic theatre of local politics that is the full council. One Conservative county councillor stated quite simply:

I find it much more comfortable in committee, we have our committee meetings in a committee room not the council chamber and you do not feel quite so on view as you do in the chamber. I am much happier speaking there, as for voting you say, well I can not see myself voting against the Conservative group, it would have to be a very major issue and that sort of thing just does not happen in my division.

Councillors generally report from experience that 'reprisals' by the group (to use the word often quoted), are far less likely or serious when speaking or voting against the group takes place in committee. Councillors and the group itself differentiate between acts and the theatres of representation within a council setting when it comes to the application of discretion in a crisis of representation. Equally however many groups will not

differentiate and expect from their members the same loyalty to decisions of the group meeting in committee as in full council.

The impact of issue location

The location of any issue and its salience to any local community has a major impact on the use of representative discretion by the councillor. An issue located within the electoral ward or division will condition certain assumptions concerning the councillor's relationship to that issue, in ways which do not arise in the case of external issues. Those assumptions are:

1. The issue will have a high salience for the councillor, as a result of the activities or reactions of the community directly represented.
2. The councillor will be physically closer to the issue as a representative, whether living in the electoral area or only representing it, and this 'closeness' will be a factor in the councillor identifying with the local community. It will also be a factor in the electorate's expectations that the councillor will reflect their views on an issue.
3. The councillor will have a greater knowledge of issues located inside the area represented.
4. The councillor may be directly affected by any impact of that issue on voting behaviour and turnout.

The councillor will, despite often asserting the need to take a general overview of policy issues and to make decisions for the benefit of the authority as a whole, have a closer affinity with, and desire to respond to,

issues arising from the area directly represented. Issues of impact which significantly affect particular electoral areas are rare, and the existence of articulated community opinion on those issues enhances the likelihood of the councillor speaking and voting against the group in any theatre, without appearing to raise issues of general policy.

Several factors then enhance the influence of the party group over the representative focus and action of the councillor. Those factors are: (i) the rarity of issue occurrence; (ii) the restricted nature of the impact of an issue in terms of electoral areas directly affected (despite its significance and enormity to those areas); (iii) that the number of councillors directly affected will be only a small proportion of the total number of councillors in any group; and (iv) the greater likelihood that councillors will speak and vote against the group for an issue located within their area rather than external to it.

The most significant issue dealt with in this study in terms of physical impact and impact on numbers of local authorities was the construction of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road (see chapter 9). In the Staffordshire local authorities for example, with controlling groups that supported the construction, the road would run through ten district wards, represented by 24 district councillors. Within the three district councils concerned the total membership was of 148 councillors representing 68 wards. The road would also affect only six county divisions within that area, from a total county council membership of eighty-two. Most issues - including the others discussed in chapters 7 and 8 - are of more restricted impact than the relief road.

Finally, acting against the group becomes a process largely doomed to failure by virtue of the size of any party's majority, and the councillor must then weigh the likelihood of retribution by the electorate against disciplinary action by the group. If as Newton suggests the local election is a reflection of national party preference, then the electorate may forgive a councillor for insufficient representative support over issues and reward the party with a vote because of its national standing, thus doubly enhancing the power of the party group.² As both Miller and Green noted however, local issues do indeed impact upon local election results. In reality a proportion of the electorate may not be forgiving of the councillor's past representative action on local issues but local election results, both across an authority and within particular electoral areas, turn on a combination of factors.³ Thus the electoral significance of an issue depends very much on a local community turning it into a factor in a local election. If this is not possible, for whatever reason, it makes the party group's ability to exert a pull on the representative actions of the councillor even more powerful.

Acting outside the council chamber

The likelihood of a councillor using a public meeting rather than council, press or electronic media, common across all parties whatever the issue location, is an intriguing point. The public meeting can take a number of shapes. It may be highly issue concentrated, poorly attended, have a very specific local focus, affecting a small number of citizens and receive little

² K. Newton, *Second City Politics*, particularly chapter two, 'The Annual General Election', pp. 13-30.

³ Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. III*, chapter 2, 'Local Electoral Behaviour', pp. 105-172. Green, 'National, City, and Ward Components of Local Voting'.

if any media attention, or may be the opposite in each of these respects. Whatever format the public meeting may take, the councillor speaks to a particular audience at a moment in time. A public meeting represents for the councillor a theatre in which to speak out on issues affecting their own area, away from the spotlight of group discipline and policy, although they may be expected publicly to at least not oppose the position of the group (and other members of both the group and party may of course attend any such public meeting).

The distinction made by councillors between the press and electronic media and the public meeting is largely a false one, as the media can attend these meetings and report on the proceedings. Yet the councillor has one simple but effective defence which was summed up in the words of a Conservative county councillor:

It is much easier to speak at a public meeting than in council because you can claim you were misquoted or misrepresented or taken out of context and of course you still support the line, even demand a reference to the press council on some spurious grounds of inaccuracy. It really is difficult for any one not present at a particular meeting to prove what you may or may not have said.

Councillors can, then, draw a distinction between being reported in the press or media, when they can claim the defence of being misquoted, and speaking directly to the press or electronic media. Editorial practice, and the councillor's relationship with the group and the press or electronic media, will determine how safe public meetings actually are for the dissident councillor.

It is possible that actions at a public meeting will be reported back to the group, and may be used by the whips to instigate disciplinary proceedings, as one Labour district councillor reported:

The group whip used a newspaper report of something I had said at a public meeting to report me to the group. He even distributed copies of the article to all group members. The point that I had made it clear at the public meeting and subsequently at the disciplinary hearing of the group, that I was speaking as a parish councillor (not a district councillor) and in support of parish council policy, made no difference, you are not to speak against group policy in public, that's it!

The public and high profile nature of use of the local press and the electronic media sees the Labour councillor as the most reluctant to use this open theatre against group policy and in support of the local community. The situation is the same even when that community is located in the councillor's own electoral area. Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors record remarkably close results indicating a greater willingness than Labour councillors to use these media to speak in favour of their own electorate against a policy or decision of their group.

Traditional Labour mistrust of the press, and of the local press in particular, may underpin these responses. One Labour metropolitan borough councillor and committee chair stated that:

We all know that they [a particular local newspaper] always support their Tory paymasters and whatever we do as a

council they will try and cause trouble for us. No one is a greater believer in the freedom of the press than me, but they do whatever they can to make things difficult.

Another Labour back-bencher from a nearby district council reported:

I am always very careful when I speak to them, I mean the reporters are OK, some of them are even on our side, but its the editors that are the problem. I talk to them because you feel silly saying no comment all the time and you end up looking silly in the paper, but I am very careful about what I say and never, ever, give them a chance to have a go at the party or council.

A Liberal Democrat district and county councillor from yet another authority took a different approach:

Labour councillors just don't understand the local newspapers, they want something to print. I've seen Labour councillors frothing at the mouth over the press, if they only used them properly, like we do, they'd have no complaints.

I talk to the press, give them plenty of quotes and information, they don't always get it exactly right but the point Labour miss is that it is important for a councillor to get their name in the paper and to be saying something supportive of the community, people know you are working and it's cheaper than producing and delivering your own leaflets.

The responses to the use of the electronic media rest on the actual likelihood that councillors will be granted access to such a media. The issue itself is important here as it must have significant impact to interest the electronic media, and local issues have to be of a particular nature to warrant air time. Councillors may be prepared to use that media, but may never actually be offered the opportunity.

What is clear is that Labour councillors are less willing to use the press to speak out against the group and that a centre-right affinity exists in relation to the use of this media for this purpose. What is also clear is that the nature of the issue itself emerges as having an impact on councillors' decisions to speak out, as the theatres in which they are able to speak becomes more public and less in their own control. Labour councillors indicate a general avoidance of direct contact with the press and electronic media, whilst the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, although more likely to use these, still prefer other 'safer' and more legitimate theatres of representation.

THE PARTY GROUP AND THE FOCUS OF THE COUNCILLOR'S REPRESENTATIVE ACTION

The closed theatre of representation that is the party group influences councillor discretion in all open theatres of representation ensuring that the focus of representative action falls on the group. This influence over the deliberative processes of the council as one theatre of representation, has been recognised by Prior *et al* thus:

the barrier to deliberation in representative assemblies is the operation of party discipline, which means that majorities for

proposals do not have to be built by persuasion, but are secured by the application of the party whip. The process robs assemblies of the quality of deliberation and in so doing limits their value both in expressing and informing the views of citizens.⁴

In fact however, such 'majorities for proposals' are 'built by persuasion', but that persuasion takes place in the closed party group meeting not the open theatre of representation that is council or committee. The whip system and party loyalty then ensures the passage through the open theatres, of decisions that have indeed been 'built by persuasion' but also by a deliberative process that excludes input by not only the minority group on the council, but also by the wider electorate.

The debate turns on the linkages between the concepts of deliberation, persuasion and the expression of party values, but as we have already seen, when the councillor speaks the result is not necessarily collective deliberation. Prior *et al* argue strongly and persuasively for the enhancement of citizen input through improved deliberation and an informing of the deliberative acts of the councillor via improved links between representatives and represented. They provide a comprehensive strategy for moving from citizenship as a passive recipient of representation to the citizen as an active and powerful contributor to the representative processes. They recognise however the power of party discipline to prevent this development. It is the recognition of this power and the dangers of confusing representation and the expression of party values, with the government of an area, that is made clear when they state:

⁴ Prior, Stewart and Walsh, *Citizenship: Rights, Community and Participation*, p. 94.

The problem lies not in the necessity of political parties but in the excess of party discipline, so that discipline is imposed for the convenience of government rather than for the expression of party values. In local authorities party discipline can be used to pass what are in effect officer recommendations rather than an expression of party position.⁵

Enhanced citizen input however, despite being supported by most councillors (as seen in Chapter 3), becomes not a concept of local control, representation or active citizenship, but a threat to the sustained control of local affairs by the party group. The position of the group on an issue can be used by councillors to justify their opposition to vehemently-expressed local opinion as reflective of the Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) syndrome. A sub-committee chair of a Labour-controlled district council admitted during the course of this research that he had informed a recent well attended public meeting (to consider the siting of a young persons' housing complex) he had chaired, that, 'I was appalled at them and appalled at their opinion of young people'.

Freedom from the local connection is essential for the effective operation and control of council affairs by the party group. With enhanced local connection the group could not maintain the loyalty of its members, particularly those members whose own electoral patch may be in dispute with the decision of a group meeting.

The willingness of the councillor to give voice to, or to 'speak' as a representative of the group gives the group its influence and identifies it as

⁵ Ibid, p. 94.

the inheritor of the Burkean approach to representation. Indeed, freedom from local control does not mean intellectual and representational freedom, for the representative, but freedom to 'speak' and 'act' for the party, in the deliberative body, over the local interest.⁶ This de-coupling of the group from any notion of locality makes the party group the principal beneficiary of the processes of local representative democracy.

Not that groups will necessarily flaunt local opinion. As Gregory has noted, the rule of anticipated reactions implies 'the local policy maker would have every incentive to try to anticipate the wishes of the electorate'. He goes on to comment that:

If it is the case that elected representatives take the trouble to try to anticipate popular reaction partly because they overestimate their own salience in the eyes of the electorate, it is worth reflecting on the consequences of enlightenment...if once they realised they need not worry unduly about electoral repercussions of their decisions, it is arguable that they might more readily pursue unpopular but necessary policies.⁷

Councillors hardly require enlightenment of their de-coupling from the electorate as they are predispositionally and politically prepared for and aware of that. But is it that, as this study indicates, the councillor, when faced with a crisis of representation, anticipates reactions not only of the electorate but also of the party group? This point is underpinned by

⁶ Eulau, Whalke, Buchanan and Ferguson, 'The Role of the Representative'. Eulau and Whalke, *The Politics of representation*.

⁷ R. Gregory, 'Local Elections and the Rule of Anticipated Reactions', *Political Studies*, 17 (1), 1969, pp. 31-47. p. 46.

political parties' expectations of loyalty from the councillor. As one Labour councillor commented after he had been expelled from the party group:

I find the whole business ridiculous. I actually spoke at council and in the press in favour Labour Party national policy [against the construction of a proposed motorway], I mean the shadow transport spokesman has actually said a Labour government would not build this road, but the two councils of which I am a member support it, I spoke out at the district council against the road and in favour of national policy and they flung me out the group. The really funny point is that at my appeal in front of members of the regional executive they told me national policy is not the point it's what the group say that matters, according to standing orders anyway, so groups can do what they like and have no responsibility to the Party or the public, it makes you feel like giving up.

Ideological Underpinning of Party Group as a Focus of Representation

Theatre and impact on the party group

So far, four categories of representative theatre have emerged:

1. Those that are focused on the party group and the political party, in which the councillor associates with other councillors and party members, in closed or semi-closed theatres of representation. These may be termed 'Associative' theatres.

2. Meetings of either a public or private nature, which involve sharing of common issues of concern in closed or open theatre, open to community participation, and are not limited to those sharing political opinions or party membership. These may be termed 'communal' theatres.

3. The open theatre that is the media, may be termed 'distributive' theatres.

4. The council or council committee as the legitimised theatre of activity and may be termed 'representational' theatres.

Within each of these theatres the representative acts of the councillor can fall into three categories:

1. positive (focusing on the community),

2. neutral in which no action is taken,

3. negative (focusing away from the community and toward the party group).

The categorisations of representative act are weighted in favour of the group. The group benefit directly from negative activity and neutrality. The individual councillor is very rarely in a position where the act of speaking or voting will overturn a decision of a group meeting in an open theatre of representation. Thus the damage to the group position of positive acts of representation, focused on the community, is, in reality, negligible.

The influence of group will impinge on councillors of different parties to different degrees within the four categories of representational theatres above, with Labour more willing to concede a legitimate role to the party

group as a focus for representation. All three political parties in their group form exercise a powerful expectation of compliance over their members and although party groups may respond with varying levels of flexibility when the member is faced with a crisis of representation, ultimately the group restricts the maximum willingness of the councillor to speak, vote and focus on the represented. This damages councillor willingness to act positively for the electoral area represented or the wider community.

The ideological link: representation and the party group

Across the three main parties, councillors consider themselves local decision-makers, articulators of local issues and concerns and holders of representative offices. In this last, they have the legitimate ability to apply to local issues the discretion attached to their office. The survey returns, supported by in-depth interviews, indicate that the party affiliation of the councillor is a determinant of the way local representation is interpreted, through different philosophical and political concepts, which are used to justify any focus of representation away from the community represented.

Labour councillors take an old-style corporatist approach to representation, focusing on the group (and group meetings) as a body with a legitimate right and power over its members, and as a comprehensive and coherent decision-making body with a clear concern for the general public good. The group could expect, and is entitled to, loyalty, as it represents the mechanism by which the electoral policy supported by the councillor and the electorate can be implemented. This is underpinned by an expansive interpretation of 'collectivism', not only as a method of meeting collective needs but also as a unifying force for decision-making. It is also similar in interpretation to democratic centralism, or collective

ministerial responsibility. The consequence is the same: a high degree of loyalty to the group.

Conservative councillors explain their activities by reference to concepts of liberty or freedom, particularly from state authority, and ideals of personal responsibility. These concepts, for the Conservative, apply not only to the electorate but also to the councillor. The councillor is as entitled to such liberty and freedom from local interference in acting as a representative, as the citizen should be free from state (including local government); interference, oppression and any action which diminishes individual responsibility. A wholesale acceptance by the Conservative councillor then, of a Burkean approach to representation - that is, freedom for the representative from the represented. That freedom from the represented is transferred into a focus on the 'party' which constitutes a 'deliberative assembly...with one interest, that of the whole'.⁸ This Burkean approach was often linked by Conservative councillors to statements which supported a voluntaristic approach (linked to responsibility) but was underpinned by the local authority as a point of reference for legitimate decision-making. The Conservative, can combine representation based on individual responsibility, freedom and suspicion of authority, with support for respect for authority once a decision has been legitimately made. Individual responsibility implies the obligation to accept decisions and this provides Conservatives with a philosophical justification for the councillor as decision-maker, free from a local interference, but bound to a party group.

⁸ Edmund Burke's speech to the electors of Bristol (1774), A.H. Birch, *The Concepts and Theories of Modern Democracy*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 75.

Liberal Democrats articulated an individualistic political ideology and philosophy but often made reference to 'Focus' or 'TalkBack' Teams as stemming from, and of, a community. They invoked an affinity of concept with Conservative councillors' approach to representation outlined above, but adopted their own essentially community orientation to representation; but community built on the concept of the individual. For the Liberal Democrat it is individual needs, rather than individual responsibility that matters and it is free individuals who comprise a community. As community consists of individuals, Liberalism can place the individual at the centre of its philosophy. Communities for the Liberal Democrat are not corporate, or collectivist identities, as for the Labour councillor; they are simple collections of individuals and Liberal Democrats represent them as such. By focusing on communities consisting of individuals and conceiving of, and working, with community as a collection of individuals, the Liberal Democrat rejects the extreme individualism and responsibility of the Conservative councillor and the corporate/collectivism of Labour councillors.

All the councillors interviewed expressed clear political differences of belief and approach to representation between themselves and their political opponents, but they also emphasised a similarity in regard to the importance of parties in local government as a focus of representation. Labour corporate/collectivism and Conservative individualism provide sets of beliefs by which Labour and Conservative councillors, can justify shifting their focus of attention away from the represented and thus enhance the freedom of the representative to focus on the group. The Liberal Democrat individual/communitarianism does not provide such a strong justification for representation being focused away from the community. It is all the more interesting then that in interview Liberal

Democrats supported the idea of group loyalty and the need for an element of group discipline. It is the lesser degree to which they carry such loyalty and discipline, when faced with a crisis of representation, that distinguishes Liberal Democrat councillors from their Labour and Conservative counterparts.

Councillors of different parties use political concepts relevant to their party affiliation to effectively de-couple themselves from the represented as and when it is required by the councillor acting as either an individual or member of a group. All councillors are supportive of party group and the need for group discipline when faced with political opponents. A Conservative district councillor emphasised this point:

We used to run a tight ship, with a strong disciplinary approach, but since Labour took over last May (1995), for the first time ever on this council, we have been all over the place, discipline has gone completely, Labour have a majority now and are united, we can not afford anything but a cohesive approach, we can not have members saying and doing what they like. As it is in society, it is in politics, you have to have discipline.

In interview Liberal Democrat councillors praised the power of unity and the need for discipline in the face of political opponents, they conceded that unity was the key to political success and that the individual had to support the team if Liberal Democrats were to achieve anything. In this way they echoed the notes attached to the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors own model standing orders. 'If we are to operate effectively on the council and achieve our aims, there has to be group

loyalty'. However these standing orders do distinguish between specifically ward matters that 'have little or no impact politically on other areas of the council'.⁹ Locating such a sanitised issue, may however in reality be difficult.

It would appear that once the councillor has philosophically and pre-dispositionally de-coupled his or herself from the 'represented' the group can legitimately become the focus of representative activity. Councillors across all parties, although expressing differing predispositions, political philosophy and levels of support for increased citizen involvement, actually share a rejection of an approach to representation too heavily focused on the electorate. They also share a predisposition that party loyalty, discipline and unity are essential prerequisites to political effectiveness in the representative processes. As councillors across all parties justify the group as a legitimate focus of representation, the power of the group and of group meetings, as the main determinant of the outcome of the use of representative discretion in open theatres of representation is all but assured. It is to the closed theatres of representation and in particular the closed theatre of the party group itself, that the analysis must now turn.

⁹ *Model Standing Orders for Liberal Democrat Council Groups*, pp. 6-7.

5. THE PARTY GROUP AND OTHER 'CLOSED' THEATRES OF REPRESENTATION

This chapter will consider the exercise of councillors' representative discretion within 'closed' theatres of representation. These are defined as; the party group, the local political party and other private meetings attended by the councillor. As with the 'open' theatres of representation considered in chapter 4, the councillor is able to select in which of the 'closed' theatres they will act and which act to perform, in which theatre. The chapter will consider the significance for the councillor of these choices.

Secondly, the chapter will consider the impact of political affiliation on the willingness of the councillor to use the closed theatre of representation and to act in a particular way within it. In order to fully understand the impact of the party group on the representative link between the councillor and the electorate, a comparison will be made between the analysis in chapter 4 of open theatres of representation and representation in the closed theatres. This process will identify whether councillors have a preferred theatre within which to act and a preferred focus of representation, either on their local electorate or on the party group. Thirdly, the chapter will consider the impact of issue and issue location on the ways in which councillors act within these closed theatres of representation.

CLOSED REPRESENTATION

The closed theatres of representation: the survey

To consider representative activity within the closed theatres of representation respondents were presented with the same two statements earlier introduced in the discussion of open theatres of representation in Chapter 4:

*If a group of electors from **your** ward/division were opposing a decision or policy of your party group on the council and you agreed with them on the issue, please indicate how likely you are to speak out against the decision or policy of the party group.*

*If a group of electors from **outside** your ward/division were opposing a decision or policy of your party group on the council and you agreed with them on the issue, please indicate how likely you are to speak out against the decision or policy of your party group.*

The response options to the statements were: very likely, likely, depends on the issue, not very likely and not at all likely. The statements were then repeated replacing 'speaking' with 'voting'.

In each case the respondents were presented with three particular closed theatres of representation; the party group, a political party meeting and an unspecified other private meeting. In the first and second of these the

councillor could speak against the decision, vote against or do both or neither. In the third the only option is to speak in opposition.

Councillors were asked to indicate how likely they were to speak or vote against the party group in each of the theatres presented, as appropriate.

The use of these same statements in both 'open' and 'closed' theatres enables a common focus on the criteria of councillor agreement, locational impact inside or outside the councillor's own electoral area, and pre-existence of a group decision. These issues are equally important to 'closed' theatres, as to open theatres as they present to the councillor the same crisis of representation and the same conflicting pressures. The only significant difference between the two situations is the closed nature of the theatres within which the councillor may act and the secrecy which attaches to them. The outcomes of the councillor's action in these 'closed' settings are not witnessed by the electorate, and actions embarked upon there may differ from those chosen in more open settings. Thus the councillor may choose to defend local interests only in closed theatres, effectively excluding the community from the representative processes and from witnessing the use by the councillor of representative discretion. Closed settings may possibly encourage one form of representative focus and activity, and open theatres another.

The analysis of locational impact, councillor agreement and pre-existing decisions enables a consideration of the strength of party group influence on the use of representative discretion. The more the councillor focuses action on closed theatres of representation and in particular on the party group, the more the party group takes on a legitimised decision-making and representational position at the expense of the council chamber and

other public settings. This process further excludes the community from having an effective influence on councillor decision-making and so balancing the impact of the group.

The survey questionnaire did not specify any particular type or level of party meeting from within the local party structure. The stratified nature of local party organisation and the possibility of an overlapping membership of various party committees means that in reality the councillor can act differently in different local party meetings.¹ For example councillors may display support for their electorate over a local issue in their ward or branch party (depending on that party's own position). But, they may be less strident in articulating that view, or indeed may acquiesce to, or even be supportive of, the group's position, when attending other party meetings, especially if other councillors are in attendance. The councillor is not of necessity a party activist, and may play little or no role in party activity beyond the processes of candidate selection and campaigning. Whereas other councillors may be completely immersed in the activities of the local party structure at various levels in the intervals between elections.

The response category of 'other private meetings' was used to distinguish those meetings attended by councillors outside of the party group and the local political party. These other private meetings could take a number of forms: councillors meeting with senior members and other councillors, meetings between councillors and officers, with constituents and private organisations. There are many permutations of this range of private forums.

¹ For a consideration of the stratified nature of democracy and political activity see, I. Budge, J.A. Brand, M. Margolis, and A.L.M. Smith, *Political Stratification and Democracy*, London, MacMillan, 1972. For a consideration of the organisational structure of political parties see, Game and Leach, 'The Role of Political Parties in Local Democracy', pp. 16-30.

Councillors were asked only to respond generally in terms of private meetings that were not those of the group or local party, so as to enable the issue of privacy, whatever form it may take, to be considered. Privacy as a general concept was the focus here and not the specific types of private meeting.

To consider if political affiliation has an impact on the selection of closed theatres and acts performed within them, responses to the survey questionnaire are presented in the next section, by political party.

The effect of party affiliation on representative outcomes

In order to fully appreciate the influence of party group on the representative activity and focus of the councillor, and the likelihood of the councillor acting in opposition to the group, it is necessary to consider the impact of particular party affiliation on the choices councillors make. This approach indicates whether councillors of different political affiliation are more or less likely than their counterparts to defy, or comply with, the group. It will also indicate whether political affiliation is a determinant of their preferred closed theatre of representation. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show the responses by political party to the statements regarding councillor action in closed theatres, in opposition to the group, and for issues inside and outside their electoral area. They show the likelihood of dissent by councillors from the group but within closed, and therefore unobservable, theatres of representation.

Table 5.1 shows councillors from all political parties saying they are 'likely' or 'very likely' to speak or vote against the group in closed settings for an issue located within their own electoral area.

Table 5.1. Likelihood of dissent: internal issues

		Labour %	Lib Dem %	Con %
Party group	Speak	93	99	93
	Vote	77	91	79
Party meeting	Speak	92	95	88
	Vote	79	87	76
Private meeting	Speak	65	78	79

What is striking from the responses in table 5.1 is that despite willingness amongst Labour councillors to speak against the group, in the group or party meeting on a pre-existing position, there is less likelihood of their speaking being supported by a vote. A clear distinction is made by the Labour councillor between the two acts even within the private confines of the group and party. The table indicates that the Labour councillor perceives a close relationship between the representative theatres of the party group and the wider local party. They are also much less likely to speak out when the theatre shifts from the group or party, to a private meeting of any sort. It is clear that the considerable willingness amongst Labour councillors to speak out in group or a party meeting and to a lesser degree, vote against the group, is indicative of a ward or divisional orientation, as when an issue is located outside their own electoral area there is a marked decline in the likelihood of them speaking or voting against the group.

Table 5.2 shows councillors from all political parties saying they are 'likely' or 'very likely' to speak or vote against the group in closed settings, on an issue located outside their own electoral area.

Table 5.2. Likelihood of dissent: external issues

		Labour %	Lib Dem %	Con %
Party group	Speak	76	81	67
	Vote	67	76	63
Party meeting	Speak	76	78	62
	Vote	68	73	57
Private meeting	Speak	45	54	47

As table 5.2. indicates the reduction in likelihood of the Labour councillor speaking out or voting against the group for an issue located outside their own electoral area is dramatic but that the differentiated pattern of speaking and voting is maintained. The Labour councillor is more likely to speak than vote in opposition to the group and again marginally more likely to vote in the party than in the group. With issues located outside the electoral area the Labour councillor draws no distinction between acting in either the group or the wider local party and it appears that the boundaries between these two theatres of representation merge. In both theatres they are less likely to act at all than when an issue is located within their electoral area. The location of an issue outside their ward or division sees Labour councillors responses to speaking in any 'other private meeting',

fall to below 50 per cent. The response to the private meeting category, when compared to group and party, indicates the impact and importance of: party, degree of closedness of any theatre, issue location and representative action, for the Labour councillor. Shifting the theatre outside the confines of an exclusively 'party' and 'Labour' orientation and locating the issue outside the Labour councillor's electoral area has the effect of reducing considerably the willingness even to speak in private and thus the willingness to use a varied assortment of private theatres to speak for the electorate.

The Liberal Democrat councillor indicates that the group and local party is an important theatre of representation, particularly for an issue located within their own electoral area. Although reflecting the familiar pattern of differentiation between the acts of speaking and voting, the distinction between them is slight. The responses to the statements indicate that the Liberal Democrat views the group as a theatre in which they would speak and vote on an issue almost with impunity, whatever the issue location. As with the Labour councillor there is a blurring of boundaries between the group and local party as a theatre within which to act; but there is an identifiable decline in the likelihood of the Liberal Democrat voting against the group within the party meeting, as opposed to voting against the group within a group meeting. This maintains the differentiated pattern of representative responses. Despite that decline, Liberal Democrats are very likely to support their own act of speaking against the group in the wider party with a vote in that same theatre. There is less likelihood that the Liberal Democrat would speak in a private meeting of any sort, compared to group or party, but still a strong likelihood that they would use such a venue. The Liberal Democrat councillor, although remaining 'very likely' to speak and vote against the group in the group itself and in the wider local

party, does indicate a strong reduction in the level of 'likelihood', for an issue outside their electoral area. The pattern remains one of speaking being a more likely act than that of voting, and speaking and voting more likely to take place in the group than any other closed theatre. There is considerably less likelihood that Liberal Democrats would speak against the group in a private meeting, for an external issue, but this has to be seen in the light of a high 'likely' base for responses to the location of an issue within the area represented.

The Conservative councillor reflects the general pattern of representational behaviour. There is a high degree of likelihood that they would act in the party group and wider party in opposition to the group in support of their own electorate's position on a particular issue. A distinction appears to be drawn by the Conservative councillor in the boundaries between group and party, although there is a considerable likelihood that the Conservative councillor would speak in the party against the group. The responses indicate that in the confines of the group and the wider party, the Conservative councillor is highly likely to display, through his or her representative acts, a focus on the electorate they represent. The unspecified private meeting is less likely to be used by the Conservative councillor than either the group or the wider local party, but there exists (as with Labour and Liberal Democrats) a high degree of willingness to use this theatre. The group and party represent the prime focus of attention for representative activity when an issue is located within the councillor's own electoral area.

As expected, and in line with the pattern already identified for the other parties, Conservatives show a falling off in willingness to undertake acts of representation in closed theatres when the location of an issue shifts

outside the specific area represented. The decline in likelihood that the Conservative councillor would either speak or vote against the group in either the group or wider local party is marked. The pattern of speaking being more likely than voting and of either act taking place in the group as opposed to the other closed theatres of representation, is maintained by the Conservative councillor. It is, again, the impact of issue location which influences the likelihood that the councillor would conduct acts of representation in opposition to the group and in support of the community, and influences the theatres in which such acts are conducted. The likelihood that the Conservative councillor would speak against the group in an unspecified private meeting falls below 50 per cent for issues outside their electoral area. The responses display (as for the Labour councillor), the impact and importance of party, the degree of closedness of any theatre, and issue location for representative activity response. These factors are an important element of the application by the councillor of representative discretion and the resultant selection of acts of representation and the closed theatres in which such acts can be performed.

To fully appreciate the influence of party group on the councillor as a local representative, it is necessary to consider in greater detail the impact of party affiliation on the use of representative discretion within closed theatres of representation.

REPRESENTATIVE DISCRETION: PARTY AFFILIATION AND THE CLOSED THEATRES OF REPRESENTATION

The analysis of the survey evidence is supported here by interview and case study material which is used to elaborate the consideration of the themes so far identified in this chapter. The closed theatres of representation offer the councillor the opportunity to debate issues away from scrutiny by the public where the councillor is freer to debate, shift position and argue against the policy of the group, without the attendant fear of publicly embarrassing the group. The degree of secrecy that is affixed to the closed theatres of representation underlines the considerable influence of the location of issues as the councillor displays a greater willingness to pursue ward or divisional issues within closed settings than to pursue issues located outside their electoral area.

The importance of closed representation

Comparison of councillors' likelihood of opposing the group becomes all the more sharper when the extent of that likelihood is taken into account. It is the Liberal Democrat councillor that, faced with an issue located within their own electoral area, in all but one instance (the one percentage point difference in responses between them and Conservative councillors on the use of other private meetings), is the most likely to use the closed theatres of representation to speak and vote. In both the party group and the local political party, Liberal Democrats are more likely to speak and vote than either their Labour or Conservative counterparts, but voting, even in secret and for an issue located within the councillor's own electoral area, remains a less attractive representative option for the councillor of any party.

Once a decision on a community-orientated and locationally-focused issue is taken within the confines of the group, it becomes an extremely difficult prospect for the community and their elected representatives (even where agreement between the two exists) to change it. It is still more difficult when the issue is not specific to a councillor's ward or division. Faced with a choice between group solidarity and representative action, councillors of all parties appear to opt for the former. How do councillors themselves account for this situation?

For the councillor to take identifiable responsibility for seeking to change an existing group policy may be a too costly victory over the group leadership. An assessment by the councillor of the possible consequences that will flow from a change of policy, will influence him or her when deciding whether to vote or not. A Labour metropolitan district councillor commented:

I want to be able to protest if my ward is badly affected and I'll happily do that in the group, but the leadership will have spoken to officers, got statistics and legal advice from them, so not having the time to do the same you rely on the leadership to get it right. You can argue in favour of what local people want but if you change the decision you never really know what you're in for, best to argue and lose the vote, least then I can say I tried.

This was supported by a Labour metropolitan committee chair who stated that:

My vice-chair argued very strongly in group against the closure, [of a youth club] but he did not vote because he knew we had to save the money somewhere, I tipped him the wink to sit on his hands at committee because I knew we had the votes and then at least he could say he didn't support it. Appearance can be everything in this game you know.

A combination of factors serve to weaken the likelihood of a councillor voting against the group, even within closed theatres of representation. Support for the group leadership, fear of the consequences of changing an existing decision, lack of alternative strategies supported by evidence and research and the multiplier effect of decisional changes on a wider strategy or policy of the group. There is also a fatalism amongst many councillors who see much local decision-making as controlled by central government or the courts, and themselves as only ratifying decisions to which there are few, if any, real alternative courses of action.

The party group still expects the loyalty of the councillor to that decision. Whether it is generated from, or simply ratified by, the group, it is after all a group decision. The impact of decision ratification will mean councillors are often confronted with supporting publicly a decision made via government policy, the courts or a planning inquiry, which they may possibly oppose. Government-generated mineral extraction or housing figures do provide some limited discretion for councillors, such as location, but as a Labour district councillor commented:

The Government figures for house building were ridiculous, we couldn't possibly allocate land for that many, but there was nothing that could be done, despite arguing in group about the

figures and agreeing to protest, we still had to accept the officers' report. Once that was agreed at group then we supported it in committee.

A Conservative district and county councillor summed up the often expressed views of councillors across the political spectrum thus:

They did not want this housing development at any cost and you can have all the protest and argument in the world, but if the Government set you a quota of houses to build you have to build them. I could try and convince my fellow councillors to vote against the idea, but they will think, hold on, if it doesn't go in his area, it could go in mine, then I get the problems. Any way if we have a local plan then the people can use agreed procedures to object to anything in that plan and then if they convince the inspector to overturn elements of it, fine. If it is something that's not planning, then yes I would try to get the decision overturned but the same problem arises, close something in his area and you don't close it in mine.

An element of shifting the problem then exists, a kind of representative NIMBY-ism amongst councillors, that is, 'I can support a decision that causes public opposition, so long as its impact is not in my area'.

A Conservative group leader summed up the implications of councillors disrupting decisions, even in the closed arena that is the party group by saying:

The Conservative group is the place to argue for what you believe is right and you can do that openly, that is amongst fellow councillors, but there is this strange fear of winning a vote and I suppose carrying the can for what happens. A ward issue can be part of a wider scenario, stop your local park being closed and that's good but you blow a hole through an entire policy for rationalising a particular service and that can be bad. You're marked then and what councillor with any career intentions wants that on their record. You can say to your people though, look I did try.

It is however the clarity of expression when referring to the group that particularly distinguishes Labour councillors. One such, a former district council leader and now a back-bencher, stated simply that:

When accepted onto the panel of candidates you agree to accept group policy and the need to abide by it, have your arguments in group, that's the right place, but abide by any decision afterwards. Yes of course even if that affects your ward, no question about it.

When an issue is located within the councillor's own electoral area then the pre-existence of a group decision on that issue will not be likely to prevent the councillor of any party from debating that issue and from expressing opposition to the group position that they share with their own electorate. That the Liberal Democrat councillor is more likely than either their Labour or Conservative counterparts to support an act of speaking with a vote on that issue may reflect either their political philosophy and the nature of their relationship with the group (considered in chapter 4); or,

their opposition, or third party status on any council at the time of the research. A Liberal Democrat may change the group position by voting and encouraging others to vote, but may not in effect be altering council policy. The same could of course be said of any minority party councillor.

The discipline of power, or the possibility of obtaining or regaining power at some future point focuses the mind of the councillor on the consequences of overturning existing positions on local issues. In areas with prolonged one party domination, both Conservative, but particularly Labour councillors, when in the minority, indicated in interview the same reluctance to vote against the group within the group. The issue here becomes one of group loyalty and unity for the Labour councillor. There is a greater willingness amongst Conservatives to view parochial issues as non-political and therefore less demanding of group discipline. The Labour councillor is less likely to make this kind of distinction, with loyalty transcending parochial issues, with or without a political connotation.

Interviews conducted with councillors recently experiencing the loss of council control by their political party, some for the first time, indicate the elusive impact on group solidarity of a fall from political power. Interviews indicate that a temporary 'blip' may occur in group solidarity as a result of the immediate shock of the changed political circumstances, especially after a long period of control. The temporary problem of the group reasserting itself as a centre of councillor loyalty, is less likely in councils that have a tradition of changes in political control. Councillors in interviews indicated that after settling down to the new position and with the prospect of regaining control in the future, little difference occurs in the expectations of group loyalty, or the willingness amongst councillors to

provide that loyalty. Councillors in marginal authorities indicate that loss of power makes very little difference, if any, to the focus on group.

A Conservative metropolitan borough councillor commented, *'the group's attitude toward discipline did not change and has not changed one bit from when we were in power, it is exactly the same whether in power or not'*. This was supported by a second Conservative metropolitan borough councillor, *'This is a highly political council, whether we are in control or not and that tends to concentrate the mind on winning, whether in power or not, if you see what I mean'*.

Group loyalty or discipline, whether it arises from Labour traditions of collectivism, Conservative political orientations toward discipline or the Liberal Democrats' recognition of the need for group organisation to secure political success, results in one conclusion. The party group represents a closed theatre of representation and the councillor is expected to undertake acts of representation within its meetings.

The group is the theatre in which councillors are likely to deliberate local issues, but less likely to vote against a pre-existing decision and thus, through voluntary self-restraint, effectively negate the only opportunity they have to oppose the group. It is an important indicator of group influence over the representative processes that Labour and Conservative councillors are less inclined to vote against the group, in the group meeting, even when under no direct disciplinary control; and when the very theatre of the group meeting is accepted by councillors as a legitimate one in which to oppose the group itself.

The wider local political party is seen by councillors as another legitimate theatre of representation in which to oppose a group decision and to further the position of the local community, irrespective of the councillor's political affiliation. Councillors of different political affiliation however vary in the likelihood that they would use such a theatre. A clear majority of councillors across the main parties are likely to use the wider local party as an acceptable theatre in which to oppose the group, at least by the act of speaking. Voting represents a different prospect, and although clear majorities of councillors are likely to undertake this act when the issue is located in their own electoral area, they do nonetheless differ by party. Fifty-six per cent of Labour and Conservative, but 62 per cent of Liberal Democrat councillors, are 'very likely' so to vote, still high, but with significant margins for doubt as to the willingness amongst councillors across the parties, to vote within their own political party against the group. The symbolism of the vote is as strong a deterrent on councillor action in closed as it is in open theatres of representation.

A Labour district council leader, faced with a vociferous local campaign against a decision of his group and council reported that:

All the ward councillors, of which I am one, held a meeting with the residents campaign committee and what was obvious from this was that they were pressurising us as their local councillors to support them against the group without understanding our position. I am the leader of the council and one of the other ward councillors is the vice-chair of personnel, how can we argue publicly against our own group. I advised them to talk to the constituency [Labour Party], if they back the residents it would ease our position and we would be able to take the views

of the constituency to the group far more easily than some self appointed residents group. Since you ask, although I am not a member of that particular constituency party no, I would not speak and certainly not vote against the group.

Of the other two councillors for that particular ward, one would speak and vote in favour of the group policy not the electorate and admitted that:

I am not exactly the favourite son down there at the moment, this will have been resolved, the road built and all forgotten about by the time I am up for re-election in 1998, any way I think they are wrong on the substantive issues and the group has a policy which I will stick by. My local branch [Labour Party] support the group and I would argue strongly at the constituency for group policy and vote for it.

The remaining councillor for the area stated that:

I support the residents, I don't like this road but it's group policy and I've been told by them [the group] to support it, things would be easier if the constituency opposed it, and if I was on the GC (General Committee) I would probably speak against, but no not vote, there are too many councillors on the GC, and they expect you to support the group.

The political party represents for the councillor a legitimate theatre of representation in which they are readily prepared to 'speak' against existing group policy when in agreement with a community campaign. It should be remembered that in this question councillors were not given a specific

'party meeting' in which to locate 'speaking' and were thus able to consider party meetings generally. Some councillors will be bolder in party meetings of the ward or division they represent where there may exist a solid bedrock of support for, or opposition to, the community in which that party is located. As the councillor moves up the stratified structure of the local party, more opposition to the community and support for the group may be experienced, especially from other councillors.

The councillor appears to be able to act as easily in the party meeting as in the group and will act similarly in each theatre. This approach is particularly the case for the Liberal Democrats, perhaps a product of the often smaller local membership base available to them compared to the other two parties. A Liberal Democrat county councillor summed this position up by stating:

Locally we are very stretched, we have a borough by-election next week and have drawn on workers from far and wide, most of my local party are councillors of one sort or another and a party meeting is like a group meeting, except we are on different councils.

Councillors consider the political party meeting, with its semi-closed nature and restricted membership, as a legitimate theatre of representation in which to speak. The closeness of the responses to this question, compared to the responses to the question which located speaking in the group is telling, and indicates the ease with which councillors move between the closed party group meeting and the semi-closed party meeting, especially when speaking against the group.

The impact of issue location

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 showed the local (ward/divisional) orientation of councillors across the political spectrum when considering the use of closed theatres of representation, but that closed theatres also encourage councillors to speak and vote when the issue is outside their own electoral area. The distinction made by councillors between the use of the three closed theatres of representation presented to them becomes clear when considering the shifting down in intensity of response from 'very likely' to 'likely' that indicates the differentiation placed by councillors on these closed theatres.

With an issue located within their own electoral area 87 per cent of Liberal Democrats, 84 per cent of Conservatives and 83 per cent of Labour were 'very likely' to speak out in a group meeting and 73 per cent of Liberal Democrats, 62 per cent of Conservatives and 60 per cent of Labour were 'very likely' to vote against the group, at a group meeting. Within the political party, for an issue located within the councillor's own electoral area, the responses became 76 per cent Labour and Conservative and 75 per cent Liberal Democrat 'very likely' to speak against the group and 62 per cent Liberal Democrat, against 56 per cent Labour and Conservative 'very likely' to vote against the group within the party.

The unspecified private meeting, for an issue located within the councillor's own electoral area, is the only closed theatre in which the Liberal Democrat is not clearly the most likely to speak out when strength of response is taken into account. With 54 per cent of Liberal Democrats 'very likely' to speak out, against 63 per cent of Conservatives and 46 per cent of Labour councillors 'very likely' to speak out in this theatre.

Conservatives are seen to have a higher propensity to use the private meeting.

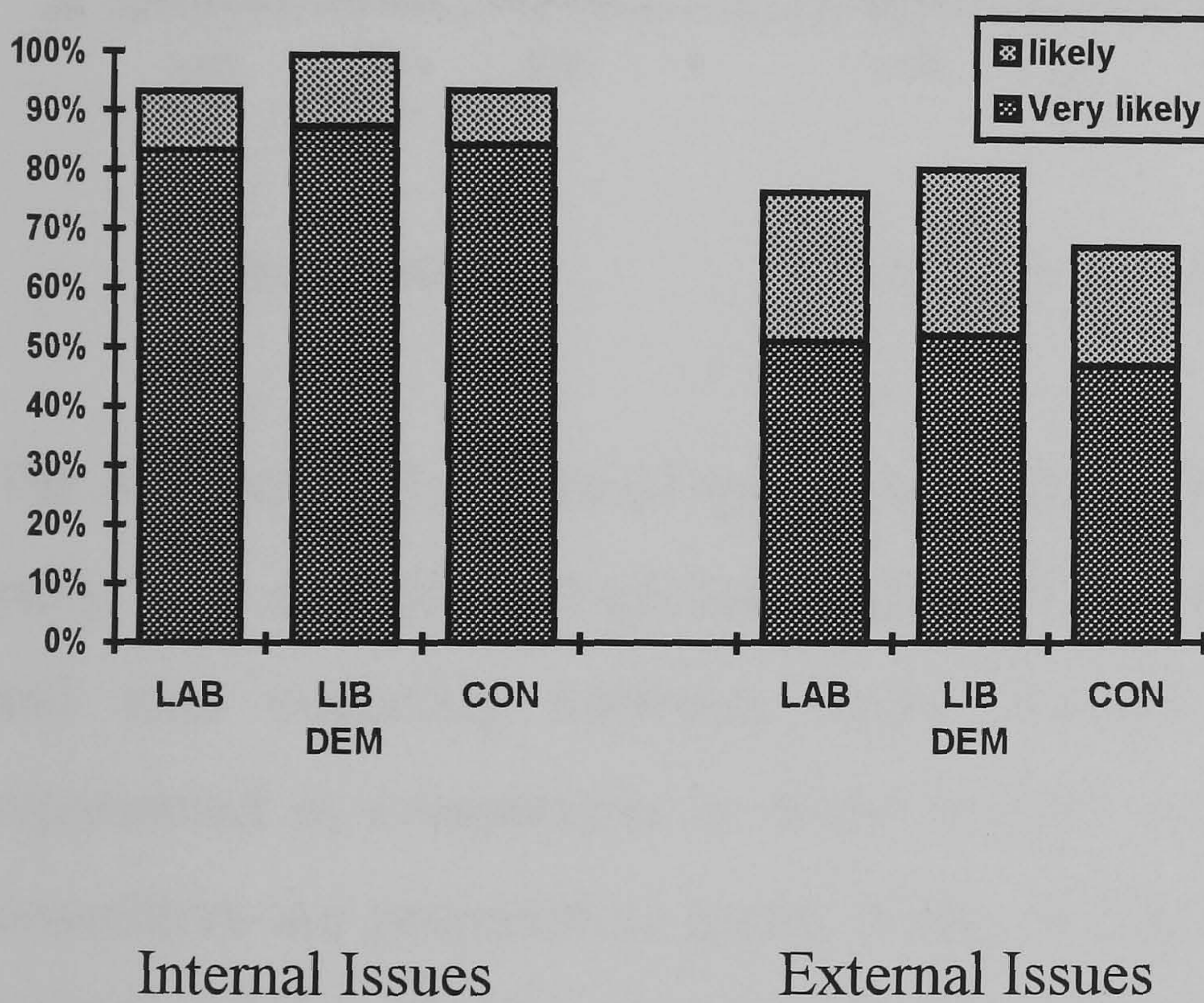
The councillor of any party is more likely to speak against the group, within the group itself, than other closed theatres, with the Liberal Democrats more likely than Labour or Conservative councillors to support that act with a vote. The difference between the likelihood of the Conservative and Labour councillor speaking and voting in the group is 14 per cent and 16 per cent respectively, for an issue within their area. The difference is only four per cent and nine per cent respectively for an issue external to the area represented (but from a lower preference anyway, as shown in tables 5.1 and 5.2). Both Labour and Conservative then, are less likely than the Liberal Democrat to vote after speaking.

Councillors are clearly willing to articulate community concerns from their own electoral area within the confines of the party meeting and to dissent from and speak against group policy. Again, as with open theatres of representation, it is the symbolism of the vote that causes the councillor particular concern; representative discretion is not unfettered. Deliberation and debate, is a more sustainable action, than voting, even within the closed confines of the political party and the group itself.

There is a clear shifting down in intensity of speaking and voting against the group when the issue location shifts outside the councillor's own electoral area. Not only are fewer councillors likely to speak or vote against the group when the issue is located outside their own electoral area, but the intensity of likelihood of those who might do so declines. Figure 5.1 shows the 'very likely' and 'likely' responses from Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillors to the prospect of them

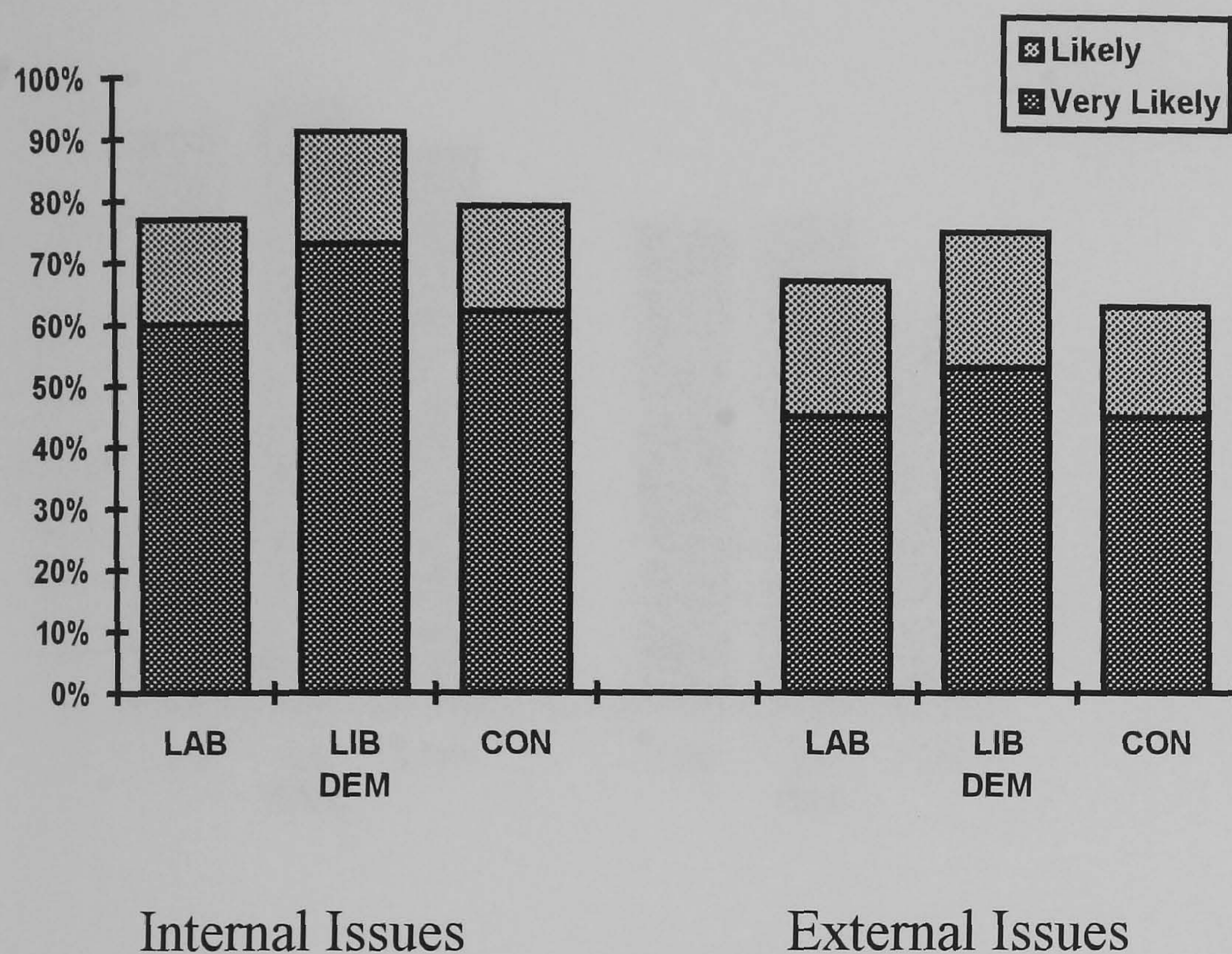
speaking against the group, within the group, for issues located inside and outside of their own electoral areas. The shifting down in intensity of response between issues inside and outside of the ward or division represented is marked, with all councillors indicating a decline in likelihood of speaking in the group as the issue shifts outside of their own electoral area.

Figure 5.1. Councillors 'likely' to speak against the group, in group meetings: issues internal and external to the area represented



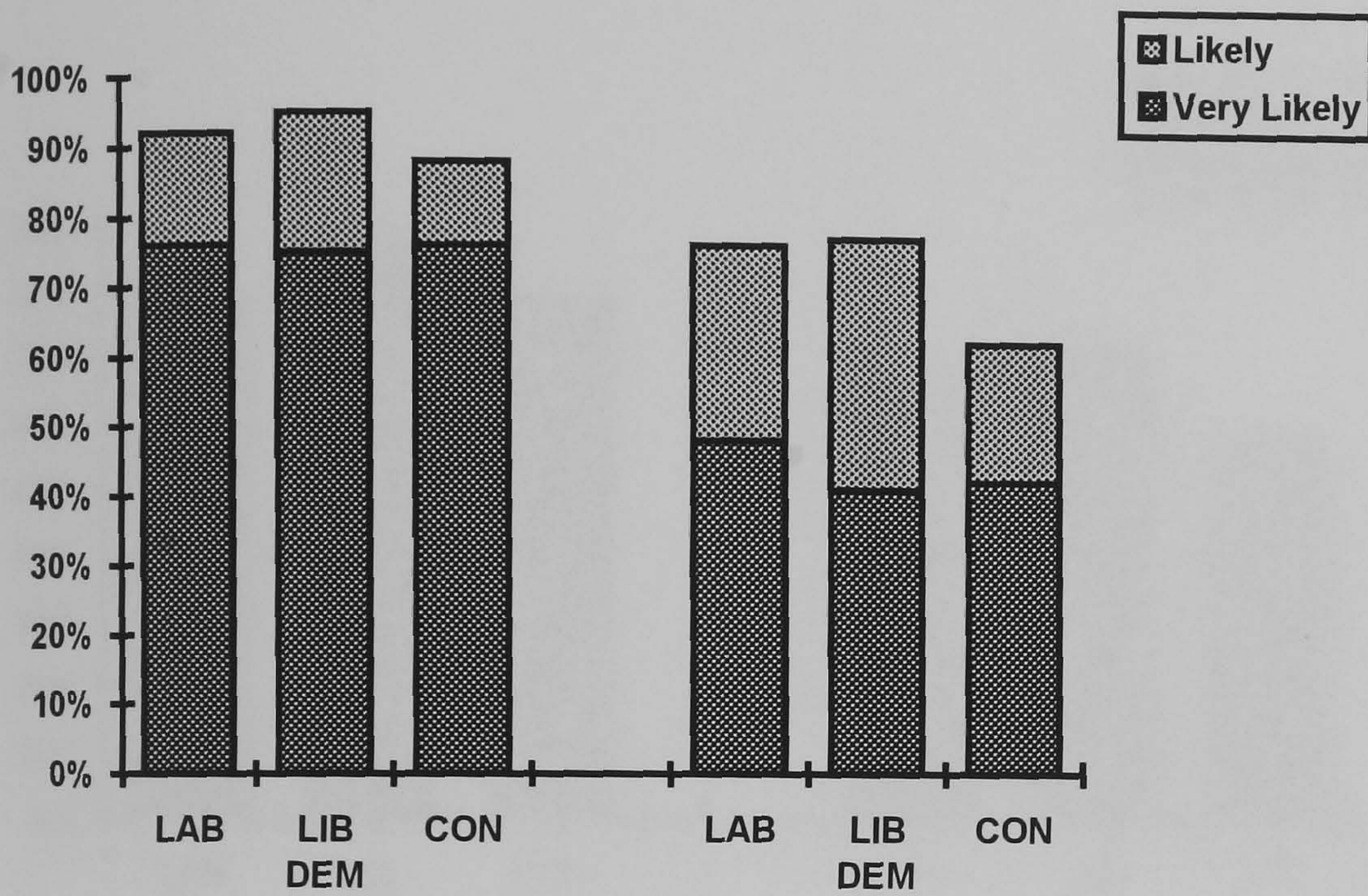
The differentiation in intensity of response to speaking in the group as a result of issue location is matched in terms of voting in group. There is a greater likelihood that councillors would vote when the issue is located within their area, rather than external to it. Figure 5.2 shows the responses from councillors regarding the likelihood of them voting against the group, in group.

Figure 5.2. Councillors 'likely' to vote against the group, at group meetings: issues internal and external to the area represented



The differentiated pattern of responses follows through into the wider local party, with a similar but greater dilution of intensity in likeliness to speak and vote occurring between issues located internally to the area represented in comparison to those located outside of it. So, although councillors are prepared to speak within the party against the group, the intensity of that likelihood underpins the preference for the group meeting as the arena in which to speak out. Figure 5.3. shows the responses from councillors to the likelihood of them speaking in the party meeting.

Figure 5.3. Councillors 'likely' to speak against the group at a party meeting: issues internal and external to the area represented

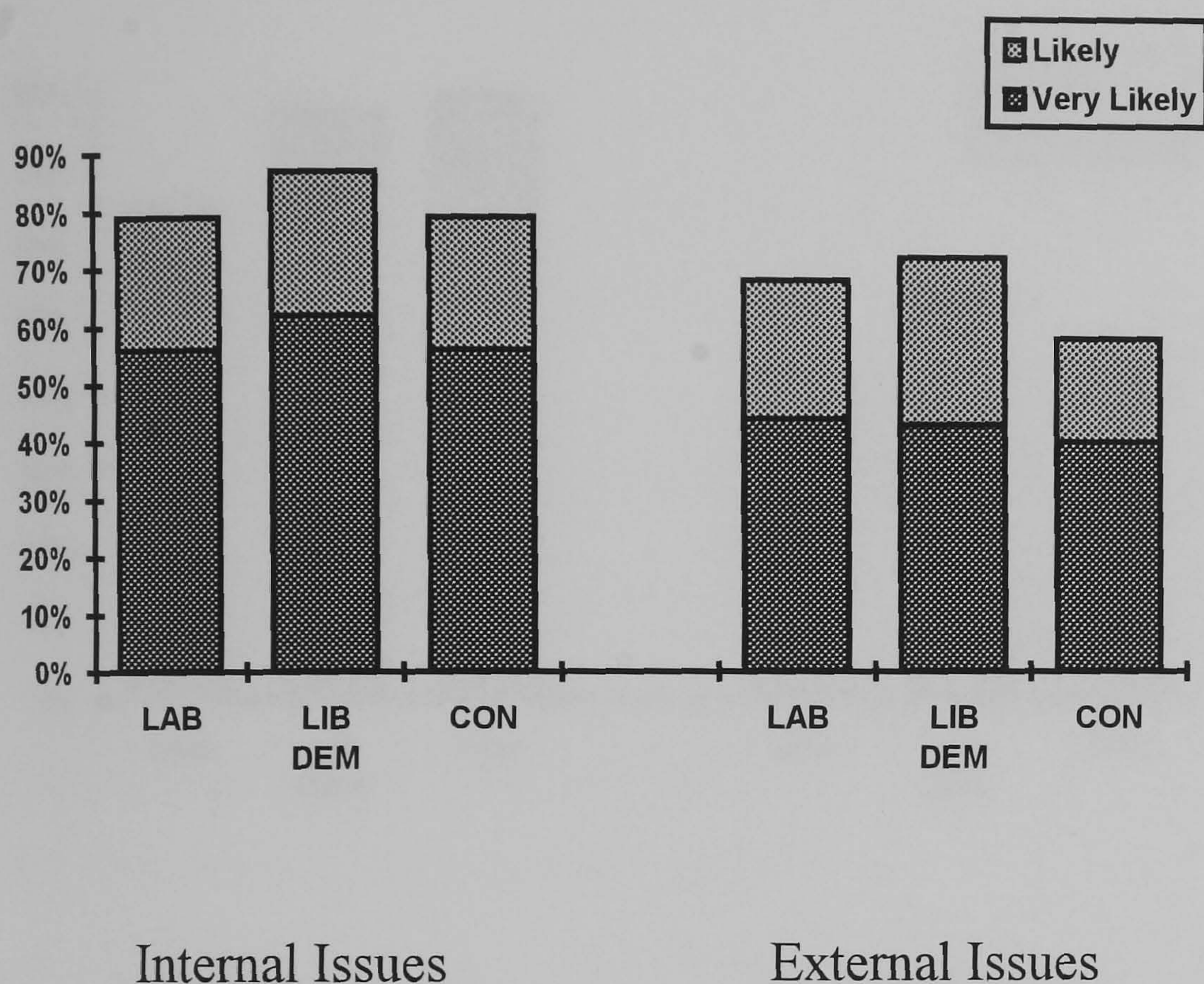


Internal Issues

External Issues.

In terms of voting against group decisions at a party meeting, the decline in intensity of likelihood continues across the parties, with the Liberal Democrat indicating the strongest likelihood of voting in this setting for an issue located within their own area. Figure 5.4 shows the responses from councillors to the likelihood of voting in a party meeting.

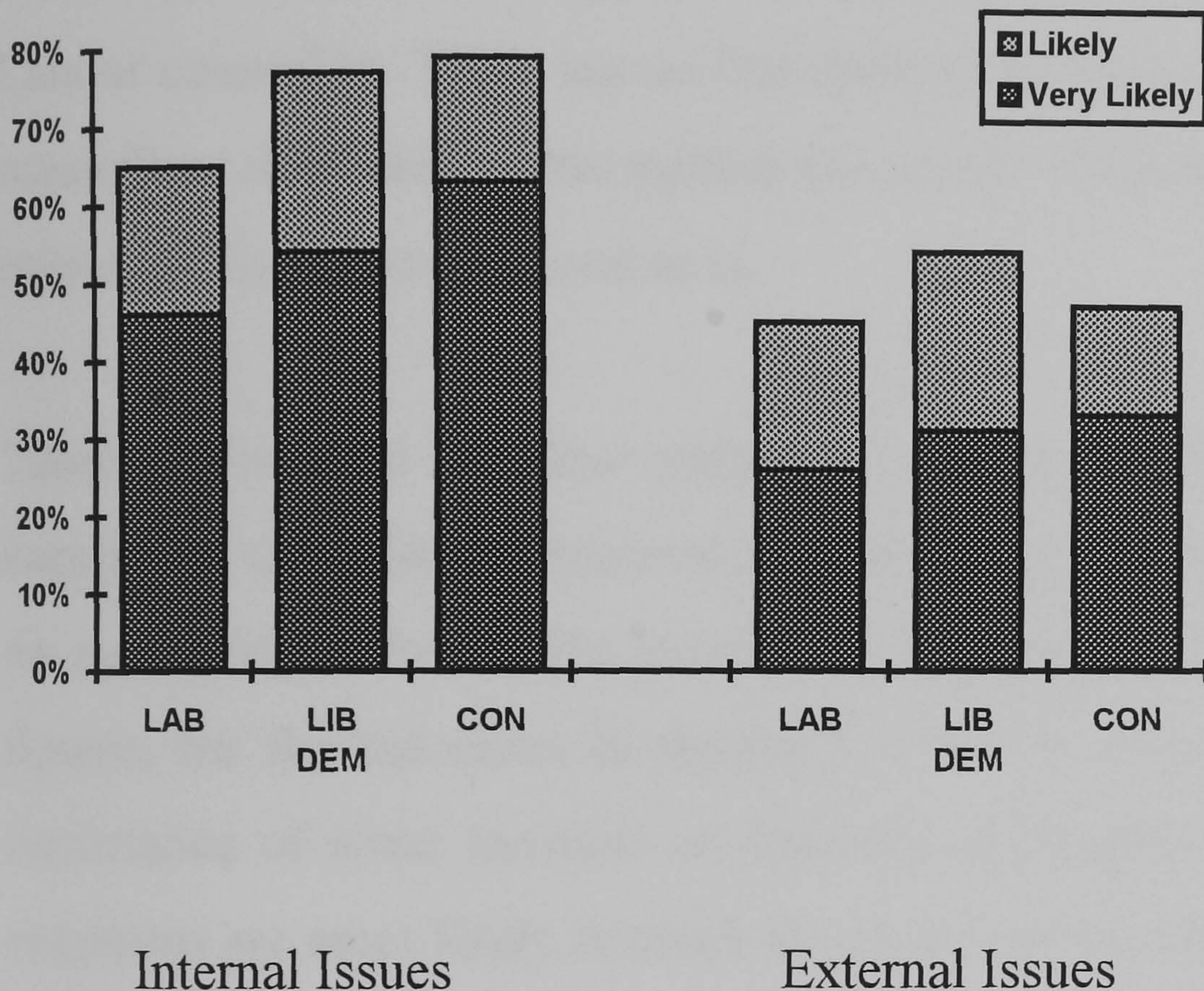
Figure 5.4. Councillors 'likely' to vote against the group at a party meeting: issues internal and external to the area represented



The decline in intensity of likelihood of speaking against the group continues, across all parties when the theatre shifts to the 'private meeting', which produces the lowest 'very likely' responses from the three closed theatres presented to councillors. The impact of issue location is equally important in the private meeting, which by its nature may include very few, if any, fellow group members.

Figure 5.5 shows the responses from councillors to the likelihood that they would speak at a private meeting, against the group.

Figure 5.5. Councillors 'likely' to speak against the group at a private meeting: issues internal and external to the area represented



What is clear from figures 5.1 to 5.5 is that issue location has a consistent and pervasive impact on the intensity of likelihood of a councillor acting against the group, in private theatres of representation. This impact is common across the political spectrum. Such a behavioural pattern confirms the existence of a ward or divisional orientation amongst councillors, but it must be borne in mind that such orientation is more likely to be played out in the secrecy of the party group, than any other closed theatre of representation.

Although the Liberal Democrat appears as the most likely to act against the group, in six out of the ten cases presented in the figures, they are not consistently the highest 'very likely' scorers, being marginally less likely

than Labour or Conservatives to speak out in the party for an issue located either inside or outside their own ward or division. In regard to speaking and voting against the group at a private meeting, the Liberal Democrats are eight per cent less 'very likely' to use this theatre than the Conservatives, but are eight per cent greater in this category than the Labour councillor. There are no real differences between them and Labour councillors disposed to vote against the group within the party for an issue outside of their own electoral area.

There is therefore no clear pattern of greater likelihood that emerges, except that the Liberal Democrats produce higher 'very likely' responses in six out of the ten cases. The closeness in percentage terms of the response figures, for the ten cases in figures 5.1 to 5.5, do indicate however the importance of issue location on intensity of likelihood. The 'very likely' responses are more likely to result in action than the 'likely' responses.

Closed theatres of representation: political expediency and the permanency of decisions

Although the likelihood, and intensity of likelihood, of a councillor speaking and voting against the group is less when the issue is located external to their own electoral area, councillors across the party spectrum do not exclude themselves from speaking or voting on such issues. As a Conservative district councillor stated:

It would of course very much depend on the issue and if it had already been raised by the ward member, once raised I would feel free to take part in the debate, if it was a Labour councillor's ward and we could embarrass that councillor then I would certainly raise the matter, not only in the group but in

public, if it is one of our own, I would be content to discuss the matter, albeit a parochial one, in the group. It's not my business to take someone else's matters up first off.

It would appear that councillors are motivated to act by a number of considerations, not least of which is the expectations of the party group of councillor loyalty. There also exists the possibility of an issue being used to highlight weaknesses in political opponents, either as individuals or as representatives from a political party. A local issue, and a councillor's stand on it, can be used not only to pursue the issue, but also a wider party political advantage. Casting blame on a political party for a particular decision and manipulating a local issue for party purposes, is an attractive proposition for many councillors interviewed for this research.

Equally opposing a community position because of the involvement in the issue of councillors from an opposing party, in some local campaign, has also been highlighted as a tactic of advantage to the group position. One Labour councillor commented:

they [a particular action group] are all Tories you know, councillor [named Conservative councillor] is advising them, or should I say mis-advising them and none of them vote Labour, closet Tories and Liberals they are, only representing themselves.

In other words, if all who protest the group's position are political opponents, their own arguments on an issue can effectively be delegitimised, at least by the party group. This possibility must be considered against the willingness of councillors to form cross cutting single-issue

alliances with councillors of other parties, as identified in the case study in chapter seven. Those alliances may lead to active co-operation on a single issue, or at least working towards the same objective, but independently, and not opposing the actions of the other.

The impact of the issue and other political considerations such as party advantage, personality, and nearness of an election, account for the use of local issues by councillors as either a political expedient and platform, or a genuine inter-party approach to a single issue. Interviews with councillors have indicated that although the issue itself may be of such local impact as to negate political expediency, the existence of an issue which can be used to secure an advantage over political opponents is seen as a preferable situation by many councillors. The preference however is for concentration on issues located within the ward or division and if possible mixing this with political advantage.

A Liberal Democrat district councillor stated:

Now if I want to speak or vote on something I'll do it but I am more inclined to concentrate on my own ward, get the best for the people that elect you that's obvious to almost anyone. What you must understand is that after all, the other wards have their own councillors, don't they, so it's up to them to fight their own corners, but if I am interested in the issue, I might dabble in it you could say, especially if it upsets the Socialists or Conservatives, or even my own side. I don't mind really!

Local issues are also seen by councillors across the political spectrum as very much the property of local members. Whilst ignoring the distinction

between the local impact of policy and local issues, councillors support fellow councillors' right to raise and pursue ward or divisional issues, but within of course, the appropriate theatre of representation. Echoing the Liberal Democrat and Conservative above, a Labour metropolitan councillor stated:

If it is not in my patch and it is not a major issue, you know some big policy question, then I'd let the local member get on with it, I mean I would speak if I was interested or the issue was relevant and of course if pushed to the vote I would vote, but you can't then keep going around changing things because they don't suit somebody in your patch. I don't think that local ward members should have the final say on their areas, there'd be no point in having a council if we didn't all consider these parochial matters, but after all that's exactly what they are.

This comment raises another issue which has also been reflected across the political spectrum: the ability of councillors to make a virtue out of consistency of approach and maintaining a particular group position, despite community opposition and evidence to undermine and contradict that position. Speaking at a district council Labour group meeting one councillor commented:

We made a decision on this, in this group, some years ago and we should stick to it, it would be hypocritical now start saying something else. We made a decision, based on believing this road would be to the benefit of the area, it doesn't matter what anyone says about it, we must stick to our guns on this decision.

This approach was supported at the same meeting by a councillor stating:

We have a decision on this, and we know there are those that are against us and protesting and the like, but we can't go and change the policy of this group as is suggested now just because some one disagrees with it or argues against it. We took this decision in 1988 and should stick to it.

The case study in chapter 9 which relates to the issue being considered here, indicates the existence of several different opinions on both the effectiveness and desirability of the road in question. The case in favour of the road made at a public Inquiry has been subject to widespread rebuttal and much contrary independent evidence to that on which the party group concerned made its decision. An apparent unwillingness exists, in this case anyway, to admit that the original decision may have been wrong or that the circumstances had changed drastically over the intervening years.

In interview and from observation, councillors of all parties accept the need for a consistency - almost a permanency to decisions - once made, and the group would rather avoid losing face by changing its position, than respond to expressed local opinion. In these circumstances the position of the group is clearly set against local opinion and the group must not be seen to vacillate on an issue. In interviews councillors from all parties stressed the need for maintaining decisions once made and the political problems that could be generated by a group which, as one Conservative district councillor said, *'caved in at the slightest bit of pressure'*. The Liberal Democrats interviewed did indicate a greater willingness to reconsider, if not change policy once made, with a county councillor stating that:

Nothing is forever, we must always be prepared to review our position, listen to new information, and think about what people say, but once a decision has been made it would have to be some very pressing new evidence, you might say, to lead to a change of policy.

Generally, though, inflexibility appears as one of the damaging effects of the party group system on local democracy and representation.

Lessons from issue location and closed theatres of representation

Councillors across the political spectrum display the same pattern of behaviour in both closed and open theatres of representation. They are more likely to speak than vote, and more likely to undertake either of those acts in the group than in any other closed theatre of representation. They are also more likely to perform those acts when the issue is inside rather than outside their own electoral area.

It is possible to conclude that whatever the party affiliation of the councillor, the party group - of all the closed theatres - is the one in which the councillor is most likely to undertake acts of representation. Liberal Democrats are more likely to follow up any act of speaking with a vote, whatever the location of the issue. Although there is a decline in willingness to transfer activities to the wider local party, there is also an ease of movement from the group to the party for the councillor (of any party), which is reflected in the high degrees of willingness to speak and vote in this arena. It is the unspecified private meeting, outside the confines of a purely political meeting that finds least favour with all councillors for speaking against the group.

Although the group is the theatre in which the councillor is most likely to act, there is an interesting degree of reluctance to vote against an 'existing' decision. The belief that once an issue has been settled, the demands of 'democracy' imply the councillor must acquiesce in that decision was emphasised by a Labour district councillor:

Look, put it this way, when an issue comes to group, whether brought there by the local member or on a committee agenda for a policy decision, we discuss it and vote, if you lose you have to accept that, now some might want to break the whip, well group standing orders deals with that. Even if you don't break the whip you can not keep coming backwards and forwards to the group with the same subject, you have to let go, democracy is about accepting defeat, discuss things in group, vote, but then get on with it.

and by a Conservative group leader:

I expect my members to accept the results of debate and decisions by the Conservative group, in all my time I have never met a real rebel, most decisions made are taken within the group on good sound logical argument and debate, now many may go along because they lack alternative information but it is not good enough to say Mr Jones at No 67 doesn't like it so I am against. You have to do better than that in my group.

Although there is a difference between likelihood of speaking and voting, the councillor from any one of the three main parties is 'very likely' to either speak or vote against the group, within the group meeting. Despite

the decline in likelihood of voting compared to speaking and the impact of issue location, internal or external to the councillor's own electoral area, the group is still the main focus for undertaking representative activity.

The group however is the theatre of representation that is most emphatically closed from observation by the electorate. The party group distances the decision process from the electors themselves, who are excluded from its deliberations, activities, decision-making processes and discipline. Although across the political spectrum the councillor expresses a high likelihood of representing the electorate within that closed theatre, it remains just that - closed.

It is possible to argue, that like justice, democracy must be seen to be done. Therefore to fully appreciate the position of the party group as the prime beneficiary of representative democracy at the local level, it is necessary to compare the declared 'likelihood' of the councillor undertaking acts of representation in closed, unobservable theatres, with the 'likelihood' that they would also act in open, and observable theatres. It is also necessary to consider how both the group as a concept and the particular political affiliation of the councillor influences his or her willingness to perform acts of representation in either closed or open theatres. To undertake this analysis requires drawing together material from this and the previous chapter.

REPRESENTATIVE ACTIVITY: CLOSED AND OPEN THEATRES.

To consider the influence of the party group on the use of representative discretion it is necessary to consider whether a differentiated approach to councillor activity exists across closed and open theatres of representation. To undertake such a comparison two particular theatres from the closed and open categories have been isolated for comparison, those being the full council and committee from the open category, and the closed theatres of the party group and the local political party.

These particular open and closed theatres have been isolated because they enable a comparison of the representative activities of the councillor between those theatres of representation legitimised by the local electoral processes, against those not so legitimised. Council and committee are the theatres in which councillors undertake debate and decision-making that is open to observation by the public and press and in which local democracy is seen and heard to be done.

The group and local political party represent the antithesis of these circumstances in that they are theatres of representation in which the public are either completely excluded or only able to attend by virtue of membership of a political party. In these theatres of decision-making and representation the acts of the councillor are not observable, not witnessed publicly, and are not therefore theatres in which they can be held publicly accountable. These contrasting theatres were also selected because they enable a comparison of the representative acts of both speaking and voting.

Tables 5.3. and 5.4. below indicate that councillors across the political spectrum, when faced with an issue located within their own electoral area, are more likely to speak and vote against the group, within that group and wider political party, than they are to undertake those acts in the open and legitimised theatres of full council and committee. In all cases the variation in the responses between open and closed theatres of representation are marked, with councillors indicating a rejection of the electorally legitimised theatres of representation in favour of the closed and unobservable group and political party.

Table 5.3. A comparison of representative acts between closed and open theatres: all councillors; internal to the area represented

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	(base)
Open Theatre					
Council	Speak	46	27	24	(533)
	Vote	25	29	42	(526)
Committee	Speak	57	24	16	(535)
	Vote	34	30	34	(531)
Closed Theatre					
Group	Speak	94	3	1	(540)
	Vote	80	11	7	(538)
Party	Speak	91	4	3	(534)
	Vote	79	11	7	(530)

Table 5.4. A comparison of representative acts between closed and open theatres: all councillors; external to the area represented

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	(base)
Open Theatre					
Council	Speak	21	36	37	(515)
	Vote	17	32	44	(508)
Committee	Speak	28	36	30	(520)
	Vote	24	33	36	(509)
Closed Theatre					
Group	Speak	73	19	6	(534)
	Vote	67	17	10	(518)
Party	Speak	71	19	6	(523)
	Vote	64	18	11	(514)

When an issue is located within the councillor's own electoral area there is marked decline in likelihood that the member would speak or vote when comparing the closed with the open theatres of representation. The decline is stark, falling by 48 per cent when comparing those councillors who would speak against the group in the group meeting, with those 'likely' to speak in full council, and by 55 per cent for those that would vote within the group meeting, compared to those 'likely' to vote in full council.

Table 5.4 shows that similar reductions in the likelihood of the councillor speaking or voting in open and closed theatres of representation also occur when the location of the issue shifts to outside the councillor's own electoral area. The pattern remains that the councillor is more likely to speak and vote in group, than any other theatre and more likely to speak and vote in the closed rather than the open theatres of representation. The

responses indicate that the councillor prefers the security of the closed theatres, particularly the party group, for conducting acts of representation, over the open and electorally legitimised council and committee. That holds so whether the issue is either internal or external to the electoral area of the councillor but with the councillor more 'likely' to act when the issue is internal to the area represented.

The impact of the party group and party affiliation on the representative activity of the councillor is indicated in tables 5.5 to 5.10 below which present the likelihood of councillors undertaking acts of representation between closed and open theatres, for issues internal and external to their electoral area, by political affiliation.

Table 5.5. Likelihood of representative acts between closed and open theatres: internal issue location; Labour councillors

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	(base)
Open Theatre					
Council	Speak	25	32	41	(218)
	Vote	10	21	65	(215)
Committee	Speak	38	30	29	(220)
	Vote	17	25	55	(218)
Closed Theatre					
Group	Speak	93	4	1	(221)
	Vote	77	10	12	(221)
Party	Speak	92	6	1	(223)
	Vote	79	11	8	(220)

Table 5.6. Likelihood of representative acts between closed and open theatres: external issue location; Labour councillors

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	(base)
Open Theatre					
Council	Speak	13	26	54	(210)
	Vote	8	20	65	(210)
Committee	Speak	18	28	49	(213)
	Vote	16	20	58	(212)
Closed Theatre					
Group	Speak	76	15	7	(219)
	Vote	67	15	14	(214)
Party	Speak	76	14	7	(216)
	Vote	68	13	15	(214)

Table 5.7. Likelihood of representative acts between closed and open theatres: internal issue location; Liberal Democrat councillors

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	(base)
Open Theatre					
Council	Speak	59	28	11	(97)
	Vote	43	37	15	(95)
Committee	Speak	66	27	5	(97)
	Vote	50	36	12	(97)
Closed Theatre					
Group	Speak	99	1	0	(99)
	Vote	91	6	1	(97)
Party	Speak	95	3	0	(97)
	Vote	87	8	2	(96)

Table 5.8. Likelihood of representative acts between closed and open theatres: external issue location; Liberal Democrat councillors

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	(base)
Open Theatre					
Council	Speak	28	46	23	(97)
	Vote	28	48	18	(94)
Committee	Speak	36	45	16	(97)
	Vote	31	51	12	(94)
Closed Theatre					
Group	Speak	81	18	0	(98)
	Vote	76	17	2	(95)
Party	Speak	78	19	0	(96)
	Vote	73	19	4	(95)

Table 5.9. Likelihood of representative acts between closed and open theatres: internal issue location; Conservative councillors

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	(base)
Open Theatre					
Council	Speak	62	23	12	(218)
	Vote	32	34	30	(216)
Committee	Speak	72	17	8	(218)
	Vote	43	32	21	(216)
Closed Theatre					
Group	Speak	93	3	1	(220)
	Vote	79	14	5	(220)
Party	Speak	88	3	5	(214)
	Vote	76	13	7	(214)

Table 5.10. Likelihood of representative acts between closed and open theatres: external issue location; Conservative councillors

Theatre	Act	Likely %	Depends %	Unlikely %	(base)
Open Theatre					
Council	Speak	26	41	25	(208)
	Vote	20	37	33	(204)
Committee	Speak	35	40	19	(210)
	Vote	28	36	26	(203)
Closed Theatre					
Group	Speak	67	23	7	(217)
	Vote	63	20	9	(209)
Party	Speak	62	24	8	(211)
	Vote	57	23	11	(205)

The responses presented in tables 5.5 to 5.10 above indicate that whatever the political affiliation of the councillor a preference exists for undertaking acts of representation within closed theatres away from the electorally legitimised full council and committee. Whatever the affiliation of the councillor, there is a greater likelihood that they will speak and vote against the group within the group, than in any other theatres and are more likely to speak and vote in either of the closed, as opposed to the open theatres of representation. The councillor, irrespective of party affiliation prefers the secrecy of the group and the political party in which to conduct acts of representation, but this is far more marked for Labour councillors.

This preference for closed theatres of representation indicates that for Labour and Liberal Democrats, there is little distinction between the group and the local party for either speaking or voting against the group. The Conservative councillor is slightly more reticent to draw group issues into

the local party, a reflection of the freedom of the councillor to employ representative discretion, unhindered by party or electorate. The variation between speaking in group and local party, although greater for the Conservative than either Liberal Democrat or Labour, still indicates that the Conservative views closed theatres as preferable to open ones for opposing the group, and still prefers to do this within the group meeting itself.

The research indicates the existence of strong inter-party differences but the crucial point at which political affiliation becomes a determinant of likely councillor representative activity and theatre selection is in the shift from closed to open theatres. Here, it is quite clearly the Labour councillor who is far more reluctant than either the Liberal Democrat or Conservative councillor to allow a crisis of representation to spill into the public arena. Labour councillors indicated a marked prioritisation of the democratic processes and a differentiated approach between theatres within which they would perform representative acts. Clearly Labour councillors prefer the secret and closed theatres of representation more than either the Liberal Democrat or Conservative. Across the three main political parties there is less likelihood that the councillor would both speak and vote against the group as the theatre for that action shifts further away from the group itself and into the open.

Labour councillors are the least likely to undertake either act of representation as the theatre shifts outwards from the group, whatever the location of the issue, with the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives more likely to act in open theatres, although, all councillors indicate a very high likelihood of speaking and voting in the group itself, and also within the political party. The Labour councillor views the democratic processes as

quite legitimately conducted in the privacy of the group meeting and displays the greatest reluctance of councillors from the three main parties to transferring acts of representation into the open. Compared to the Labour councillor, the liberal Democrats and Conservatives, whilst preferring privacy and the party group meeting to conduct representation, have a greater propensity to transfer those acts into open and observable theatres in each and every case.

Against the performance of representation in closed theatres must be considered the nature of the representation so conducted. If, as has been argued, the acts of representation conducted in open theatres are largely symbolic, with little, if any chance (or even intention), of success, perhaps representation conducted in private is more forceful, genuine and deliberative and thus of a higher quality than that observed in open theatres. If so, then the Labour councillor's reluctance to act in public has little effect on the result of the democratic processes but those processes themselves are impoverished for being privately conducted. The lesson is clearly that the councillor, when faced with a crisis of representation, is more likely to conduct acts of representation in opposition to the party group within closed rather than open theatres and specifically the party group meeting itself. The democratic processes are therefore more likely to be unobservable and therefore unaccountable to the public.

There is a clear reduction across councillors of all political parties in likelihood that they would either speak or vote against the group in any of the closed or open theatres presented to them when the location of an issue is external to their own electoral area. The Liberal Democrat retaining the position as the councillor most likely, in any theatre of representation, to speak or vote against their group and in support of the community. The

pattern of preference for speaking over voting identified as existing with open theatres, also remains constant for councillors across all parties and in each of the closed settings of representation. As the theatre shifts outwards from the party group, despite the closed nature of those settings, there is less likelihood that the councillor will speak or vote against the group.

Why councillors distinguish between act and theatre

The issue that remains is, why are councillors of any party more likely to focus their representative action on the closed, rather than open theatres of representation? Interviews and case study material have indicated a shared acceptance of the necessity for closed debate where councillors can contribute to policy and decision formulation, free from observation by any other than their own party councillor colleagues. The need for some private debate is seen by Labour, Liberal Democrats and Conservative councillors as facilitating the free flow of deliberation leading to group policy or decision-making, by which the councillor is expected to abide.

The matter goes deeper than this need for privacy, as councillors indicate that a legitimacy attaches to the closed group meeting as a theatre for representation in its own right, as well as a setting in which the councillor can express opinion free from the direct observance of the public. Councillors perceive privacy as a benefit to enable the consideration of unpopular alternatives, particularly when those alternatives have, as in so many cases, a locational impact and are likely to generate community opposition. A united front can be maintained against such community opposition if the decisions taken in private are supported in public. As one Labour district councillor stated:

It is just easier to consider in private dropping something in some ones back yard, that you know they won't like, especially if there are conflicting views in the group. Have the argument in private, say what you like, vote how you like and when you all stick together in public, you are less frightened by opposition.

The distinguishing factor highlighted by the political affiliation of the councillor is the degree of willingness, across the parties, to support the results of the closed meetings which privately make decisions to be ratified within open council or committee, especially when a crisis of representation occurs. It is here that the power and influence of the party group can be assessed, as councillors of different political affiliation express different degrees of willingness to shift the representative acts they may undertake in closed theatres of representation into the open. Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillors, although supportive of the right of the group to expect the loyalty of its members, are also inclined to consider locational impact on a member's electoral area as a legitimate source of conflict which the councillor must resolve. A Liberal Democrat county councillor stated:

If a member of the group disagrees, as individuals they can abstain, being a fairly maverick lot that does happen, but no way would we force someone to vote any particular way.

Labour have a stricter policy approach, they say, this is the policy so you vote for it. This is one area where we are very different to Labour, we do let people abstain or suggest they pop to the loo while the vote is being taken. If they voted or spoke against Liberal Democrat group policy that would be very serious but we don't have any real mechanisms for dealing

with it. You can abstain or be absent, we try not to speak or vote against the group, but if you do, you do.

The absenting by 'popping to the loo' tactic is supported across the parties with a Labour chief whip stating, *'Go to the toilet when the vote is taken, that's fine if your own division is affected and as we have a good majority, but if you're in the chamber you vote with the group, no question'*. Abstaining is also seen as acceptable to some party groups and thus abstention allows the councillor to cope, with a crisis of representation, by avoidance of any public action. The public however, may demand action from the councillor, not acquiescence to his or her group. Voting against the group is not accepted by party groups with the same flexibility as abstaining or indeed speaking.

The need for group discipline and loyalty is accepted by councillors across the political spectrum as important to political success and the avoidance of allowing political opponents an opportunity to criticise the 'party'. Unity against political opponents, and even against community protest, protects the integrity of the party group as a decision-making mechanism that can demand the loyalty of its members. The collectivist decision-making tradition of the Labour Party is one of demanding a greater loyalty of its group members and exacting a greater willingness to provide that loyalty compared with the Conservative or Liberal Democrat groups (as evidenced in chapter 2). Such loyalty however is specific to Labour only in its degree and intensity, not its existence.

The Conservative councillor experiences a particular political paradox in squaring the Conservative philosophies of discipline and respect for law and order with the conflicting ideals of freedom and, particularly, free

speech. The Conservative councillor, whilst preferring the secrecy of the closed theatre of representation that is the group, to any other theatre, is more likely than the Labour councillor to oppose the group in public. A conflict exists then between expectations of loyalty and discipline to the group position and the belief in free speech. Conservative councillors often raised in interview the difficulty experienced in reconciling the need to be seen to be representing the electorate on a specific issue located within their own ward or division, with their feeling of loyalty to the group and a strong predilection for discipline. A Conservative district councillor stated that:

It really is extremely difficult you know, I am loyal to the Conservative cause and so to the group but if my constituents wanted me to support them on something then I feel I would have to do it. It would cause a great problem though and I would feel very torn between my loyalty to the Conservative group and to the people I represent, In the end I would make a decision based on my own assessment of the particular details of the case. I would certainly speak to the leader of the council and fellow ward councillors before coming to any decision on a course of action.

The paradox between discipline and freedom was rationalised through a process of consideration of apparently conflicting ideals, by a Conservative district and county councillor thus:

Difficult, but not insurmountable this one I think, yes, Conservatives have this ideological preference for discipline, law and order and I suppose you could say, that with our own

councillors we don't put theory into practice, in our group, we protect free speech against discipline. It is an interesting point, I have never actually thought about it in this way before now but I suppose, it is because we have always done business this way.

We give our members freedom to act outside the group, but they tend not to take this option. I suppose they don't because of a feeling of loyalty and a feeling that we have this traditional way of doing things, custom and practice you might say. We don't say you can not go against the group, but most don't, but they are free to.

I suppose it's a sort of self-discipline, not an imposed discipline, yes that's it, you have free speech and freedom to vote but you discipline yourself, that is a sort of freedom too isn't it? so you can square freedom with discipline.

This one instance of rationalisation condensed many of the comments and positions presented by Conservative councillors throughout the research, and it is interesting that it comes from a councillor sitting on both district and county local government. Conservatives referred to concepts such as loyalty, discipline, (this being shared by both Liberal Democrats and Labour in relation to the group as a body), freedom, custom and practice and particularly free speech. Freedom and free speech, for the councillor at least, is positioned above discipline in conceptual terms, although self-imposed discipline results in the same conclusion as discipline imposed by the group: that is, adherence to group policy.

The Conservative councillors' adherence to freedom and free speech is all the more important as they appear to adopt a self-imposed group discipline and loyalty. This process is particularly important if, as already argued in chapter 3, Conservatives can by the same adherence to freedom of action conceptually de-couple themselves as a representative from the represented. This process is achieved by all councillors but for different ideological reasons. The Conservative councillor however, is more likely to oppose the group in open theatres of representation, whilst the Labour councillor is far less likely than Liberal Democrat or Conservatives to consider this a legitimate course of action. The difference also reflects a pragmatic approach to discipline and loyalty, rather than an ideological one, as a Conservative metropolitan borough councillor stated:

Conservative groups tend to be flexible, but we operate here in a politicised metropolitan borough and we need to bring people into line more so than our colleagues in the shire areas, it is also a matter of seeking a consensus on issues which helps when discipline is involved.

Political affiliation is a determinant of the likely outcome of the use by the councillor of representative discretion, but party makes less difference to representative acts than might be supposed. It is a difference of degree rather than a fundamental divergence between the parties in terms of acts and focus of representation. The affiliation of the councillor may result in the same outcome, a focus on the party group, but that process is rationalised through different political filters and interpretations of circumstances. Ultimately however, this rationalisation results in a similar practical conclusion, by a different ideological journey: the party group is

owed a debt of loyalty which is repaid by focusing on the group as the most important theatre of representation.

The differences that do occur across the parties are reflected in differing degrees of willingness amongst councillors to shift from the group to other theatres of representation. Labour councillors are far less likely than either Conservatives or Liberal Democrats to make that outward shift from the closed to the open theatre of council and committee, even when the issue which precipitated a crisis of representation is located within the councillor's own electoral area.

The Liberal Democrat and Conservative are more likely than the Labour councillor to oppose the group in open theatres of representation, whatever the location of an issue. They also indicate a gradual but not inconsiderable reduction in likelihood of speaking and voting against the group within the council and committee, as opposed to acting in a group meeting or the wider political party. Liberal Democrats and Conservatives also expressed a general reluctance or discomfort at the prospect but equally maintained a willingness to act against the group when faced with a crisis of representation, but would prefer to avoid this course of action. The dramatic nature and greater extent of the decline in likelihood of Labour councillors acting against the group in open as opposed to closed theatres is noteworthy. Conservatives and Liberal Democrats may have the same tendency to so act, but to far less an intensity than Labour councillors.

There is, then, a pattern of behaviour which holds across the political spectrum. It indicates the influence on the processes of representation of the party group. Councillors do however indicate that, despite preferring

closed to open theatres of representation, they are 'likely', when faced with a crisis of representation, particularly for an issue located in their own electoral area, to act in opposition to their party group, in any theatre. To consider further the impact on local representative democracy of the party group it is necessary then to compare the stated likelihood of the representative behaviour and action of the councillor with actual incidence of opposing the party group, in any theatre. We must also consider whether political affiliation has an impact on the strength of the group to influence *actual*, rather than *likely*, representative action, focus and outcome.

This comparison is important, as the research data presented in this chapter must be qualified by the fact that it is about hypothetical and not actual situations for the councillor, situations which nevertheless indicate a strong loyalty to the idea of party group. This conclusion is backed by interview and case study evidence. However it is necessary to take into account the possible bias in survey method resulting from hypothetical (or remembered) situations by setting it alongside evidence of actual representative behaviour. Chapter 6 considers the actual behaviour of councillors when faced with a crisis of representation and compares that evidence to the research presented in this chapter. This consideration of hypothetical against actual behaviour presents a sharp indication of the likely future representative behaviour of the councillor; his or her actual focus on party group; and the impact, in real terms, of political affiliation on the representative focus and action of the councillor.

6. PARTY GROUP INFLUENCE ON THE COUNCILLOR AS A REPRESENTATIVE

Chapters 4 and 5 examined what councillors consider to be their 'likely' responses within open and closed theatres of representation, when faced with a crisis of representation. These 'crises' are situations which demand that councillors employ the discretion attaching to their office when faced with demands from the electorate for some form of action in opposition to a decision of the party group. This chapter will consider the extent to which councillors report having actually acted in opposition to the position of their group. It will consider which actions councillors report having actually taken, the circumstances of that action and the pattern of difference between self-reported 'likely' activity and self-reported actual activity. For the purpose of this study, self-reported actions are taken at face value as truthful reports, as the only record of most of the actions reported are the recollections of the councillor involved. The chapter will assess the reasons for variations between likely and actual behaviour; and consider the influence of the party group on the actual representational activity of the councillor and on the use councillors make of their representative discretion. This chapter will consider the extent to which political affiliation influences the selection by councillors of representative acts and theatres, and of the actual occurrences of actions which focus on the group rather than the electorate.

The opportunity for issues of conflict to arise between any of the various manifestations of community within a local authority area and the party political groups on that authority is considerable. Gyford, Leach and Game identify at least three manifestations of community: the general public, ratepayers and service users, each with differing priorities and sources of

interest in local affairs.¹ The pluralistic and diverse nature of local communities was recognised by the Widdicombe Committee.² The local arena is an ideal setting for 'log rolling', the processes of alliance-building and support gathering for issues and causes.³ There has also been a growth of demand for greater participation in local decision-making.⁴ Hampton noted however, that the 'formalities of representative democracy seem unable to capture the enthusiasm of the public at a local level' whilst at the same time there has been an increase in both 'official encouragement for methods of enabling public participation in local services and public demands for such opportunities'.⁵

In an arena of such diversity, pluralism and conflicting interests, it is unlikely that the community position in relation to an issue or event will fail to be articulated. If councillors do not find themselves acting against their group, it is unlikely to be due to a lack of such issues and events of community significance. The totally acquiescent ward or division is a rare, if not extinct, phenomenon.

¹ Gyford, Leach and Game, *The Changing Politics of Local Government*, pp. 257-266.

² Widdicombe committee, *Research Vol. IV*, Chapter 4, 'Diversity, Sectionalism and Local democracy' pp. 106-131.

³ P. Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, pp. 39-42.

⁴ H. Elcock, *Local Government: Politicians, Professionals and the Public in Local Authorities*, London, Methuen, 1982, p. 14.

⁵ W. Hampton, *Local Government and Urban Politics*, p. 135. Hampton and Pike provide an analysis of an interesting experiment in public participation in the planning process undertaken by Leichardt Municipal Council, Australia, after a change of political control in 1971. W. Hampton and P. Pike, 'The Open Council and Public Participation: The Leichardt Experience', *Policy and Politics*, 3 (1), September, 1974, pp.37-50.

With the importance of issues and party affiliation already established, in earlier chapters of this thesis, the first section of this chapter considers the options available to councillors in terms of action and theatres for action. The second section considers the influence on the councillor of the theatres within which they are able to act. The third section looks at the importance the 'issue' itself has actually had on councillors' representative behaviour and the disparity between what councillors say they would do, and what they actually do. The consideration of actual occurrences as against likely activity and the search for the source of such variation is a necessarily tentative process which must recognise that, for some councillors, issues of this sort will simply have not arisen. Yet there is an increasing possibility that they will.

The fourth section considers the influence of the party group as a determinator of actual councillor action and theatre selection and whether that influence is common to all councillors, irrespective of their political affiliation. It considers the influence of the group in two ways; first as a factor common to the experience of all party councillors and secondly in terms of the differences between councillors of different political affiliations. This chapter reports the findings of the research conducted amongst councillors of the three main political parties and excludes party independent councillors. Thus when the term 'all councillors' is applied this refers only to all councillors that have responded as a member of a political party.

ACTING AS A REPRESENTATIVE: CONSTRUCTING A MEASURE.

As indicated in chapters 4 and 5 councillors face a range of situations requiring them to take representative action based on the use of the discretion attaching to their office. That action will be based on a number of factors: the issue concerned, the electorate's level of interest, and articulation of interest, in the issue; and the theatres and acts of representation available. This assessment will be set against the councillor's knowledge of the expectations of group loyalty from their own political party and the specific group of which they are a member.

Councillors are faced with issues that may be located internally or externally to their own electoral areas but the issues themselves may fall into three further categories. First there are issues of general policy that may or may not have a specific locational impact. Secondly, there are matters of conscience, unconnected to a specific location. Thirdly, there are issues which emanate from, and are specific to, the area actually represented. Similarly an issue may impact on one or more electoral areas, either as a result of policy considerations or as a result of some specific local factors. As well as these categories of issues, councillors are faced with the need to decide which combination of theatre they will use and act they will perform in response. Moreover, as issues develop councillors may have to reappraise, if not change, their approach as pressure may mount to move across the theatres of representation from closed to open settings.

The survey

To ascertain the actual occurrences of councillors speaking or voting against the group in a range of theatres of representation and the frequency with which they acted the respondents were asked the following question:

i) during your time as a councillor have you ever spoken against group decisions?

In response, of the 548 political party councillors that returned the questionnaire, 481 indicated that they had spoken against the group. Those councillors were then presented with a series of theatres in which they might have spoken and asked to indicate where they had spoken. The theatres presented were; the party group; party meeting; private meeting; public meeting; local press, local radio or television; council committee, and full council.

All respondents were then asked:

i) during your time as a councillor have you ever voted against a group decision?

In response, of the party political councillors, 401 indicated that they had voted against the group. Those councillors were then presented with a series of theatres in which they might have voted and asked to indicate where they had voted. The theatres presented were the party group; party meeting; council committee, and full council.

Finally, councillors were asked to indicate on how many 'issues' - one, two or three - they had either spoken or voted against their group. The number of issues on which the councillor has acted against the group indicates the real impact of the group. If a councillor acts only on one issue of significance, but on all other issues and occasions accepts the group line, then the group can be considered to have a powerful influence on the representative undertakings of the councillor. The more issues on which the councillor has actually acted against the group the weaker is the influence of the group and thus its position within the processes of representative democracy.

Three important considerations must be taken into account here. First, are the differences in the reported willingness to use particular open and closed theatres of representation reflected in the actual selection of theatres for acts undertaken? Secondly, are there differences between the actual percentage of councillors reporting that they had spoken or voted against their own party group in comparison to those indicating their 'likelihood' of speaking or voting? Thirdly, are there any identifiable variations in reported acts of speaking and voting against group decisions, across the political parties?

The questionnaire at this point did not differentiate between issues located internal and external to the councillor's own electoral area, as the collection of such data would rest too heavily on the accuracy of the individual councillor's recall of the details of issues and the causes of their own particular actions. This recall, especially if the issues occurred some time ago, cannot be guaranteed to produce accurate reporting of past acts or where they were conducted. As a result, presented here is evidence of all actual occurrences of councillors acting against the group. Use will be

made of interview material, case studies and participant observation to assess the rationalisation behind councillors' actions.

When councillors report 'likely' behaviour they may be reporting actual behaviour undertaken; that is, that if you have undertaken an act you are obviously more 'likely' to undertake such an act. The existence of one enhances the possibility of the other. To overcome this bias the questionnaire asked specific questions regarding 'likely' behaviour when faced with a crisis of representation with the location of issues both internal and external to the area represented. With the reporting of actual behaviour, councillors were asked to report any incidents of speaking or voting against the group.

ACTION AGAINST THE GROUP: THE INFLUENCE OF THEATRE.

The logic of the discussion here follows that of chapter 5 in that the acceptance or rejection of open (and thus electorally legitimised) theatres of representation, for action by the councillor can be compared with action in closed settings.

Tables 6.1 presents the responses from councillors when asked about occasions on which they had spoken against the party group, and in which theatre they had undertaken this act.

Table 6.1. Councillors: speaking against the group by party

Spoken		Labour	Lib Dem	Con
		%	%	%
Group				
Yes		87	88	88
No		9	5	7
base		(217)	(92)	(213)
Party meeting				
Yes		86	78	81
No		11	12	10
base		(215)	(89)	(205)
Committee				
Yes		32	54	61
No		62	33	29
base		(210)	(86)	(203)
Council				
Yes		21	42	46
No		71	43	40
base		(205)	(85)	(195)

As can be seen councillors across the political spectrum report that the party group meeting is the prime theatre above all others, open or closed, in which speaking against their own group has actually been undertaken. The percentage of those councillors across all parties reporting that they had never spoken against the group within the group itself is tiny by comparison. Party affiliation of the councillor makes little or no difference to the actual incidence of the member using the group meeting to speak against a group policy or decision. The party group is clearly seen by all councillors as a legitimate theatre in which to speak out and an important part of the mechanisms of representative democracy.

The ease with which councillors indicated in chapter 5 that they would shift between the group and a wider local party meeting is borne out in table 6.1 which presents the incidence of councillors having used the local party meeting to speak against the group. There is a lower actuality of councillors using this theatre when compared to speaking out in group, which is most marked amongst Liberal Democrat councillors. Those councillors reporting that they had never spoken against the group in a meeting of the local party were a relatively small proportion of the respondents, but Liberal Democrat councillors have used the closed local party meeting to speak against the group with less frequency than either Labour or Conservatives. This is perhaps a surprising result for a party underpinned by a balance of individualism and community politics.

There is a dramatic reduction in the incidence of councillors having actually spoken against the party group when the theatre of representation shifts from a closed setting to the open council committee. This tendency is marked across all parties, but as table 6.1. indicates the reduction is most marked amongst Labour councillors. The variation between those councillors that had spoken in group as compared to committee is 55 per cent for Labour, 34 per cent for the Liberal Democrats and 27 per cent for the Conservatives. When the theatre of representation shifts from the closed arena to the open and electorally legitimised setting of the council committee meeting it is the Conservative councillor who reports the greatest use of the committee in which to speak out against a policy or decision of the party group.

The reduction in actual use of an open theatre to speak continues as the arena of representation shifts to the open theatre of the full council. Again, it is Labour councillors who have rejected to a far greater degree than their

Conservative or Liberal Democrat counterparts, the open full council when it comes to speaking against the group. The variations between those councillors speaking against the group in closed group meetings as compared to open full council meetings are 66 per cent for Labour, 46 per cent for the Liberal Democrats and 42 per cent for the Conservatives. In no case has the percentage of councillors speaking out in council exceeded 50 per cent for any party, although twice as many Liberal Democrats and Conservatives have so acted than have Labour councillors.

The pattern, then, is of a decline in the actuality of the representative act of speaking as the theatre shifts outwards from the group to the public and electorally legitimised forum of committee or council. As can now be anticipated, when considering the representative act of voting against the group, it occurs, far less often than speaking and a similar pattern of decline is recorded as the theatre of representation moves away from the closed party group meeting towards more open theatres.

Table 6.2 presents the responses from councillors when asked about occasions on which they had voted against the party group, and in which theatre they had undertaken this act.

Table 6.2 Councillors: voting against the group by party

Voted		Labour %	Lib Dem %	Con %
Group				
Yes		74	71	74
No		16	12	12
base		(200)	(82)	(192)
Party meeting				
Yes		68	58	67
No		21	21	16
base		(200)	(78)	(185)
Committee				
Yes		24	49	51
No		65	25	32
base		(199)	(73)	(187)
Council				
Yes		13	44	40
No		73	32	44
base		(194)	(76)	(187)

The group represents for councillors the preferred theatre of representation for voting against that group. When the theatre shifts to that of a local party meeting a decline in instances of the councillor undertaking a vote against their group is recorded. The Liberal Democrats again show the sharpest decline of the three parties when the theatre shifts from group to party in voting, as they did with speaking. Although 16 per cent of Conservatives had not voted against the group within a party meeting, both Labour and Liberal Democrats record some 21 per cent having not voted against the group in the closed local party meeting.

The decline in incidence of voting against the group continues unabated and across the party spectrum as the theatre of representation shifts from closed theatres to the open arena that is the council committee. The variation between councillors who had voted in the group when compared to committee is 50 per cent for Labour and 22 and 23 per cent respectively for Liberal Democrats and Conservatives. Twenty-five per cent of the Liberal Democrats, 32 per cent of the Conservatives and by comparison a not inconsiderable 65 per cent of Labour councillors had not voted against the group in the theatre of the council committee.

The responses display a decline in protest voting that is indicative of a pattern of the actual representative behaviour of councillors, but it is apparent from table 6.2 that in the theatre of the full council the act of voting against the group, is a rare, but a not unknown event. It is clear from this table that Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors had 'out-voted' Labour councillors in council by over 3 to 1, with only 13 per cent of Labour councillors reporting a vote against the group at full council. As can be seen from table 6.2 although 44 per cent of Conservatives and 32 per cent of Liberal Democrats had never voted against the party group in full council, neither had a staggering 73 per cent of Labour councillors. This indicates a very powerful rejection by the Labour councillor of the electorally legitimised and open theatres of representation in favour of party group loyalty.⁶

⁶ Newton asked his respondents 'Have you ever 'openly' disagreed with a policy decision of your group - by 'openly' I mean in council or committee?' and 'Have you ever abstained or voted against your party group in council or committee?' questions 27 and 29, p. 249. He found that 'About half the sample were party faithfuls, the other half being equally split between rebels and abstainers', p. 124, also see table 6.2, p. 120. Indeed, he noticed the tendency for rebels to be more interested in policy

Table 6.3 presents the variation across the political spectrum between the act of speaking and voting, within the theatres of representation being considered.

Table 6.3. Percentage difference between speaking and voting

Theatre	Party	Spoken %	Voted %	Percentage Difference
Group	Labour	87	74	-13
	Lib Dem	88	71	-17
	Con	88	74	-14
Party meeting	Labour	86	68	-18
	Lib Dem	78	58	-20
	Con	81	67	-14
Committee	Labour	32	24	- 8
	Lib Dem	54	49	- 5
	Con	61	51	-10
Council	Labour	21	13	- 8
	Lib Dem	42	44	+ 2
	Con	46	40	- 6

matters, whilst abstainers preferred dealing with individual problems. This policy or representational division was also related to the question of control and opposition with controlling Labour councillors more concerned with policy and the minority Conservative group with individual problems. p. 129. Policy rather than representation or locational issues then, more likely to encourage the councillor to act against the group. Newton, *Second City Politics*.

Across the parties there is an identifiable difference between councillors having spoken and voted against the group, although the differences between the parties is slight. The Liberal Democrats report the greatest variation between speaking and voting in group and local party, but the lowest in the open theatres of committee and council. In full council Liberal Democrats reported - uniquely - having voted against the group more often than they had spoken. It must be noted, however, that for the Labour councillor the percentage variation between having spoken and voted is reflective of a far lower base level of activity than either the Liberal Democrat or Conservative councillor.

Tables 6.4 - 6.6 show the differences between councillors acting in the group and in other theatres of representation for each of the parties in turn.

Table 6.4. Labour councillors: percentage variation between acting in group and other theatres of representation

Theatre	Spoken %	Voted %
Group	87	74
Party	86	68
% Difference	+ 1	+ 6
Group	87	74
Committee	32	24
% Difference	+55	+50
Group	87	74
Council	21	13
% Difference	+66	+61

Table 6.5. Liberal Democrat councillors: percentage variation between acting in group and other theatres of representation

Theatre	Spoken	Voted
Group	88	71
Party	78	58
% Difference	+10	+13
Group	88	71
Committee	54	49
% Difference	+34	+22
Group	88	71
Council	42	44
% Difference	+46	+27

Table 6.6. Conservative councillors: percentage variation between acting in group and other theatres of representation

Theatre	Spoken	Voted
Group	88	74
Party	81	67
% Difference	+ 7	+ 7
Group	88	74
Committee	61	51
% Difference	+27	+23
Group	88	74
Council	46	40
% Difference	+42	+34

When comparing the closed theatre of the party group and local party it is the Labour councillor who reports the smallest variation between the acts of speaking and voting. When comparing the difference between those same acts undertaken in the group with the open theatre of committee and council, Labour councillors record the highest percentage variation. Liberal Democrats report the lowest variation between voting in group and voting in council and committee, whilst Conservatives report the lowest variation between speaking in group and in council and committee.

The Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors have repeated in open theatres the acts undertaken in closed settings with a far greater frequency than their Labour counterparts. This indicates that for both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats the acts of speaking and voting in group or party have been transferred to the public arena to a greater degree than has been the case with Labour councillors. The Labour councillor, then, confined protest to the group and did not transfer that act to open and thus observable theatres of representation to the same extent as the Conservatives or Liberal Democrats. It remains now to consider the number of issues on which the councillor has undertaken the acts of speaking or voting against the group.

ACTING AGAINST THE GROUP: THE IMPACT OF ISSUES

Representative acts

The analysis in the above section is based on the responses obtained from councillors to the question had they ever spoken or voted in the open and

closed theatres of representation presented to them. They were then asked for how many issues had they spoken or voted in any of those theatres.

The responses presented below are based on a simple reporting by the councillor of the number of issues on which they have spoken and voted against the group, without asking them to further sub-divide their responses between theatre of representative act or issue location. The responses are from those councillors who have responded particularly to the 'filter' question about actual behaviour.

Table 6.7. Action against the group: number of issues

Act	Party	One issue %	Two issues %	Three issues %	base
Spoken					
	Lab	26	17	8	180
	Lib Dem	24	22	4	70
	Con	26	19	6	185
Voted					
	Lab	18	14	4	123
	Lib Dem	24	10	6	53
	Con	19	12	6	132

Table 6.7 displays the beginnings of a pattern indicating a number of approaches taken to actual representative behaviour. First, councillors speak more often than they vote against the group. Secondly, most councillors acted on a single issue and thirdly, acting against the group declines as the number of issues increases, up to a total of three issues. Thus it is the issue itself that is the determining feature of the behaviour of the representative, rather than any councillors tendency to be a party rebel

or to focus on the electorate. Although the 'issue' itself is important to the councillor's use of representative discretion, the overwhelming majority of councillors have used that discretion in such a way as to take no action against the group.

The response pattern does however confirm the conclusions of chapters 4 and 5. Councillors not only consider themselves more likely to speak rather than vote against the group but report having actually done so. With actual activity against the party group there is a similarity of response across the three political parties, which conflicts with the differences in reported 'likelihood' of so acting considered in chapters 4 and 5. This needs to be weighed against the small numbers that had undertaken acts against the group. The highest responses were in the single issue category, being the 26 per cent of Liberal Democrat and Labour councillors that report having spoken against the group, and the 24 per cent of Liberal Democrats that report having voted against the group.

It remains now to be seen if there exists a divergence between what councillors say is their 'likely' use of representative discretion, and what they have reported as actually having undertaken in terms of representative activity and the focus of that activity.

The councillor: disparity between intention and action

The research for this work has been based on two approaches to the use of representative discretion by the councillor, first, the 'likelihood' of certain acts being undertaken and secondly, the actual undertaking of those acts within the various closed or open theatres of representation. Table 6.8 below shows that there exists a divergence between the stated 'likelihood'

of a councillor acting against the group and the actual occurrence of such acts. The surprising element is the generally slight nature of that divergence in most cases.

It was asserted earlier that the totally issue-free and acquiescent ward or division is a rarity in the local political environment, especially in the light of the idea of 'event-driven democracy' as a motivator to community interest and activity in local issues. In that case, it is necessary to consider here the link between party affiliation and the reporting by councillors of 'likely' and actual acts against the group. Are councillors of a particular political party more likely to diverge from their reported 'likelihood' of acting when actually undertaking representative acts? What influence does the party group have as a source of this divergence? To address these questions it is necessary to consider the scope of the divergence between likely and actual behaviour.

Tables 6.8 - 6.10 below present the 'very likely' and 'likely' responses of action for issues located internally to the ward or division and compare these with the extent to which they were actually undertaken. In the table a negative score indicates that there were more 'likely' than 'actual' responses and a positive score indicates that there were more 'actual' than 'likely' responses. A positive score thus indicates an excess of positive action undertaken over the reporting of likely action, and a negative score indicates an excess of those indicating they were 'likely' to act, but in fact have not acted.

The analysis is concentrated on a comparison between the responses by councillors to the statements regarding 'likely' action for an issue located within the ward or division represented and the responses for acts

undertaken. Chapters 4 and 5 showed that the councillor is far more likely to act against the group when the issue is located within their own electoral area rather than external to it. It is safe to assume for the purposes of this work then, that when the councillor reports acts of representation actually undertaken, that the issue location would be within their own electoral area, if they are not reporting action on a general policy question.

Table 6.8. Labour councillors: disparity between likelihood of action and acts against the group; issues internal to the area represented

Labour	Likely/ Have acted	Group %	Party meeting %	Committee %	Council %
	Very Likely/ Likely to Speak	93	92	38	24
	Have spoken	87	85	32	20
% difference		-6	-7	-6	-4
	Very Likely/ Likely to Vote	77	79	17	10
	Have Voted	74	68	24	13
% difference		-3	-11	+7	+3

Table 6.9. Conservative councillors: disparity between likelihood of action and acts against the group; issues internal to the area represented

Conservative	Likely/ Have Acted	Group %	Party Meeting %	Committee %	Council %
	Very Likely/ Likely to Speak	93	88	72	61
	Have spoken	88	81	61	46
% difference		-5	-7	-11	-15
	Very Likely/ Likely to Vote	79	76	43	33
	Have Voted	74	67	51	40
% difference		-5	-9	+8	+7

Table 6.10. Liberal Democrat councillors: disparity between likelihood of action and acts against the group; issues internal to the area represented

Lib Dem	Likely/ Have Acted	Group %	Party Meeting %	Committee %	Council %
	Very Likely/ Likely to Speak	99	95	65	58
	Have spoken	88	78	53	42
% difference		-11	-17	-12	-16
	Very Likely/ Likely to Vote	91	87	49	43
	Have Voted	71	58	48	44
% difference		-20	-29	-1	+1

Table 6.8 indicates that although a disparity between likelihood of action and acts undertaken by the Labour councillor is evident, the size of this divergence is not considerable, the largest, 'representational gap' for the Labour councillor is the 11 per cent drift between those combined responses for councillors 'likely' to vote against the group in a party meeting and those that have undertaken this act in such a setting. This difference is an identifiable, but not sizeable 'representational gap'.

What is evident from the table is the 'representational gap' between those that have acted in closed theatres and those that have acted in open theatres of representation. The divergence between the 85 per cent plus of Labour councillors that have acted in group and party compared to open theatres, indicates that these theatres of representation are greatly preferred by the Labour councillor. In two examples, committee and council, Labour councillors have actually voted in excess of their 'likelihood' of voting.

Table 6.9 shows that for the Conservative councillor a similar 'representational gap' between likely and actual behaviour is evident and, as with Labour, this gap is not considerable. The greatest divergence existing between the combined categorisation for those Conservative councillors 'likely' to speak against the group in council, and those who have spoken, a difference which stands at a 15 per cent. As with the Labour councillor, the Conservative has also voted in committee and council to a greater extent than the reported 'likelihood' that they would so vote. In both cases this is probably a result of the same councillor voting on the same issue on different occasions in council and committee, despite the number of issues being stressed in the questionnaire.

The gap between those Conservatives preferring to act in closed theatres as opposed to open theatres of representation is again evident, but not as pronounced as the preference gap between these theatres for the Labour councillor.

Table 6.10 shows that the Liberal Democrat councillor maintains the pattern established by Conservative and Labour councillors in that a 'representational gap' exists between 'likely' and actual behaviour. What is

interesting from the Liberal Democrat responses is that from the matrix of eight possible theatres and activities and the 'likely' and 'actual' behaviour, it is the Liberal Democrat who records the greatest disparity between likely and actual behaviour in seven of the eight elements of the matrix.

The representational gap for the Liberal Democrat councillor ranges from 11 per cent in regard to speaking in group to 29 per cent voting in the party. Unlike the Labour and Conservative councillors, actual incidents of Liberal Democrats voting in excess of their 'likelihood' of voting, occurs only in the case of the (highly public) full council.

The disparity between likelihood of action and acts undertaken against the group, identified in tables 6.8 - 6.10 indicates that the likelihood of action is marginally greater than the actuality of such action and that the Labour and Conservative councillors display a closer relationship between the reported 'likelihood' of action and the actual undertaking of that action than exists for the Liberal Democrats. The quite dramatic divergence, by comparison, for the Liberal Democrat councillor between 'likelihood' and acts undertaken in regard to speaking in the party and voting in the group and party indicate a greater rejection of these closed theatres of representation than is evident amongst their Labour and Conservative counterparts.

The Liberal Democrat as with the Labour and Conservative councillor, does however display a 'representational gap' between closed and open theatres, preferring the closed to the open theatre of representation for acts undertaken. The response rates for the Liberal Democrats here are closer to those of the Conservatives rather than Labour councillors, indicating a centre-right symbiosis in the actual conducting of representational acts in

open or closed theatres. However, the actual incidence of acts against the group in open settings exceeds their 'likelihood' for both Labour and Conservative councillors to a greater extent than that of the Liberal Democrats. The affinity in terms of acts in the closed group and party meeting is of the left-right with the responses from Labour and Conservative councillors closer on this aspect. The preference amongst all councillors is still however for the secrecy of the closed theatre and particularly the party group.

THE POWER AND INFLUENCE OF THE PARTY GROUP.

The research presented in the previous section indicates that, irrespective of party, councillors are not only more likely to act within the party group as opposed to any other theatre of representation but actually did so to a greater degree than in any other theatre. Councillors prefer the secrecy of the group and the party to open theatres of representation. It also revealed that party affiliation indicates only the degree of difference between councillors in preferring the group as a forum for representation, and that such a preference does not rest solely with the Labour member. It is clear that Labour councillors focus on the group and away from council and committee to a greater extent than do the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, but they are not unique in doing so, and this preference for the private theatre is shared by all councillors. It also appears to be the case that Labour councillors consider the group a legitimate theatre of representation, a view which, whilst not necessarily explicitly shared in comment by their Conservative and Liberal Democrat colleagues, is shared in the actuality of their behaviour.

The responses from councillors show that the 'speak' or 'vote' dichotomy is indeed a real one. Councillors are more likely to 'speak' against the group than they are to 'vote' against it and this holds so across the political parties and the various theatres of representation. Councillors across the parties indicate not only a preference in their actions for closed theatres - and in particular the party group - but also a divergence between their reported likelihood of acting in a particular way - in a particular theatre of representation - and the actuality of their behaviour. What is clear from the research is that this divergence is not peculiar to one particular party affiliation, but is a shared aspect of councillors' experiencing of representation within a local political system in which the party group holds a dominant position.

A number of questions need to be addressed at this stage. Why have councillors acted in the group as opposed to the open and electorally legitimised theatres of representation? Why does there exist a divergence in likely and actual representative behaviour? What is the impact on these two questions of the party affiliation of the councillor? What is the role of the party group in solving this equation? To answer these questions requires moving away from the survey to consider other sources of evidence.

Sources of group loyalty

A Labour district council back-bencher in interview gave this categorical assurance of group loyalty:

I have not ever, and cannot conceive of ever, doing anything in public, that would embarrass or go against the group. Look

what they are doing in (name of council) anyone could get involved in that decentralisation business, even the National Front. No the group comes first.

This was reinforced by a Labour chief whip from a metropolitan authority:

I am popular with the leader at the moment because I got the group to support the (named development) and there was a lot of opposition to it. I swayed some by saying that some of the money for this, matched by Europe would come into their wards. Others, I convinced them by saying that at the end of the day the group has got to stick together. You see we agree in group what will happen in council and don't leave anything to chance. That's the way we like to run things.

This use of both an appeal to loyalty and an element of resource-linked inducement, (not to the individual only through benefits accruing to the ward represented), occurs across the parties and is also evident from the case study material in part 3 of this thesis.

A Liberal Democrat county and district councillor however, in stating a preference for freedom of speech, in committee, although interestingly not in full council, stated that:

Yes I have spoken against the group in committee on a number of occasions, a committee is a working body, the democratic process is that you tease out issues, the Labour attitude is that you can pre-determine everything in the group and you will hear nothing that will change your mind. If you have to talk and

listen to other views then you may be swayed. If the arguments are sound I want to give myself the opportunity to be swayed by them. Labour say no, we will not be swayed, in public any way. It is no use having these pre-determined block votes, it just doesn't feel right.

The same Liberal Democrat went on however to summarise much of the evidence collected from Liberal Democrat councillors. A preference was expressed for decision-making within group meetings, whilst maintaining a willingness to be open to persuasion and to avoid adopting a compulsion on their members to follow the group line:

In the end I go back to loyalty, if I have not managed to persuade the majority of the Liberal Democrat group of my position then my action must be speaking my mind and an abstention, not a vote against. We try to generate loyalty to the group, but not at the expense of expressing a view and persuading, but it is how you do it. You generate loyalty by respecting the rights of the councillor to hold and express a view at variance with the majority of their colleagues, express it, even in public at committee, and abstain, but don't vote against. If you treat people fairly, and give them a hearing, most will go along.

While we have this laissez-faire approach with a commitment to corporatism or collective responsibility at the heart of it, at the same time, if we, as Liberal Democrats don't respect the individual then where does the individual go as they wouldn't get anything from the other two parties.

A Liberal Democrat borough councillor however, took a different approach:

Making a decision in private and then all following it in public, whatever you actually think is immoral if you ask me. I was talking to some of the Labour councillors the night before full council and they said to me "look, we don't all agree with what [named leader of the Labour group and council] is doing on this". But, when it came to the full council meeting they just sat there and stuck their hands up in the air for it and looked around as though nothing was happening. I shouted across the chamber to them "what the bloody hell are you lot playing at, you all disagreed with him [Labour leader] last night now what are you doing". I couldn't act like that I just couldn't do it.

In fact some of our lot have told me that the Labour people keep saying "oh he's all right old [his name] when is he coming over to us" but its that all act together business that stops me. I am a Quaker, and my family have been Quakers for 200 years and so I believe in making decisions by consensus, but even so I don't expect everyone to follow those decisions, regardless of what they think.

This councillor did however recognise that:

Yes, there is some merit to having an agreed line decided amongst ourselves, a sort of agreed objective, if you like, but it is whether you all have to go along with it, no matter what you think, or where you are that really counts to me.

The party group however, was noted by councillors across the political spectrum as the theatre in which ideas could be floated and considered in private and therefore unconstrained debate. It is seen as a place where councillors, and back-benchers in particular, can flex their muscles against the leadership and officers, without the repercussions of what would follow from doing so in public. Councillors also see the group as a private theatre for the consideration of officers' reports without the interference of the public, press or opposition.⁷

It is the 'public' element of disagreement that councillors fear, as this holds their group and party up to ridicule, embarrassment and the possibility of defeat in council, as well as to accusations of disunity, conflict and double standards which may damage that party electorally in both the local and national arena. How real those fears are is open to debate, but this research indicates that such fears are 'real' to the councillors concerned and therefore worthy of note and comment.

The 'protective' nature of the party group was not however the prime virtue of the secrecy which accrues through the focusing of representation on the group. It was the group as a loyalty-demanding source and the construction of a 'contract of loyalty' between the group and the individual councillor, which councillors referred to as a benefit of acting in the group meeting as opposed to any other forum for representation. The contract

⁷Green provides examples of the difficulties experienced by councillors in challenging the recommendations of officers and committee chairs, even in the group. Green, *Power and Party in an English City*, pp. 122-124. Chapter ten also considers the group pre-meetings, the back-bench councillors 'main chance to exercise influence on committee decisions', p. 111 and how these pre-meetings may not give councillors as much influence as they would like, pp. 111-134.

between the councillor and the group is considered in greater detail in the final chapter. It is based on a four dimensional model of sources of group loyalty: loyalty born of fear, loyalty born of a psychological agreement, loyalty born of commitment to a physical contract (this affects particularly the Labour councillor) and loyalty to the group as a team or family.

Why is loyalty seen as a benefit of group membership rather than an obstacle to freedom of action for the councillor? A Conservative district councillor summed up the position thus:

In the Conservative group you are amongst colleagues and often amongst friends, there is a feeling of kinship, yes we have our disagreements but like a family they are quickly forgotten especially when faced with the Socialists. If I have a problem in my ward I discuss it with my colleagues, explain the problem, try to convince them of my arguments, if I win them over they will back me in the council, if not, well if I expect their backing if I win then I can't very well do my own thing if I don't manage to convince them, can I now? Once you get to a committee and even full council I could say my bit that is understood, but I won't get the support of the Socialists, or if I do their motives are not honourable they would only do it to make mischief if they could and any way I am not sure I would want their support.

I would rather have lost an issue amongst Conservative colleagues and accept that in council than get the support Socialists and win an issue for my ward.

A Conservative metropolitan borough councillor spoke of the group in these terms:

The influence of the group is a subtle one, you are a family, the idea is that we are all in this together, just like a family, the group even has this supportive and social side, we mix together, well some do, and if you stray from the path a sort of guilt is applied, just like in a family. You know the sort of thing, how could you do this to us, how could you not support us at a time like this. Its not even said in those words but you get the message soon enough, and some times it is said like that I suppose, we use guilt just like any family would but only as a uniting factor and we also give help, advice, support, friendship, a place to turn to.

Times are not good for us at the moment so you look to your family for support. We know we will loose some good colleagues this May and it will be like a bereavement, for them as well as the group that is left.

This vision of the party group as somehow representing a 'family' and thus being reflective of the loyalty offered to a family was not confined solely to representatives of the party of the family.⁸ It also found expression of a sort amongst Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors. A Labour metropolitan borough councillor and committee chair stated:

⁸ Newton found councillors using the same metaphor to describe their relationship to the party group. Newton, *Second City Politics*, pp. 123-124.

I know this sounds clichéd but we are a team, I suppose you could say that we even have kinship groups made up of people who came onto the council together, there are old friendships of some length amongst us. Look, and this is the really clichéd part, it is like supporting a football team, (sorry for the genderised example but it's the best I can think of), no matter how bad that team are, no matter how dreadfully they play or how often you criticise them or threaten never to go again, you just want to see them win. You don't like it when anyone else criticises them and you don't criticise them to supporters of other teams do you now? So we are together, Labour united you might say. So when problems occur there is a strong sense of loyalty people actually want to work problems out when they occur but work them out in the group, everyone has to give and take a bit and that is easiest in the group, then we can get on with the job of keeping the Tories out here and getting them out at the next general election.

The theme of loyalty, family and kinship was also echoed amongst Liberal Democrats with a district councillor commenting:

Politics can be lonely if you're not careful and you look for, well, shall I say, soul mates, now I would count every member of the Liberal Democrat group, except one, as a soul mate, I might have one soul mate amongst the Conservative group and, say, I might have three soul mates in the Labour group. I am happy to admit that, they wouldn't admit it though.

The group then is a place of comfort, support and mutual resolution of conflicts of conscience amongst political colleagues and often friends of some long standing. A danger exists here, of romanticising the group out of all proportion, and the existence of inter-group power plays, policy disputes and personality disagreements have been well-documented.⁹ A Labour metropolitan borough councillor commented of his political opponents within the party group thus:

You don't know the sort of people I am talking about, they are the political hard men, when the Tories ran this council if they couldn't get their way in group they would vote with the Tories, but now we, or rather they [the hard men!] are in control, if a Labour member so much as sneezes out of line they would have you out of the group. You just don't know what it is like here.

The secrecy of the group provides the councillor with an environment for the resolution of conflict and the settling of representational issues and disputes which the open committee and council can not replicate. Group secrecy and the loyalty that attaches to it is a contradiction built into the representational processes. This contradiction is best rationalised by the Labour councillor who refuses to identify the contradiction in the first place; for him or her, the group is simply the place where the real task of a councillor in terms of any representational activity and focus is undertaken.

⁹Green, *Power and Party in an English City*. K. Livingstone, *If Voting Changed Anything they'd Abolish It*,. D. Blunkett and K. Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis: The Town Halls Respond*, London, Hogarth Press, 1987. Gyford, Leach and Game, *The Changing Politics of Local Government*.

The Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillor has to work harder to address the contradiction of the focus on the group being juxtaposed with the legitimate and open forums of representation of committee and council. Whilst the Conservative and Liberal Democrat have used the open forums to a greater extent than the Labour councillor, their preference for closed debate in the actuality of representative behaviour is squared by reference to the group as a source of kinship or fellowship, of supportive and like minded individuals. The group plays the role of the contemporary family.

Divergence between likely and actual representation: as evidence of group power

Tables 6.8-6.10 indicated the existence of the disparity between the likelihood and the actuality of representative acts and shows a clear pattern of behaviour amongst councillors across the political spectrum. That disparity supports the conclusions of chapters 4 and 5 which considered the reported 'likelihood' of councillor action. If the disparity is small then councillors' statements of a 'likely' act of representation are closer to reality than if that disparity had been a considerable one.

Either way, the research so far has clearly indicated that the group exerts a loyalty-generating 'pull' on the representative action and focus of the councillor and that as a result there will be a shortfall between the 'likelihood' of the councillor acting against that group and their actually doing so. Any loyalty-demanding centre with the ability to discipline its members can influence their actions. However when those members are members as a result of voluntary action on their own part and have a pre-existing philosophical and political linkage to the organisation they are joining, the scope for disparity between likelihood of action and acts, is reduced. Leaving aside the possible absence of any issues which motivate

the councillor to disagree with the group, the question remains, what impact on the councillor as a representative is generated by the party group?

There may be very strong feelings of attachment amongst councillors to the party group of which they are a member. One Labour district councillor, who had suffered the sanction of withdrawal of the whip described it thus:

It is funny really, I had to do it I could not support the group policy in regard to this [named issue], but when at the group meeting they actually expelled me, it was like being ex-communicated, I imagine it is like what a teenage daughter feels if she gets pregnant and instead of getting the support of her family gets thrown onto the streets. Quite a few of my colleagues said they did not want to withdraw the whip and actually support my position on the [named issue], but they said I should have done it in the group, not in council. They reckoned that if I had of taken it to the group again we could of won, I doubt it.

The disciplinary element however, although a consideration for the councillor of any party does not always result in the ultimate sanction of withdrawal of the group whip. Green notes that in Newcastle there was a 'very strong support for the view that decisions of the majority must be supported' and that it was rare for Labour councillors to 'defy a decision of the full group or of a committee pre-meeting'. Despite a strong commitment to majority rule amongst the ruling Labour group in Newcastle at the time of his study, there was also an apparent reluctance

to withdraw the group whip from those Labour councillors that did defy a group decision.¹⁰

Green goes on to cite examples of group discipline from the work of Jones and Newton, reporting Jones as commenting that in regard to the Wolverhampton Labour group 'the common practice was for a deviant to be reported to the group, when an explanation was invited and was usually accepted' and reminds us that Jones 'found numerous cases where Labour councillors voted against group decisions'.¹¹

Green reports Newton finding that in the case of four Labour councillors who rebelled on one occasion some 'hard words' were 'delivered by group members and officers' but none of the rebels had any 'formal action taken against them'. In the early 1960s however, Newton also notes that an internal group dispute and case of disciplinary action did involve the withdrawal of the whip from eight councillors and went as far as involving the Labour Party's national agent before being resolved.¹² Green himself reports that in Newcastle 'disciplinary action normally took the form of issuing warnings to individual councillors, or seeking assurances from them about their future conduct'. He reports that during the period of his research 'no Labour councillors had the whip withdrawn'.¹³ The evidence presented here relates only to Labour groups; Bulpitt provides additional evidence of both the formal and informal nature of group discipline within Labour and Conservative groups.¹⁴ Much of the literature reports actual

¹⁰ Green, *Power and Party in an English City*, pp. 80-86.

¹¹ Jones, *Borough Politics*, p. 183.

¹² Newton, *Second City Politics*, pp. 259-260. p. 259

¹³ Green, *Power and Party in an English City*, p. 81.

¹⁴ Bulpitt, *Party Politics in English Local Government*, pp. 99-103.

disciplinary action. and indeed even withdrawal of the whip, as being relatively rare, or something to be avoided. Equally, cohesion amongst councillors can be generated by means other than disciplinary action. Jones provides examples of the approach of Wolverhampton Conservative group to group discipline which did not rely so much on formal disciplinary action, but more often on some other 'moral pressure'.¹⁵ Dearlove has considered how recruitment and behavioural rules ensure councillors' actions are 'predictable' and do not 'challenge the maintenance of established council policy'.¹⁶ Indeed, he reports a Conservative councillor as commenting '*they seem to be terrified on the council of Conservatives standing up in the council meeting and criticising a decision. You really have to be careful how you go about it*'.¹⁷

The findings for this study indicate that although councillors and leading councillors in particular, stressed the existence of and willingness to use disciplinary action, a preferred course of action is to avoid withdrawal of the whip and deal with differences of opinion and possible breaches of discipline by discussion, compromise and agreement. All of which, for each of the parties, would be considered within the party group with the aim of avoiding any expression by the member of public dissent from the position of the group, not only in committee or council but wider public arenas such as the press, media or public meetings.

Interviews were conducted with the leading councillors for a small sample of party groups: four Labour, two Conservative and two Liberal Democrat,

¹⁵ Jones, *Borough Politics*, pp. 200-201.

¹⁶ Dearlove, *The Politics of Policy in Local Government*, pp. 140-141.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 147. For a full discussion of how recruitment and behavioural rules were used in Kensington and Chelsea, see pp. 140-153.

who were questioned as to the number of occasions on which the whip had been withdrawn over the last four years. This line of questioning revealed that four Labour councillors, two Conservative councillors and no Liberal Democrat councillors had suffered that sanction and that three of the four Labour councillors had all been members of one particular district council. A Labour councillor on a neighbouring district council said:

Yes, (name of group) have a reputation for treating every slight misdemeanour as a disciplinary offence, they are known for it. Silly really because the appeal meeting either re-instates the councillor concerned or puts a time limit on the suspension period. They have just got a reputation for this and make themselves look silly, one or two individuals that are a bit carried away with things I suppose.

When questioned as to the frequency of the use of the ultimate sanction at the hands of the group itself, a Labour metropolitan borough councillor recalled, *'I can only remember two occasions on which that has happened in my 18 years on this council'*.

A Labour metropolitan chief whip from another authority stated:

we have only had one whip withdrawal in the last four years and that was for a local thing not national policy, you know nothing to do with when Militant were about. We withdrew the whip for not following the line and voting against the group.

A Conservative group leader said *'I have been leader for six years and we have not done that to any one in that time, or the eight years I remember before becoming group leader'*.

A Liberal Democrat gave a different opinion stating: *'er, I don't think we can do that, can we? I'd have to check the rule book, I don't ever remember anyone having the whip withdrawn, that's more Labour than us isn't it?'*

The feeling amongst councillors of all parties is that you do not vote against the group within the open theatres of representation. Speaking is accepted, normally after consultation with the group itself or the chair or shadow chair of a committee. Councillors from the three political parties, and from front-bench and back-bench positions accepted the need to restrict any acts of defiance or dissent to speaking or abstaining, falling short of voting against the group. Labour councillors were far more willing than Conservative or Liberal Democrat members to fetter themselves and accept that any acts against the group should be restricted to the party group meeting itself and not occur in the public theatres of representation.

If the question of disciplinary action is such that withdrawal of the whip is not a frequent method of securing the loyalty of the councillor to existing policy and decisions, then what are the other causes of group loyalty? Why are councillors across the political spectrum, willing to focus activity and loyalty on the group rather than the community they represent?

If fear is not the key then loyalty is born of political philosophy and the pre-dispositions toward representative democracy identified in chapter 3. Those predispositions indicated a fundamentally exclusive approach

amongst councillors, particularly Labour and Conservative, to the nature of their position as a decision-maker and to the various forums within which they operate. The attitude of councillors toward both representative democracy and their own position as 'representative' indicates support across the political parties for a 'focusing' on the party group as a theatre for representation. This attitude results in the group holding a powerful position within local democracy by virtue of the support for that role given by councillors and by the 'closed' nature of the group meeting as a theatre of representation.

The importance of the visibility of councillor action was emphasised by Green thus:

Many local government decisions and outcomes are visible to the citizenry, but there are many which are not. The utility of the election as a protective device is weakened in direct proportion to the lack of visibility of the actions of local government policy-makers.¹⁸

The party group is the least visible theatre for undertaking acts of representation and thus the least accountable. It is however the theatre favoured for acts of representation by councillors of all three political parties, over and above any other open or closed setting.

It is necessary to consider in more detail the impact of political affiliation on group loyalty and hence group influence in local democracy and to identify whether political affiliation generates shared or divergent attitudes

¹⁸ Green, *Power and Party in an English City*, p. 204.

towards such loyalty. It is also necessary to consider whether any source of group loyalty is a result of what might be termed 'affiliation' factors, that is resulting from political allegiance or 'non-affiliation' factors, that is, from the common experiences of representation which all councillors shared.

THE GROUP: PARTY AFFILIATION AND ACTS OF REPRESENTATION.

Tables 6.1 to 6.6 indicated the frequency with which councillors have spoken or voted against their group in either the closed or open theatres of representation. They also displayed the preference amongst all councillors for constraining such action to closed theatres, where that preference is strongest amongst Labour councillors. Why do councillors view the group as the focus of representation and what is the source of the affiliation differences in approach to the group?

The focus by councillors across the parties on the group as the main arena of representation can be categorised on two levels. First, there are sources common to all councillors irrespective of party affiliation ('non-affiliational' sources). Secondly there are sources reflective of, or resulting from, party affiliation, ('affiliational' sources). These categorisations apply to policy issues as they do to the representational issues which place the councillor in conflict with either the community represented or the party group.

Non-affiliational categories of group loyalty

The family

The group represents a 'safe' or 'representationally clean' environment in which the councillor can consider both straightforward and complex, politically contentious issues, within an atmosphere that is seen to be mutually supportive. Even though deep political and, on occasions personal matters will influence events, and despite many councillors reporting in interview that group meetings can be hard-fought affairs involving much personal animosity, the 'family' metaphor is often used to describe the group. That is, arguments are contained within this supportive environment, and that once a decision has been made it is maintained against a potentially hostile external political environment.

The idea of councillors 'keeping it in the family' presents a realistic image for many councillors of the way in which they approach the group. It is important that the 'family' is not criticised in the public theatres of representation, no matter how deep or wide-ranging the areas of disagreement.¹⁹ The family analogy for councillors is often merged with a view of the group as a protective and supportive 'kinship', 'team' or even 'clan' which defends the councillor from outsiders but in turn demands loyalty to the group against outsiders. This is a loyalty which most councillors seem happy to grant.

¹⁹ Indeed, Newton reports a councillor as saying 'one doesn't wash one's dirty linen in public', Newton, *Second City Politics*, p. 124.

A theatre for decision-making

Councillors from the three main parties see the group as a legitimate decision-making forum. It is only in respect of the rigidity with which those decisions are transferred into the public theatres of representation that party affiliational differences begin to arise. The group represents for all councillors an important and legitimate part of the decision-making processes that enables issues to be widely considered. It is an important counterbalance to the power of the officer and to pressure from the public or organised groups. The group is part of the decision-making process in which issues can be considered more freely than in open committee or council and therefore enables the airing of opinions that could not, and would not, be aired in the more public theatres.

As was stated by one metropolitan Labour councillor *'You can't have 60 or so people, jumping up and down all over the place, you would never get anything achieved that way'*. The group enables decisions to be made, in private, and in a way that the open and more critical theatre could not facilitate. The 'jumping up and down all over the place' is a process best conducted in private. In public the group 'jumps together'.

The advantage of organisation

The development of a group line is perceived by councillors across the party spectrum as providing a tactical, political advantage, a unified and cohesive approach offering the advantage of a solid bloc of support for or against particular issues. In this way it enhances the chances of success in

the committee or council chamber for a party line, thus indicating the benefit of group cohesion.²⁰

The acceptance of a particular councillor's need to pursue an issue located within their own ward or division to committee or council also has a greater chance of success if that councillor can secure the support of the group. Most councillors of both back-bench and front-bench positions, and across the party spectrum, indicate support in interviews for the concept of the 'local member' pursuing a local issue, a situation for which councillors have expressed sympathy and understanding, so long as that pursuance is conducted in a manner that does not threaten the group or conflicts with some policy matter or group decision.

A dichotomy arises in the question, at which point does a local issue become an issue of policy? The case study material reported later in this study indicates that the separation of subjects for decision into policy and local issues (the latter accruing greater support for councillor freedom to act in open theatres), indicates that for the local councillor a local issue on which the electorate expect the focus of representation to be placed on them, can often be, for the group, an issue of policy. The closure of a school, the construction of a road, the development of a major industrial area or the closure of a library or day centre are often issues for a local area but result from wider policy decisions taken by the group. The councillor may then be faced with a local issue but constrained by group policy on how to act with regard to that issue. Stoker has noted a number

²⁰ see, Young and Davies, *The Politics of Local Government Since Widdicombe*, pp. 47-50.

of cases in which ward-focused activity by councillors has successfully challenged local council policy.²¹

Councillors may accept the local member's right or duty to pursue a ward or divisional issue, but the greater the linkages of that issue to general policy decisions, the weaker the connection, from the perception of the party group, with the councillor's own local area. In reality, local issues can be almost 'de-localised' by the party group and thus expectations of councillor loyalty to the group are generated. Action aimed at the resultant local effects of policy issues on the member's ward or division are as likely to be confined to the privacy of the party group as any of the open theatres of representation. Councillor's willingness to shift that action beyond the confines of the group into open theatres, this research indicates, is a less likely option to be selected. It is also less likely to be taken by Labour councillors than Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

Affiliational sources of group focus

It is the Labour councillor who displays the strongest attachment to the concept of the group as a focus for representative activity and as a body which benefits from the representational processes. The attachment of

²¹G. Stoker, *The Politics of Local Government*. As evidence of local ward councillors successfully challenging council policy, Stoker cites Saunders, *Urban Politics*. G. Stoker and T. Brindley, 'Asian Politics and Housing Renewal', *Policy and Politics*, 13 (3), pp. 281-303. G. Stoker, *The Politics of Urban renewal in Withington Village, Manchester. 1962-1983*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Manchester, 1985, p. 99. For a case study of ward councillors acting in pursuit of 'objectives set by the local community' see, N. Dennis, 'Community Action, Quasi-Community Action and Anti-Community Action', in P. Leonard (editor), *Sociological Review Monograph*, 21 (2), 1975, pp. 143-163. p.147.

Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors to the group is constructed around philosophical and political needs, at variance with those of the Labour councillor. These come from an approach to the group based on the needs of practical politics but with a greater emphasis on 'local' needs, i.e. those stemming from the area represented. Labour councillors are not unsupportive of the councillor's right to conduct acts of representation that focus on the area represented, but they are more inclined to see those acts as properly taking place within the group itself. This is an approach taken to a lesser extent by Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors.

Approaches to representation

The Labour councillor views the party group as a legitimate beneficiary of the representational processes. It is the group which controls the council and it is the group, as a centre of democratic decision-making, to which the councillor owes representational loyalty. Although Labour councillors accept that certain issues will emanate from the area represented and will place the councillor in conflict with the group, that conflict should be, and, by and large is, contained within the group. It is rare for such issues to spill into the open arenas of representation. If they do, as with all councillors, the Labour member is more 'likely' to speak than vote against the group. The group is therefore seen as an integral part of the democratic processes of decision-making.

In a discussion at a Labour District Party meeting around an issue contained in the case study in chapter 8, the ability of a local ward party to select any Labour candidate who may, or may not, oppose a particular existing group policy, was called into question. An existing Labour councillor and committee chair commented:

I can't see what he's talking about selecting some one who might support the anti [named policy], resident people, that road is a policy of the Labour group and anyone selected supports the policy of the group, there's no room for people like that who do what they are told by people outside the group.

It was subsequently pointed out that the manifesto for the forthcoming local elections was constructed by a joint committee of officers of the Labour group and officers of the district party and that any policy options could be included in that, not necessarily existing Labour group policy.

At the same meeting a Labour councillor for the ward concerned commented '*all three [name of ward] councillors and the county councillor support the council's plans for the area we fully support our balanced approach to the issue*'. To which another of the councillors for the area responded '*oh do I, I don't and I have every sympathy for the protesters people, I just don't tell them or say it in public, you [the group] wont let me*'.²²

Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillors approach representation from a philosophical and practical base which results in a greater acceptance, in conceptual terms anyway, of the need for the councillor to be able to employ representative discretion without hindrance by the party group. The Conservative bases this approach on the rights of the individual councillor, the Liberal Democrat on a community-orientated focus. The member is free (or perhaps freer than the Labour councillor) to undertake

²² Labour councillors speaking at a district party meeting, November 1995.

acts of representation against the group, particularly if these acts are as a result of a local issue arising from the members own electoral area.

The expectation on Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillors is of loyalty to the group but there is an acceptance of the individual member's right to speak against the group and to abstain. Voting against the group, whilst accepted as legitimate by Liberal Democrats and Conservative councillors, is not seen as a wise move and is certainly an act of last resort. The Conservative councillor that votes against the group may find him or herself the recipient of group discipline, the intensity of which will reflect the nature of the group of which he or she is a member. Indeed, depending on the circumstances of an incident, abstention, could also result in a disciplinary response from the party group. A Conservative district councillor explained a particular experience of group discipline over a local issue thus:

At the end of the day I felt I could not support [named scheme] and when a vote was taken I, together with three of my fellow Conservative councillors, abstained and the vote was lost. All the rebels had to attend a special meeting of the group and we were all asked individually why we had abstained and not voted with the group. We then had to wait outside while the group decided what punishment we were to receive. I felt like resigning there and then. After about three quarters of an hour we where called back in and told that on this occasion we would all be seen individually by the group leader and made to apologise. It was like being back at school and going to see the Headmaster. After that I did vote against the group but I always made sure that I gave notice.

This approach to Conservative group discipline - being interviewed by the group leader or leadership - was referred to by a number of Conservative councillors in interview by reference to the 'headmaster' analogy. It is as though acting against group decisions is a form of errant behaviour worthy only of a troublesome schoolchild. It would appear that the sanctions do not necessarily end there, depending how strongly the group feel the recalcitrant members need to be taught a lesson. The Conservative councillor last quoted above continued:

Later that year two Liberal councillors joined the Conservatives and we took control of the council from no overall control, we were already the largest party. It was decided that the group would take all the chairmanships and vice-chairmanships and every Conservative councillor except one, me, got a position. I shall no doubt again be having differing views to my party and although unpleasant at the time at the end of the day I shall have the knowledge that I did what I thought was right.

Discipline, then, can be both formal and informal, and is often more effective when councillors impose their own self-discipline when faced with acting against the group over what is seen as a local issue.

Approaches to the office of councillor

Linked to the orientations to representation evident amongst councillors is the attitude taken to the office of the councillor. It is clear from interviews with councillors that the purpose of this office is interpreted differently by councillors of varying political affiliation. Labour councillors reject the notion of being a delegate of the electorate, and are more prepared to act

as a delegate of the local ward party if the issue is appropriate. They are still more prepared to act as delegate of the party group. The Labour councillor often views the office held as obtained by the virtue of a party label and thus to be used to pursue party advancement on two fronts. First is the local manifesto or group policy. Secondly, important to all Labour councillors interviewed, was the good behaviour of Labour councillors across the country as crucial to displaying Labour's general ability to govern and thus secure the return of a Labour government. One councillor summarised this view by stating:

We have to show we are credible in Government, everything you do as a councillor reflects on peoples' impression of our ability to govern nationally and that is extremely important for all Labour members, whatever council they may be on.

As well as a local decision-maker, the office of councillor is also one of party ambassador and as a result the party group must act in a 'governing fashion'. This approach accounts for the strength of loyalty to the group as a governing body transcending the needs of local representation around issues or events.

Conservative councillors in interview and from observation have an approach to the office of councillor which reflects an approach to representation which stresses the councillor as a decision-maker. The party group therefore assists in, but does not dictate that process. Are Conservative councillors more likely then to focus representation on the electorate rather than the group? The tables contained in this chapter indicate that may be so, for Conservative councillors have acted against the group in council and committee to a greater degree, in all but one case

(voting in council), than either Labour or Liberal Democrat councillors. But does that imply a focus on the electorate? Conservative councillors see the office of councillor as an unencumbered decision-maker and whilst they are less likely than Labour to follow a group line they are equally reluctant to allow the electorate outside the council chamber to direct their representative activities and decisions.

In interviews Conservative councillors were as forceful as their Labour counterparts in stressing the need for group loyalty and legitimising the group as a forum for, and focus of, representation. They also expressed considerable divergence from what they perceived to be the 'populist' approach of the Liberal Democrats. A Conservative metropolitan councillor criticised the Liberal Democrats thus:

The trouble with them is that they think they invented community. We have been working in our ward for ages on what you could call a community approach, that is how when we were losing seats all over the country last May, my colleague was re-elected with an increased majority in what was once a safe Labour seat. The Liberal Democrats say anything to anyone, they say what they think people want to hear and go public on things straight away with out thinking of the consequences six months down the road. Then even before the issue is dead, they move onto something else.

We work in the community and we are very forth right in our opinions, we will say in a leaflet we are going to crack down on this estate on rent arrears, scroungers, prostitutes, or whatever, but we don't say anything that we haven't considered in group,

or with the group leader and we don't say anything that we could not repeat anywhere in the borough. The Liberals just look for causes to use and say what people want to hear.

This form of community Conservatism sees the Conservative councillor with an active role within the area represented but one which is rooted in the dominant position within local democracy held by the party group. The community activity undertaken, is sanctioned by the group or at least notified to its leadership and is not contradictory of any decision or policy taken by that group. The same Conservative councillor also recalled attending a very difficult public meeting to defend the council's policy (then Conservative controlled) of privatising the laundry service on a council estate within his ward:

It was a very difficult meeting, but I agree with the policy. The people did not want it privatised, I stuck to the group decision, had a rough time on the night, but now two years latter everyone has forgotten about it and are happy with the service.

Conservative councillors were particularly scathing in interview of the mechanisms of influence that are available to the electorate to communicate a community opinion on a local issue. Petitions, letter campaigns in the local press and public meetings and wider campaigns have come in for criticism as unrepresentative, easily manipulated, contradictory, or as a biased sources of information. The Conservative councillor, then, uses the office of councillor as an information gathering, sifting and filtering position, from which the 'councillor' acts as a local decision-maker.

Conservative councillors have accepted in interview that this approach to the office of councillor is more prone to influence from the closeness of relationships with other councillors in the group than it is from attempts at influence from the electorate. This approach to representation is clearly a product of political philosophy. The family that is the group is able to exert a greater informal influence on the member than is the electorate. This approach in turn gives the group as much influence over the councillor as a representative, as any Labour group obtains by the use of a more structured approach to discipline, but which also rests on the informality of pressure from the group.

A Conservative group (and indeed a Liberal Democrat group) has as much impact on the activities of its members as any Labour group. The resultant perceptions of both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats of the activities of any Labour group with which they have had indirect experience, leaves them with a greater sense of freedom to act as a councillor than they perceive is possible for the Labour member.

Loyalty to the group then displays itself in different ways across the parties. A comment at a council meeting by the Labour chief whip accusing the Conservative group of lacking direction, contradicting one another, and then criticising the Conservative leader for disunity in his ranks, brought this retort:

Councillor [named councillor] is obviously very concerned even jealous of the freedom of speech we have on this side of the chamber, there may not be many of us but at least we can express more shades of opinion in meetings than the Labour

*group, who only ever seem to have one opinion. He is jealous, he is jealous of our free speech.*²³

The Liberal Democrat approach to the office of councillor is reflective of a community orientation toward representation but shares with the Conservative a need to feel unhindered by a firm policy line, particularly on ward or divisional issues. The councillor makes a decision within a group meeting and expectations of loyalty to that decision exist. The office of the councillor however can be used to pursue representational issues emanating from the area represented. If that brings the councillor into conflict with the group, then a deep appreciation has been expressed (by all councillors, but by Liberal Democrats in particular), that the office of councillor should be used to pursue these issues while ultimately loyalty is to the party group.

Avoidance of open defiance of the group has been stressed by Liberal Democrats as necessary for effective political action but the acceptance that such conflict may be unavoidable has also been stated quite firmly by Liberal Democrats in interviews. The group is a source of assistance to the office of councillor in pursuing representational issues, as well as a preferred centre of loyalty and representational focus.

The 'pull' of the party group in the representational process

The conclusions of the research presented in this chapter are that the divergence between 'likely' councillor representative acts and the actual occurrence of such acts is generated by a number of sources. Those sources include the existence of issues of community significance, the

²³ Conservative group leader, full council meeting, September 1995.

impact of those issues on a given location, the nature of any theatre for representation, the acts of representation open to the councillor, party affiliation and the expectation and acceptance of the need for loyalty to a party group. Factors generating the latter can also be sub-divided into affiliational and non-affiliational sources.

The 'pull' of the party group on the representative acts of the Labour councillor is greater than the pull of the party group on the Conservative or Liberal Democrat councillor. The representatives from these two parties indicate a predilection and actuality for acts against the party group that exceeds any such approach to representation amongst Labour councillors. Labour councillors reject the open theatres of representation in favour of the privacy of the party group, to a greater extent than Conservatives or Liberal Democrats. They also legitimise a focus on the group both as a theatre for, and a beneficiary of, representation, over and above that expressed by their Conservative and Liberal Democrat counterparts.

That the Labour councillor focuses to a greater degree on the group as a theatre for and a beneficiary of representation, in comparison to both Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors, is clear. The key distinction is whether the reluctance on the part of Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillors to identify the group as much more than a forum for deliberation, advice, support and direction (albeit one to which a rightful expectation of loyalty exists), results in councillors from those parties placing the electorate as the prime focus of their representational activities.

The evidence suggests that the approach of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats purports to lessen the image of the power of the group,

especially by reference to what is seen as unacceptable group coercion and power within the Labour Party. They also, however, reject the right of the electorate to expect the focus of representation and resultant representative activity to be solely an articulation of community demand. Although Liberal Democrats are uneasy at being seen to replace a focus on the community, with a focus on the group, they do attest to the need for group loyalty, but with a more flexible interpretation than that imposed by both Conservative and Labour groups.

This issue is not a repeat of the delegate or representative argument in regard to representation, which has already been considered as presenting an inadequate basis for an appreciation of the power of the party group within local representative democracy. Rather, it is an analysis which considers the group as benefiting from representative democracy because Labour councillors award to the group that legitimate right. Additionally, whilst Conservative and Liberal Democrats are at pains to avoid accusations of dictate by a party group, the very processes of group activity, the acceptance of a need for group loyalty and the role of the group as a forum for debate and decision-making, draws them away from the electorate and into the group.

The research presented so far indicates that the group does not have to use discipline to obtain loyalty. It merely has to exist within the framework of local representative democracy to ensure that the councillor will be drawn toward it as a decision-making forum and as a recipient of the loyalty of that councillor. The process may be intensified by the party affiliation of the councillor, but both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, whilst expressing their rejection of the group as a body to which they must always adhere, also express the need for loyalty to the group and

willingness to bestow it. Thus limiting the opportunity for the electorate to influence any councillor around an issue of significance for that community.

In order to explore these issues further and to fully understand the 'pull' on the councillors representative activities that the party group generates the next three chapters present and consider case studies in which councillors across the party divide have been faced with actual crises of representation. The chapters consider the issues inherent in those case studies and how councillors resolved the crisis of representation presented. As a result the case studies look particularly at the activity of the councillors for the wards or divisions most affected by the impact of the issues, and how they coped with the pressure they experienced from the electorate and the party group. The case studies look at where councillors concentrated their representative activities and where they focused their loyalty as a representative, to their electorate or the group.

The case studies taken together with the survey and interview material, alongside the opportunity for limited participant observation that has also underpinned this work, provide for an assessment of the power of the party group over the processes of local representative democracy. They are used to illustrate the processes by which the party group exerts a 'pull' on the representative focus of the local councillor. They also indicate the strength of the relationship between the councillor and the group and how, if at all, the councillor manages the tensions that occur when the group and the councillor experience pressure from the electorate.

PART III

CRISES OF REPRESENTATION

The three case study chapters that follow exemplify the interaction between councillors, the electorate and the party group. Specifically they consider the *crisis of representation* created for a councillor when decisions of the party group collide with the expressed opinions of the electorate and where both demand the councillor's loyalty on a particular issue.

Each of the case studies have been selected, first, because their specifics hold particular lessons for the experiencing of local representative democracy. Secondly, there are distinct differences in the cases in regard to the nature and level of the involvement by the three participants; the councillor, the group and the electorate, and in the activities undertaken by each. Thirdly, opportunities for participant observation existed as a result of the author's status as a councillor. Participant observation provided a closeness to the issues and a depth of understanding of the interactions between the group, councillors and the electorate and thus supplemented examination of the representative processes by other research techniques.

The subject of each episode is not the important aspect, and details are kept to the minimum necessary to understand the context of the interactions being considered. Two of the three cases studies - the open cast and the link road - are located within the same district council area. The third, a much larger issue of the construction of a new Relief Road, impacts on a number of local authority areas. However as the aspect of the case presented here is the conflict engendered between councillors and the electorate, only the areas in which such conflict arose are considered, so making a large and complex case study easier to manage and present.

The cases were selected as current and developing issues which are still, at the time of writing, the focus of community concern and councillor activity, rather than historic case study examples of past activity. In each episode, therefore, no firm conclusion to the issue had been reached.

7. THE OPEN CAST MINE EXTENSION.

This case study concerns the application for an extension to an existing open cast site. The National Coal Board gave Notice of Prospecting land at Heath Hayes, Rawnsley and Prospect Village in the District of Cannock Chase in 1978. In July 1983 The NCB submitted a Notice of Authorisation to extract 19 million tonnes of coal over 23 years on a site of 533 Hectares. Changes in legislation taking effect on 1 March 1984 meant the application had to be made to the mineral planning authority, Staffordshire County Council, which had already objected to the proposal. Subsequently the application was not pursued.

In May 1985 an application was submitted to work 6.3 million tonnes over 12 years on a 334 hectare site. Staffordshire County Council refused planning permission in December 1985. The former NCB, now British Coal, appealed against this refusal and in December 1986 the first of two Public Inquiries was held. The Secretary of State refused the appeal on the grounds of adverse effects on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

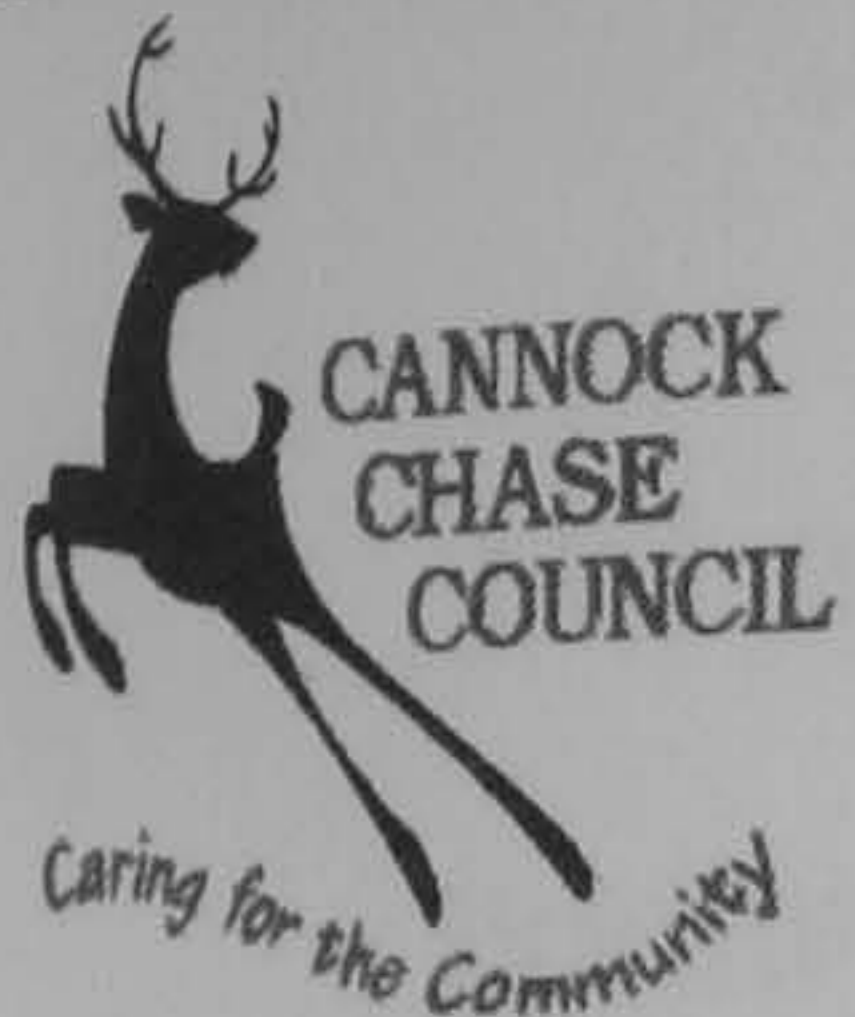
On 30 January 1989 British Coal submitted a revised planning application for 3.2 million tonnes over a five year period on a site of 314 hectares. On 13 June 1990 the county council again refused planning permission. British Coal appealed and after a second Public Inquiry, in September 1992, permission for the coaling of 3.2 million tonnes was granted. Coaling commenced on 11 April 1994, intending to cease in 1998. Restoration activities would continue until 2000, after-care and management responsibilities until 2005 with an additional after care period lasting on the site until 2015.

The period from the Notice of Authorisation in July 1983 to the grant of permission by the secretary of State in September 1992, was set against a high profile, if intermittent, community campaign. Opposition to the proposals came from; local action groups, three parish councils, a town council and district and county councillors and councils.

The opposition was partially successful as the permission granted by the Secretary of State, was for a site reduced in size and duration of coaling than that originally intended by British Coal. However, there was a widely held belief amongst councillors and community that British Coal would continue to apply for extensions until it secured by increments permission for mining of the entire reserve. At best all that could be hoped for was partial and temporary victories until this inescapable conclusion. By July 1994 public awareness of British Coal's intention to extend mining activities was widespread and this was officially applied for in October 1994, just six months after coaling had commenced.

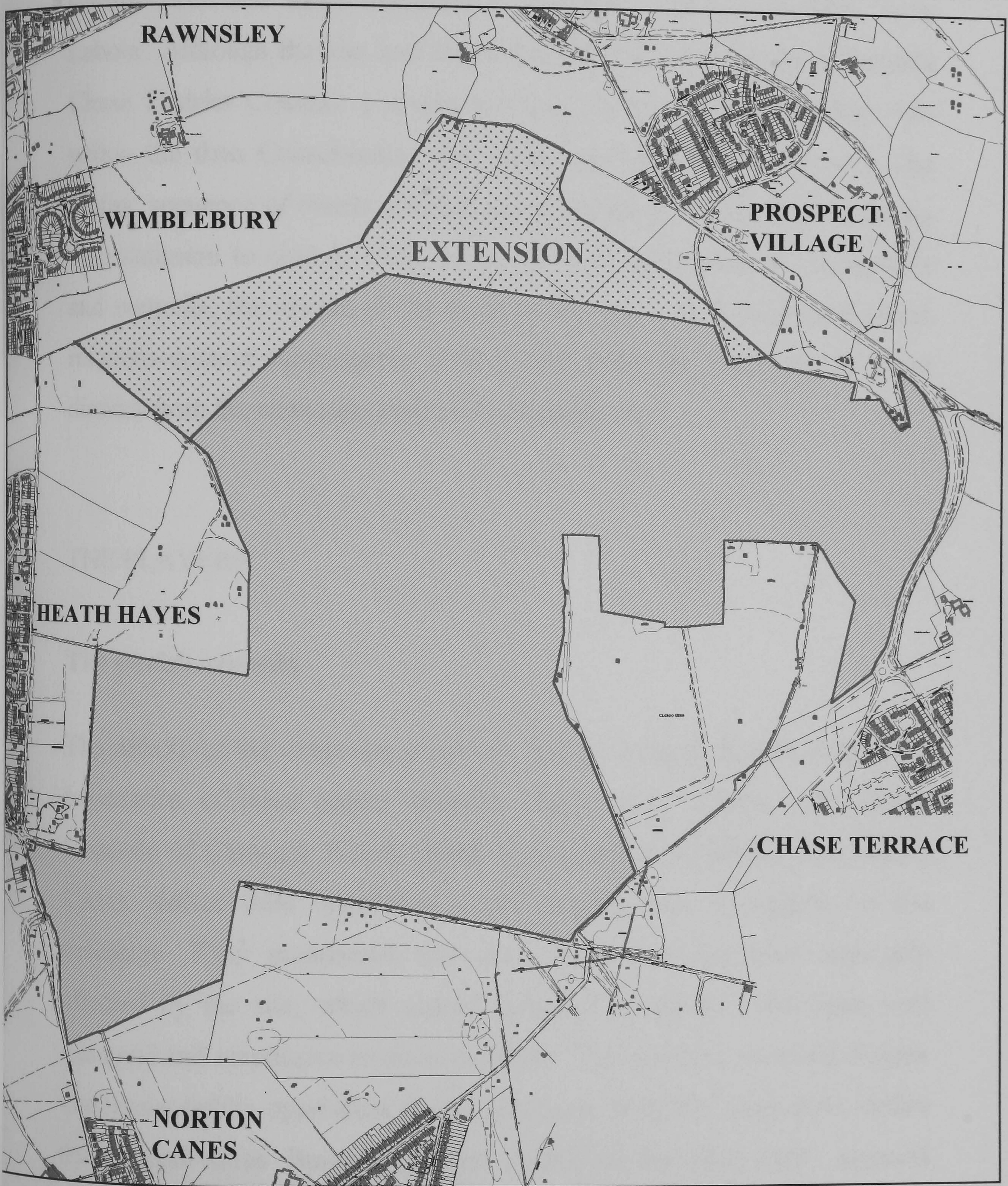
The extension proposals were for an increase in site boundary by 38 hectares and in excavation area by 64 hectares to a total of 194 hectares. This would allow the winning of an extra 2.2 million tonnes, above the existing three million tonnes and extend the coaling period by three years to 2001. The geographical extension was towards the northern boundary with Prospect Village, Cannock Wood and eastwards toward Chase Terrace. The map below presents the existing site and proposed extension.

Figure 1.1 The Bleak House open cast mine site and surrounding area.



BLEAK HOUSE OPEN CAST SITE

SITE OF ORIGINAL PLANNING CONSENT AND EXTENSION



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The areas which surrounded the open cast site were served by 14 district councillors and four county councillors. At the time of writing the political composition of the group of district councillors was; nine Labour, two

Conservative and three Independent. All four county councillors were Labour. Although the site was located within Labour controlled Cannock Chase District Council, a residential area to the eastern boundary was within the then Conservative controlled Lichfield District Council. The timing, sequence of events, a break in campaigning activity at the granting of permission to coal in 1994, shifts in the position of some councillors and councils, the impact of the existing site and a well organised public relations counter-campaign by British Coal, made the 'extension' an event distinct from the campaign against the original site.

THE PLAYERS

The parish councils

The affects of the extension would be felt to varying degrees within the boundaries of three parish councils and a town council. The Parish Councils of Cannock Wood, Heath Hayes and Wimblebury and Norton Canes, shifted from opposition to the original site, to support for the extension. They maintained that their areas had not been adversely affected by the site, which caused minimal disturbance and been well managed and responsive to the community. This position was held despite vociferous public opposition to the proposals from the community within those parish areas. Burntwood town council on the other hand, opposed the original site and the extension.

Political control of the three parish councils was diverse. Liberal Democrat, Conservative, and Independent/Liberal run parishes provided an interesting political spread within a Labour held county and district. By contrast however the town council, which was Labour-controlled, sat within Conservative-controlled Lichfield District Council (Labour after May 1995). The two Lichfield District Council wards which bordered the open cast site, returned three Labour and three Independent councillors (all Labour after May 1995). Although Conservative, Lichfield District Council supported the extension, the case study concentrates on Labour Cannock Chase. This is because, no Conservative councillors from Lichfield were representing wards impacted on by the site, and as such no conflict between group, councillor and community existed.

The district and county councillors

Although the group of councillors involved in this issue totalled 18, there existed dual (in some cases triple) membership of parish, district and county councils, so just 15 individuals held a larger number of elected offices. Table 7.1 sets out the political composition, council membership and known public position on the extension of those councillors. Parish council membership has been included to indicate the concentration of political office.

Table 7.1. Political composition, council membership and view on the open cast

Councillor	Party	Council	View on open cast
A	Labour	County District Parish	Oppose
B	Labour	County District Parish	Oppose
C	Labour	County District	Support
D	Labour	County	oppose
E	Labour	District Parish	Support
F	Labour	District Parish	oppose
G	Labour	District Parish	oppose
H	Independent	District Parish	support
I	Independent	District Parish	no public position
J	Independent	District Parish	no public position
K	Labour	District	support
L	Labour	District	support
M	Labour	District	oppose
N	Conservative	District	support
O	Conservative	District	support
Total	15	18 seats (excluding parishes)	

Amongst these councillors, opposition and support for the extension was fragmented politically and between representative bodies. The Liberal Democrats had no district or county councillors representing the affected area, but did control a parish council and their parish councillors were active on the open cast liaison committee and supportive of the site and the extension.

The position of councillors opposed to, or supporting, the extension was not straightforward, and intensity of support or opposition could be categorised as active or passive. Some councillors, on both sides of the argument engaged in intense political activity, whilst others remained on the side lines making minimal contribution to the debate.

Turning now to the local party organisations, the Liberal Democrat ward parties and constituency party supported the extension and Liberal Democrat parish councillors were an important part of the pro-extension campaign.

The District Labour Party opposed the extension, on the casting vote of its chair, (also the leader of the district council). Of the ward Labour parties concerned, one supported the extension, a second was vehemently opposed, and a third was divided and an informal 'truce' on the issue ensured it remained unconsidered here. An employee of the open cast latter joined this branch and secured election to the parish council as a Labour candidate. Another Labour district councillor, a supporter of the extension, lived and was politically active in the ward but represented a seat elsewhere, unaffected by the site.

Within the Lichfield District Council area the Burntwood Labour Party, Chase Terrace branch party, and the district council Labour group, opposed the extension. On taking control of Lichfield District Council for the first time, in May 1995, the Labour group, reversed the council's policy of support for the extension.

Nationally both Labour and Liberal Democrats parties had policies that supported a planning presumption against open cast mining. As the site was sold to a private mine operator, some Labour councillors found themselves supporting the activities of a privatised mining concern in opposition to national party policy. The Labour chair of the district's, planning and works committee, also chair of the open cast liaison committee, was an ex-miner and a strong supporter of the extension.

The Conservative Association and district council Conservative group had not considered the issue and had no plans to debate the extension. The Association, the local Conservative branch parties concerned, and councillors, had vigorously opposed the original application, but saw no benefit in objecting to the extension and preferred to see the coal mined as soon as possible.

British Coal / RJB Mining U.K Ltd

Since the commencement of coaling in April 1994 British Coal ran a well organised public relations exercise to counter opposition to the extension. Representatives of British Coal visited all three parish councils and, on the request of the chair of Cannock Chase Council's planning and works committee, attended a meeting of the district Labour Party. They provided lectures, slide displays and answered questions from the public and

councillors at public and private meetings. Councillors were given guided tours of the site and were impressed by the standards of environmental care and operational management. This exercise created a ground swell of support amongst councillors for the extension. Local schools visited the site, and were engaged in a competition to design a site logo, this was latter replaced by the new owners corporate logo.

At midnight on 31 December 1994 the open cast site passed to the ownership of R.J.Budge Mining (UK) Ltd. Privatisation provided a political back drop for the issue, and the government saw advantage in securing early agreement to an extension, which would enable the transfer to the private sector of a prime site, with permission to extend. Labour councillors supporting the extension thus operated within this politically ambiguous environment.

The open cast liaison committee

On the 12 August 1993 British Coal convened an inaugural meeting of a liaison committee to enable representatives of the community and site management to meet on a regular basis. The committee comprised nine parish, 15 district and four county councillors. Only eight members of the local community, who held no elected office, sat on the committee.

The committee met on a monthly basis to receive progress reports, or responses from the site management to complaints about it's activities. Pro-extension councillors used the meetings to give vocal support to the extension, counter any criticism of it and support the day-to-day running of the site. 'Anti' councillors and non-councillors used the meetings to criticise the company, site, and those councillors supporting the extension.

The initial meetings of the committee lasted for over two hours, meetings within the last six months lasted between 30 minutes and an hour, as one Labour councillor stated:

They are pointless now, I used to come to stick my neck out and have a go at them [the company] but I am sick and tired of them ['pro' extension Labour councillors] sitting there saying how good this place is. I've told the management here more than once I want them out and if I could close this place tomorrow I would, sitting listening to them avoid questions is no use to anyone.

THE CAMPAIGN IN THE COMMUNITY

The campaign against the extension

A distinguishing feature of this issue was that although a community action group was formed to oppose the original site no such group emerged to campaign against the extension. Instead individuals supported by local 'anti' councillors, undertook activities normally associated with pressure groups, but without such a group being formed. It is perhaps surprising that the original action group did not re-emerge, but the period between original proposal and extension application, would have seen changes in the local community, and possibly a degree of fatalism or fatigue amongst campaigners. As a result the 'anti' campaign was unstructured, but vocal and effective in promoting its opinion. 'Anti' councillors and members of the community worked closely together, as a Labour district councillor

commented, *'I wish we had a few councillors like these people, we might get something done'*.

The issue was highly emotive and aroused passions from the 'anti' and 'pro' groupings amongst councillors and the community. The 'anti' campaign took the form of public meetings and a letter-writing campaign to the local press and the planning authority. Petitions were submitted to Cannock Chase and Lichfield District Councils and the county council. Individual 'Pro' and 'anti' councillors were contacted by letter, telephone and home visits.

The local press was an important forum for criticism of councillors and councils that supported the extension and for the expression of much of the deep community resentment generated by this issue. One local resident wrote of a particular parish council and its members that supported the extension:

For a cosy clique of unelected and co-opted parish councillors [the parish had failed to secure sufficient candidates in 1995 to warrant an election and thus co-opted additional members] to accuse democratically elected representatives of trying to get political mileage out of the open cast issue takes some brass neck but cannot be taken seriously... She [named parish councillor] says that the parish council neither supports nor opposes any extension and that the public inquiry costs should be spent on environmental improvements, allowing further mining to go through quickly.

Such views are naive, showing shallow awareness in sharp contrast to the depth of the hole... [named parish councillor] states that she wants mining on the site to be over quickly. This can only be achieved by the refusal of any extension, thus allowing RJB Mining to pick up their kit and go.¹

Another summed up a deep sense of community frustration thus:

Should we not recall the reason that this site came about in the first place? I seem to remember some official of British Coal saying that Bleak House was necessary to mix with deep mined coal at pits like Littleton [a local deep pit closed by British Coal] if coal could not be taken from the open cast source, the future of deep-mined pits would be in doubt. We cannot be in any doubt today about the future of pits like Littleton - there isn't one. I feel the local population were conned into accepting Bleak House and to allow the site to be extended, knowing that would cast doubt on our intelligence.²

A letter from another local resident is worth quoting at length:

Fifty six years ago I was employed by [named company] as a chain lad to the surveyor in order to prove the existence of suitable coal for outcropping... I went on as second man on the excavator that took the first trench out of [named landowner's] field, a beautiful field of winter wheat, as I remember it about

¹ Letters page, *Chronicle*, 31 May 1996.

² Letters page, *Chronicle*, 7 June 1996.

six inches high when we destroyed it. There was reason then, there was war on ...

Look at it now, nearly sixty years on... there are no hedges all wire fences. It's boggy, all the natural aquifers and land drains were cut through and could never be replaced. One crop was taken from it, the coal crop, and that spoilt it forever.

Regardless of what is said at the inquiry [for the proposed extension] the land will never be the same again, we don't need the coal as we did in 1940. Why ruin our natural heritage ?

Look for yourselves at the result of outcropping and then attend the inquiry with the knowledge and experience of 56 years.

Don't be bamboozled by the operator who will tell you it will all be over in two years. It won't be the same in 200 years.³

Five well-attended public meetings were organised by councillors and 'anti' campaigners. Attendance at only one of these fell below 100 to 75. After one particularly well-attended meeting a Labour district and county councillor commented:

I can't understand it sometimes, you can't get them out at election time, even if the weather is nice, but now they want to extend the open cast site in my ward we've had public meeting with standing room only, it was 5 degrees below freezing and England were on telly that night as well.

³ Letters page, *Chase Post*, 4 July 1996.

As with the press, these meetings were an important focal point for the expression of local opinion on both the issue itself and councillors' reactions to it. At one such meeting a member of the public made a classic denunciation of councillors who supported the extension:

I may be naive but I just can't understand that we elect people to do as they please, they are there to do what we want, not anything they feel like. I can't believe councillors don't understand this. What do they think they are there to do, we don't want this bloody thing can't they understand that either, its simple vote against it that's what we want, they should forget what they think, its our lives they are ruining

Another local resident commented at a meeting:

How on earth do councillors like that stupid [named councillor] get away with saying there is no problem with the open cast, he wants to come and live in my house for a while.

Pro-extension councillors were not invited to any of these public meetings. Tactically this was an error on the part of the 'anti' campaigners as it left 'pro' councillors without direct experience of the strength of feeling against the extension. At these public meetings, resolutions of opposition to the extension were passed and on each occasion, of those voting, no dissenting votes were cast. Any 'pro' feeling did not express itself in outright vocal support and particularly not as a vote. Many in attendance at these meetings pledged to write to the county council and the local press to object to the extension.

The lobby for the extension

The 'pro' camp within the community was also unstructured and manifested itself through letters to, or statements in, the local press, one such statement from a 'pro' parish councillor stated:

I stood up in the original inquiry as a Cannock Chase councillor speaking against the mine. Councillors on other councils are trying to get political mileage out of the issue but now the mine is here we think it is pointless opposing the small extension. The quicker it goes through, the quicker the mining on the site will have ended. The inquiry will be expensive, that money could be better spent on environmental improvements. All parish councils have their own views, if we had united as one, we would have been a more powerful pressure group to demand money from the mine's owners for community projects.⁴

Other pressure was applied to 'anti' councillors. In one case an 'anti' councillor was threatened with violence for his opposition by an employee of the site, who was also a local resident. The police were involved and this incident, whilst progressing no further, indicated the strength of feeling over the issue.

Some support for the extension was based on the prospect of employment opportunities within the area. 170 people were employed at the site, 43 of whom lived in Staffordshire or the surrounding area, in other words a small number of local jobs existed from the total number employed at the

⁴ *Chronicle*, 24 May 1996.

site. Whilst probably not generating additional employment, the extension could secure the existing jobs for another three years. Although open cast employees attended some of the anti-campaigners' public meetings, surprisingly they did not vote in opposition to anti-extension resolutions moved, nor spoke in favour of the extension at these meetings. Employees, whilst visible at meetings, did not in general, become an active lobby for the extension.

Beyond the prospect of local employment, support for the extension was based on three factors. First, some sections of the community that had experienced campaigning against open cast proposals or remembered British Coal's success in pursuing this site, were prone to fatalism on the issue and a feeling of powerlessness which tended to acquiescence. Secondly, the belief (widely held), in the community, that as there existed on site some 23 years of reserves, it was inevitable that it would be mined, and this should be completed sooner, rather than after a protracted campaign and period of uncertainty. That is, not so much support, more a weary resignation to the situation.

Thirdly, support for the extension was based on a British Coal announcement that in the event of the planning authority permitting the extension, a series of 'community benefits' would be proffered to local communities. This last point was to prove an important factor.

THE COMMUNITY BENEFIT ARGUMENT

The provision of compensatory funding to local communities, by British Coal and then RJB Mining, for the activities of the open cast, came from

three sources. First, a section 106 agreement by which the site owners were legally bound (in addition to the planning permission granted by the Secretary of State for the Environment), to provide a range of community facilities.⁵

Secondly, RJB Mining made of its own accord a series of corporate donations to local communities, and continue to do so as part of its on going public relations exercise. The company have provided land at a peppercorn price, to Hednesford Town Football Club for the development of a new football ground, and agreed an annual sponsorship of the club. It provided sponsorship for a local youth theatre group, funds for new stage curtains at a village community centre, the cost of hiring a lorry as a float at a village fair, Christmas trees for a number of local schools and additional heath land transplantation, over and above that contained in the section 106 agreement.

Thirdly, British Coal made it known in the press and in meetings with the public and councillors, that a quarter of a million pounds was available to fund the presentation of its case at any public inquiry. British Coal stated they would rather donate these funds as 'community benefits' to be used on a range of local projects, rather than for an expensive public inquiry, which they were confident would be determined in their favour. Thus a considerable sum of money that could be used for various local projects would be wasted on an inquiry. The strategy, then, was to place a high price on objection.

⁵ Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, gives local authorities power to enter into an agreement which places a planning obligation on developers to provide specified facilities related to a particular development - at the developers expense.

As a result of that offer three parish councils which had opposed the original open cast, declined to object to the extension when consulted by the county council, although in no case was that decision unanimous. Parish councillors (amongst which were also district councillors), from all parties, then lent public support to the extension application. Those parish councils, which decided not to object did so, not on planning grounds, but in view of 'community benefits' accruing to their areas. District councillors, and in one case a county councillor, that were not parish councillors were also swayed by the offer of community benefits. As one Labour district councillor stated:

It would be wrong to reject this [extension] out of hand without looking at what benefits could come into the area. There is a salutary lesson here in making your mind up to quickly, as some councillors have, stating your position publicly and not giving yourself room for manoeuvre, especially when the situation changes and the offer is made of a large amount of money that could be put to good use in the community.

We have to look at what could be achieved from the benefits offered against only another three years [of open cast activity]. Some people in this area will always be against open casts, but look at what we can gain from it. If we object we get nothing.

Conversely, another Labour councillor, who neither lived in nor represented a ward close to the site and in an unusual display of interest and opposition from a councillor so placed, commented:

They want to take that site 150 metres, 150 metres, away from houses in old [named councillor's] ward, they could offer us 50 million pounds and I wouldn't support it, they couldn't pay enough to that community to make it right bringing that bloody great hole 150 metres away from where those houses are.

The district council was consulted on the extension proposal by the county council, and the district Labour group was divided on the matter. Meetings of the Labour group were open to all Labour councillors and to five observers from the district party, with speaking but not voting rights. Some councillors' opinions were influenced by British Coal activities within the area, particularly past open cast workings, the closure of local deep mines and subsequent redundancies, and the 1984 miners' strike. British Coal was not popular amongst a group of councillors in the ruling group and their approach to the decision would reflect that history rather than immediate community concerns. In particular, a number of ex-miners within the ruling Labour group were not supportive of their past employer conducting open cast mining activity within the area. Strong environmental objections were raised by some group members who used the Labour Party national policy document *'In Trust for Tomorrow'*, which emphasised the environmental impact of open cast mining, to pursue their position within the group.⁶

The formal response to the county council's consultation would however be provided by the district council's planning sub-committee which acted under delegated powers. Its decisions did not require ratification by the parent, planning and works committee or indeed the full council. The sub-

⁶ *In Trust for Tomorrow: Report of the Labour Party Policy Commission on the Environment*, London, The Labour Party, 1994, p. 29.

committee did not involve a whip, as this would prevent any planning application from being considered by Labour members, on its own merits and expose the decision to legal challenge. Even so, divisions within the Labour group were evident on the issue, with some senior councillors, which included the chair of the planning and works committee, interested in the community benefits package. The leader of the district council, however, opposed the extension, but those senior councillors that favoured it enjoyed the support of a group of loyalist councillors, that could be called upon to support them on most issues. The group leader could not guarantee carrying the group with him.

The Labour group took no formal vote on the extension, and although it was discussed at group meetings, it was never a formal agenda item, or discussed as a discrete issue, rather raised by councillors when referring to other issues. For example, if a councillor supporting the extension was informed, usually via an officers report on a committee agenda, that 'no funds were available' for a particular scheme, then reference was often made to the use of the community benefits offer as a possible source of funds, so long as the council did not object to the extension.

One councillor was particularly firm in support of the open cast as the community benefit offer could be used to fund a pedestrian crossing and an extension to a local school in her ward, both of which she had been campaigning hard for over a protracted period. She commented, *'it's the only way I am going to get this crossing, what do they want, someone to get killed on this road, just so they can keep a bit of dust off the washing line'*.

Support for the extension within the group was based on the 'community benefits' and possible job creation and debates reflected what appeared to be a majority opinion in support for the extension. Subsequently, and without a vote being taken, anti-extension councillors experienced an informal 'whip' and were criticised for their opposition. To all intents and purposes the situation was addressed as if a policy had been agreed to support the extension. This enabled the 'pro' councillors to justify their position in public as support for an informal policy and to marginalise the 'anti' councillors within the Labour group. Those opposed found themselves faced with a hostile political environment within the group.

In response to the community benefit offer an informal district council 'shopping list' of projects was developed, which drew on schemes favoured by the district and parish councils. The list was divided into 18 projects under the headings: highways, leisure and miscellaneous. The cost of which was in excess of a million pounds and was to be funded by British Coal as part of the community benefit package. Many of the projects on the list would otherwise have to be funded from committee budgets, if they were to be undertaken at all.

The possibility of a considerable sum of money being available for works across the district influenced a number of councillors and this resulted in a shift of opinion within the ruling Labour group from its opposition to the original open cast site, to support for the extension. Councillors that represented wards distant from the open cast had every motivation to support the extension, their areas were not affected by the site, whilst the community benefit package could lead to projects being undertaken in their wards.

Important then is the relatively small geographical impact of the site in terms of the district council area and the influence this had on councillors' decision-making. The site was described by Friends of the Earth as 'the largest hole in the ground in western Europe' but still only affected three of fifteen wards, and eight district councillors (six Labour, two Conservative) from a total of 42. Four from the six Labour councillors representing those three wards supported the extension and one offered only passive opposition, whilst his ward Labour party was firmly opposed. He commented: *'I will vote against it because you know what [named local party members including the branch chair] think about it. You can protest all you like but they will get that coal and we will get nothing'*. The offer of 'community benefits' had an important impact on the position some councillors took on the issue and was described by one Labour anti-extension councillor as:

An unspecified sum of money for unspecified projects in unspecified areas, at an unspecified time, all a bit unspecified really, but definitely an interference in the local democratic processes and verging on bribery.

The community benefits were described by a Labour county councillor as: *'a bribe, pure and simple, that's what it is, just a bribe that some people are just too willing to take'*

They were conversely described by a Labour pro-extension councillor as:

A strong sign of good faith and a desire to give something back to the local community for the minor inconveniences the site caused as well as bringing the prospect of yet more local jobs.

The offer of community benefits provoked disagreement in the communities affected by the extension and thus diluted opposition. The mainstay of the 'pro' extension argument was that British Coal somehow 'owed' the area for past open cast sites as well as this site. Parish and district councillors were prominent and quick in forwarding 'projects' to be considered for funding. The offer had a considerable affect on the level of support for the application amongst some councillors on, all three tiers of local government, and across the major political parties. It is all the more surprising that the new owners of the site, R.J.Budge, wrote on 28 February 1995 to the councils affected by the development apparently to withdraw the offer of community benefits, and replace it with a land deal that would limit future site extensions. The letter included an invitation to councillors to a meeting on Saturday 11 March at 9.30am on the site.

Councillors attending this meeting were informed by the new mine owners that the package of community benefits floated by British Coal had been replaced by the transfer of land ownership to the district council. This would provide a 'buffer' zone making almost impossible future movement of the site boundaries towards Heath Hayes and Wimblebury and Prospect villages. In the latter case the boundary would be 150 metres from the nearest residential properties. Although this would freeze the site boundaries it would not protect the local environment from noise, dust and pollutants. The meeting was also informed that £50,000 might be placed in a trust fund, the interest accrued on which could be used for community projects. The meeting became extremely acrimonious and parish and district council delegations walked out.

The chairs of two of the three parish councils concerned stated their intention to take the issue back to their parish councils to move objections

to the extension. The chair of the district council planning and works committee was - as a result of the withdrawal of community benefits - also to seek objection by the district council. In the period after this meeting, support amongst the district council Labour group was less vocal and opinion shifted amongst some, though by no means all councillors. A core group of supporters of the extension remained and were not swayed by the removal of the offer, believing that other means of ensuring that funds flowed into the community could be found.

The result of the meeting on the 11 March 1995 was to sow confusion amongst the pro-extension campaign, to undermine the positions of three parish councils and a district council and of councillors that supported the extension.

On 16 August 1995 the district council planning sub-committee resolved to inform the county council of its objection to the extension on three grounds, first the proposals would lengthen the period of detrimental effect on the environment and general amenity of local residents. Secondly, the increased risk of pollution to a site of special scientific interest. Thirdly, that the applicant had failed to provide a bond to ensure implementation of the restoration strategy.

Interestingly, of the councillors listed on table seven, four Labour and one conservative were members of the planning sub-committee, so too was another 'pro' Labour councillor that lived in a ward affected, but did not represent it. Of the Labour members mentioned here, four had supported the extension and maintained that support after the community benefits offer had been withdrawn. They also maintained a high public profile of support for the extension and continued to seek funding from the site

owners for various community projects. All four however voted against the extension at the planning sub-committee meeting on 16 August 1995.

On the 21 September 1995, the county council's strategy sub-committee considered the extension application. As none of the four county councillors for the divisions concerned were members of that sub-committee they were invited to the meeting, and permitted to speak, but not vote. Councillors A, B and D (table 7.1) spoke against the extension. councillor C, who had maintained firm support for the extension because of the community benefit package, spoke in favour of the extension, despite that package having been withdrawn. The sub-committee, which acted under delegated powers, voted unanimously to refuse the application.

On 20 October 1995 R.J.Budge Mining (UK) Ltd lodged an appeal against the refusal to the Secretary of State for the Environment and a public inquiry was arranged to commence on 8 October 1996.

ISSUES AND LESSONS FOR REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Cross cutting, single issue alliances

In this first case study, councillors from different political parties, elected to parish, district and county councils, found themselves in public agreement with political opponents, and public opposition to councillors from their own party. Liberal Democrat, Labour and Conservative councillors had shared objectives, whilst conflicting with party colleagues and the wider community. This pattern of conflict was not confined to

councillors, but was reflected throughout political party organisations locally.

The issue transcended party political boundaries and led to cross-cutting alliances amongst elected representatives. It indicated a willingness amongst councillors of different parties to supersede their political allegiance by agreement on a specific local issue, to ignore party labels and national party policy and to link with councillors in other parties. Those links vary in the level of informality and are often the result of personal contacts which influence political and representative activities.

Some of the Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors supporting the extension for example, had maintained social contacts with each other over a number of years. They however did not speak together on any public platform other than to rebut criticism of the extension at liaison committee meetings. Labour and Conservative district councillors spoke in support of the extension and commented on what they considered to be the high quality management of the site.

No apparent social ties bound anti-extension councillors, although in contrast it would be wrong to suggest that the unity of the 'pro' lobby councillors rested on that fact alone. Social interaction, however, presents better opportunities to discuss issues and plan tactics than formal meetings, and eases the process of agreement around specific issues amongst councillors of opposing political parties. This gave the 'pro' and 'anti' lobbies a different texture.

The community benefits offer added a financial element to the equation which deepened the rift between councillors, particularly those of the same

party. Financing for local community facilities for which some councillors had campaigned over long periods of time and might not otherwise achieve, intensified disagreement between councillors despite party ties. Supporting the extension on the grounds of community benefits would enable councillors to claim their support had resulted in an identifiable community advantage, a useful claim at election time.

The Liberal Democrat support for the extension contradicted the party's usual community politics and placed Liberal Democrats in opposition to expressed community opinion. Rather than reflect this opinion Liberal Democrat parish councillors and district council candidates, campaigned against the 'anti' extension lobby. The Liberal Democrats of a parish council which had opposed vigorously the original site, found themselves affected by the extension, only on the eastern border of the parish, and dropped their opposition. The prospect of 'community benefits' and the low level of site impact on the parish, encouraged the Liberal Democrats to support the extension position, rather than the 'anti' campaign, which would have obtained more favourable press coverage and possible electoral benefits.

The blurring of party lines over single issues indicates a flexibility amongst councillors to work with shared objectives and seek support wherever it may politically be found, if the issue is of significant magnitude to warrant cross-party co-operation. While the single issue link is in existence the normal interplay of party competition continues - particularly in council and committee - but the intensity and regularity of that interplay is open to influence by the existence of co-operation on a single issue or event.

Sources of change in councillors' positions

There was a major shift in the position of a number of councillors who supported the extension based on the offer of community benefits, to opposition, precipitated by the withdrawal of the offer by the site's new owners. In contrast the existence of a vigorous community campaign and pressure from the community in opposition to the extension, did not shift these councillors in their support. Indeed, in some cases their support was strengthened by opposition tactics. Even after the withdrawal of the community benefit offer, a number of councillors still saw the site owners as a possible source of funds for community projects.

Councillors used the community benefit offer to justify their support for the extension, which also manifest itself in general support for the day-to-day management of the site. This support was a method of ensuring the community realised that the site was, as one councillor stated: *'of very little disturbance at all really'* and that any extension would equally be of little disturbance. Community benefits then were in another councillor's words: *'too good an opportunity to miss'*.

The removal of the proposed benefits undermined these councillors, the loss of public face inherent in the new situation was a greater catalyst to shifting their position than the arguments of the anti-extension campaign. It could be safely concluded that the campaign to oppose the extension would not have been successful had the community benefit offer remained on the table and that it failed to secure a shift in position from those councillors involved.

To act against the expressed wishes of local people, any slight division in the community was used by councillors to justify their stance. Councillors attempted to minimise and isolate the existence of opposition by arguing that this was somehow unrepresentative of the wider community and, that the councillor's position on each and every issue, was legitimised by the electoral process.

The geographical impact of the issue

The pattern of feeling within the community resulted from the impact of the existing site and the extension proposals on a distinct geographical area. However, the community was more directly motivated by this than councillors, for as has already been seen, from six of the eight district councillors for the area, four Labour and two Conservative, supported the extension as did one of the four county councillors.

Councillors whose electoral areas were located around the site led the 'pro' and 'anti' campaigns and so the geographical impact of the development on councillor's own patches became an issue in its own right. 'Pro' councillors argued strongly and publicly that the impact of the existing site was minimal and that the extension would, with proposed improvements in environmental management, reduce it further.

Those opposed to the extension argued that the impact of the existing site was considerable, and stated that noise, dust, health issues, traffic movements and occasional breaches of conditions on working hours (not substantiated by British Coal investigations), had detrimental affects on the local wards. They highlighted links between open casting and asthma, and argued that the extension would increase respiratory diseases in an area

already high in the health authority's table of such complaints. As one member of the local community commented:

When it's sunny you can see the dust for miles around and we're breathing that in all the time. My four year old boy has asthma and I blame it on that open cast. Since we have lived here he has been up and down to the hospital with it.

Councillor's residence in, areas affected seemed to be of little influence on support or opposition to the extension, as some of both the 'pro' and 'anti' councillors lived in and represented wards affected by the site. Councillors' discretion enabled them to select their own decisional criteria and allowed them to come to different conclusions as to the impact of the extension when faced with the same evidence and the same community pressure. Those councillors that lived in or represented wards distant from, and unaffected by, the site could still see a gain from employment opportunities, and the offer of 'community benefits'. Those councillors were therefore open to influence by other 'pro' councillors closer to the site, but remained uninfluenced by the high profile anti-extension campaign.

Although the county council was the mineral planning authority in this issue most of the campaigning took place at district level. This was for two reasons: first, the dual membership of district and county of three of the four county councillors; secondly, the county council had twice refused planning permissions for the site and had a record of opposition to open cast mining, whilst being careful not to compromise the legal requirement to determine each case on its own merits. It was the district council that vacillated on the issue and was thus open to greater pressure.

SEQUEL

The 'pro' and 'anti' campaigns continue but the announcement of an increase in profits for RJB Mining from an expected £54 million to £173 million prompted two 'anti' extension councillors to renew the call for community compensation. A newly-elected Labour councillor in Lichfield commented:

In the light of these huge profits I am writing to RJB to ask that they put some of this money into those communities affected by the development. Residents of the areas suffering the consequences of open cast mining should benefit from these profits.

A Labour county and district councillor commented:

If they have made massive profits of this nature then I think it's only right that the communities suffering from the activities of the site get some of that money to compensate. But there has to be no strings attached to planning permission with any payment. I still oppose the extension.

The company's response was that profits were reduced after tax to £115 million and were in line with expectations. 'Pro' councillors continue to pressurise the company for funds for various community projects, one 'pro' district councillor commented:

If the county had granted this and not forced the company to go to appeal then there would have been a lot of money for local

people and we would of got the community centre we have been trying to get for the last 20 years, and we could have got much more besides.

'Anti' councillors were divided amongst themselves on the issue of community benefits, some rejected any offer of funding from the company, described by one councillor as '*30 pieces of silver*'. Whilst others, opposed to the extension argued that the site should compensate the local community for its impact. An 'anti councillor commented:

The level of profits shows me that the government sold off British Coal too cheaply but the managing director tells me that profits are what they expected. Well despite all the promises they have done very, very little to make up for all the problems caused by that site. In the meantime RJB are laughing all the way to the bank and they still want to extend even further and completely ignore local peoples' views. Typical !

In fact the issue of community benefits and the company's profits is in itself the subject of a single issue, cross cutting alliance, which was demonstrated in a local press report of a 'cross party plea to RJB' to 'sink some of their profits back into the local community'. A Labour district councillor stated:

In spite of their promise to work with the representatives of communities taking due regard to the concerns of local residents and the environment, they have done little to compensate for the effects of the [open cast] operations

She was supported in these sentiments by a Conservative district councillor and former planning committee chair thus:

We had an understanding that the area around the mine would benefit from the company, country parks and other recreation facilities were talked about as well as other projects. I think free enterprise comes with a moral obligation and it would not be unreasonable to ask for at least five per cent of the company's profits to be put back into the community.

Clear from these demands is cross party unity on an element of an important single, local issue.⁷

Finally, despite the lack of a formal group decision in this case, the Labour group was still an important theatre for deliberation as distinct from decision-making. Those councillors who opposed community feeling could take comfort in group processes, support from other councillors, and the use of the group as a protective mechanism for their own position. The general, across the board and continued solidarity of the group and the use of the group as a forum to defend their position, was thought to outweigh the single-issue impact of an unpopular development. This study indicates that the pattern of opinion within the community does not supersede the councillor's own reactions, even when the party group has not made a formal decision on the issue and shows that councillors discretion can focus on their own 'office' as an important focal point for decision-making. In other words, when faced with difficult decisions and a divided community, councillors must 'decide'.

⁷ *Chronicle*, 19 July 1996.

8. THE LINK ROAD.

This case study concerns the political activities around the proposed construction of a link road to service a housing development of some 300 properties in the Pye Green Valley area of Cannock Chase district. The proposed road would be a mile and a half of dual carriageway, to run through green belt land and link to the existing road network, to form in effect a by-pass. The proposals for the road were included in the Pye Green Valley development brief prepared by Cannock Chase District Council in March 1981 but it was its inclusion in the Cannock Chase, *District Wide Local Plan, Draft for Consultation, in 1993* that resulted in the first real public awareness of the development. In a report to the district council planning and works committee on the 18 March 1993, the proposal was described as a 'key road scheme'. The report also identified the possibility of redefinition of the green belt boundary to facilitate the road and housing development.

A report on the consultation on the draft plan to the planning and works committee on 9 November 1993, resulted in the committee agreeing that 'no change be made to the housing proposals for the Pye Green Valley' and that 'the proposed Pye Green Valley distributor road be subject to further detailed appraisal on the technical and planning merits of the route'.

The same committee on 10 March 1994 considered further objections to the local plan, and resolved that the Pye Green Valley link road be incorporated as a proposal in the district wide local plan which was then approved for formal deposit. At this meeting, the leader of the Conservative group, (councillor A), a councillor for an adjacent ward to the one in which the road would run, was recorded as having voted against

the elements of the plan which incorporated the distributor road. By the time of the committee's meeting on 21 September 1995 the road was firmly established within the District Plan.

At each and every stage of the committee's consideration of the plan, the Labour group's pre-meetings had discussed and agreed the officers reports prior to formal ratification at committee. All Labour group pre-committee meetings were full meetings of the group. Every Labour councillor could attend, speak and vote on any item, whether a member of that committee or not. In addition the district party sent five delegates to group meetings with speaking, but not voting rights. This process resulted in a firm Labour group policy to construct the road, which had therefore been agreed by the full group. That policy and the loyalty of councillors to it was to be tested by a residents' action group formed to campaign against the roads construction.

Party political representation: councillors and the group

At the time of these events Cannock Chase Council consisted of 35 Labour councillors, five Conservatives, one Liberal Democrat, and one vacant seat. By unhappy political coincidence for the Conservative group, all their seats were up for re-election in May 1996. Pye Green Valley ward, through which the road was to be built, was represented by three Labour councillors (referred to here as councillors B, C and D) and had returned Labour members for the last ten years and beyond, although only narrowly in 1986 and 1995.

The local ward councillors at that time included the leader of the council (councillor B), who along with councillor C, firmly supported the Labour

group's policy on the road. Councillor D professed support for the resident's campaign against the road in an interview, but did not play an active part in the opposition and did not speak or vote against the proposal in council. She did however make statements of opposition in the Labour group and at one group meeting commented, *'I nearly lost my seat because of this road, why won't you listen to people about it'*. She was not supported in her opposition at group, by her fellow ward councillors. Councillor C in particular maintained very firm support for the road and opposition to the residents' action group and its individual members.

The Conservative approach

The main political support for the residents campaign, came from councillor A, the leader of the Conservative group, who, along with two Labour councillors represented the neighbouring Anglesey Ward. Councillor A had been a member of the council from 1976 to 1980, when he lost his seat, but secured re-election for Anglesey Ward in May 1992, after his thirteenth attempt. The Labour defeat in this ward was the cause of considerable political bitterness targeted at councillor A. His involvement in the road issue which did not impact on his ward (only Pye Green Valley ward), intensified this political bitterness. Councillor A had also identified an important environmental weakness in the ruling Labour group's general policy approach, and moved to exploit it with a 'green Conservatism'.

Councillor A acted not only as leader of the Conservative group but also as spokesperson within the council chamber for the residents' campaign. In doing so, he provided a voice for the campaign which was not provided by the three ward councillors concerned. Councillor D who had expressed

reservations on the issue and a degree of support for the residents, did so only within the confines of the Labour group, and did not speak against the issue in open council. That was left to councillor A, who at one meeting commented, *'the Labour group haven't listened to what the residents say. In my book, consultation means giving full consideration to other points of view'*. Interviewed on the issue he commented:

Labour group discipline is quite plain to see, we all know they have made their minds up and it doesn't matter what anyone says, least of all the local people who are fighting them, particularly because they are fighting them in fact and they don't care what they do to the environment or to people's living conditions. One of them for Pye Green is OK, I just wish she would say something. You see the trouble is, because it's me, they can play some party political campaign of Labour versus Conservative and that somehow lets them off giving any attention to what local people want. Iron discipline, they won't even let poor old [named Labour councillor] fight for her own ward, I mean what would it matter anyway if she even voted against the proposals, the other 34 sheep will flock to vote for it.

Secondly, councillor A acted as an advisor to the action group formed to campaign against the proposals. He attended meetings of its executive committee, spoke at public meetings for their cause and provided a 'gateway' into the council's bureaucracy that was otherwise denied to the group. As the chair of the action group commented in interview:

We got nothing from our own local councillors, Mr [councillor B] was always a gentleman, very polite and nice, but gave us no help or real support. Mr [councillor C] was always very, very anti us, and very difficult to deal with, we haven't seen much at all of [councillor D] since the election last May. When [councillor A] took an interest and seemed to care, we were very pleased, I know he is for the ward by us but that doesn't matter he is on our side, our own councillors are not.

Although leader of the five strong Conservative group, councillor A acted alone on this issue and received no support from his group colleagues at any public or council event concerning this issue. The rest of the Conservative group represented wards remote from Pye Green Valley.

The Labour response

The Labour councillors for the ward concerned were able to use councillor A's involvement to polarise the issue and undermine the campaign against their group's policy. One of the councillors commented in interview:

I was glad when he came out of the closet so to speak because now everyone can see what we knew all along, these people [the action group] are all Tories anyway and all they really care about is the value of their house. He is advising them you know, or mis-advising them, going to their meetings, distorting what the council want to do, he thinks it will save his seat. All Tories in that campaign, none of them vote Labour.

The intervention of councillor A was used to undermine the political independence of the residents campaign. It was also used to absolve Labour councillors of any need to support or even communicate with the action group, *'why should we meet with them, we have made a decision, and I am not letting those Tories change my mind'*, was the response from one councillor when questioned as to his feelings towards the action group. The Anglesey ward Labour councillors had a sub-text to their agenda, that was to attempt to use the issue to weaken councillor A's chances of re-election in May 1996. He was criticised at council meetings and in the local press as interfering in issues outside his own ward, as indicating both a lack of concern for his own area and a vote-seeking desperation at his re-election chances.

A Labour councillor for Anglesey ward stated:

I'll do whatever I can to stop him getting back in, this is our ward, [meaning a Labour seat] and if he can't keep out of this road which doesn't affect this ward then he shouldn't be a councillor for Anglesey. He knows the Tories are going to lose all their seats, his just getting his name in the paper to get votes.

On the issue itself the councillor added:

it's not my ward, but the group has a policy and it is part of the District Plan, I support that policy and that plan, it all went through the group so its no problem to me to support it.

The Labour councillors for Anglesey and Pye Green Valley wards maintained firm public support for the policy of the Labour group in the face of very forthright campaigning by the residents action group. From the outset the relationship between the councillors for Pye Green Valley and their constituents within the action group and the wider community was strained. That strain increased as the issue developed. The Labour councillors did not attend any of the public meetings held by the campaign or any of its regular executive meetings, which were also open to the public. After an announcement by the action group that it would contest the local elections in May 1995, councillors B, C and D, went as far as refusing to meet with the group under any circumstances. They relied on their support for Labour group policy as a justification for their stance, claiming that nothing would change as a result of any meeting.

The position of councillor D who had expressed doubt on the issue was a difficult one. She admitted in interview to being opposed to the road but was unwilling and almost unable to speak out against it in council, or to attend any of the public meetings organised by the action group. She commented:

I have my views on this which I have expressed at the [Labour] group, there is no earthly point in me upsetting the group and having the whip withdrawn. I just can't make a difference and don't see the point of getting into trouble over it. I don't think we're right though, and I really think we should at least talk to people, they are very upset by this proposal and we can't ignore that. Some in the group think that is exactly what we should do though.

Questioned further, she admitted to feeling intimidated, though not directly, by members of the group and commented that *'they [the group] told me I have got to support it [the road] that's it'*. She felt isolated in her opposition and as the group had made a decision, which was supported by senior Labour councillors, she was 'frightened' to take any action against that policy. Although acquiescing, she was not happy with the position in which she found herself, which she summarised as *'supporting the group, or shutting up'*.

The local ward Labour party was supportive of their councillors and the council on this issue and went as far as to attend the action group's public meetings so as to assess the groups tactics and pass on information to the Labour councillors.

The position of councillors B and C was of clear support for a group policy against a vocal, and well supported and organised campaign from the electorate within their own ward. Although an attempt was made by Labour councillors to present the campaign as a 'Conservative Party front', a group of middle class home owners concerned only with property values, and a move by a doomed Conservative councillor to save his seat, they also gave support to the construction of the road as a substantive issue and to the decision-making process of the group and council as a procedural concern.

THE COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN.

The reaction from the local community to the proposals led to the formation of a campaign group in March 1995, at a public meeting

attended by 100 people. It elected functional officers and an executive committee of ten members, which met every week. It held full meetings monthly, which were open to the public. Attendance at these meetings did not fall below 80 people. The group had a funding and action plan, and subsequently titled itself the 'Pye Green Valley Residents Action Group'.

Early on in the campaign the prime target became the distributor road, not the housing development. As one campaigner reported in interview:

We knew right at the beginning we could not stop the houses, but they did not have the impact on the area that the road would, linking as it would with already busy roads it would be an immediate rat run and ruin this Valley.

The group undertook an extensive campaign against the road, including a 2,300 signature petition, presented to the council via Conservative councillor A, from the neighbouring Anglesey ward. It organised an intense and wide-spread letter-writing campaign to the local press, which continued up to the time of writing. The group demonstrated outside the council offices, lobbied council meetings, and conducted an extensive leafleting campaign in the affected area. It organised a protest march along the route of the link road, attended by 160 people and conducted a door to door opinion survey on the issue. The local Member of Parliament and European Member of Parliament were contacted in order to seek their support. The group's fund raising activities were so successful that they were able to employ the services of a Barrister and planning consultant to present a case at the public inquiry into the local plan, held in December 1995.

The campaign placed hope in councillor B as their local ward member and leader of the council being able to assist the opposition to the road. When that support was not forthcoming he was criticised by a campaigner for not standing up for his constituents. After councillor B failed to attend a planning and works committee meeting, of which he was a member, and which was to consider the road, the same campaigner commented: *'everybody I know in the area is disgusted with the attitude of our councillors, [councillor B] didn't even turn up at the committee meeting'*.

In April 1995, an invitation to attend a public meeting on the road was sent to all Cannock Chase councillors, only two attended, councillor A, the leader of the Conservative group and a Labour councillor from a ward, across the district, who had been involved in campaigning against another road scheme supported by the Labour group of which he was a member. Councillor B, the leader of the council, had written to the group informing them that it was not appropriate that he attend the meeting, because they were to field a candidate in the local elections.

The electoral challenge

In March 1995, the Pye Green Residents' Action Group decided to fight the May local elections and a candidate was selected to stand under the banner, 'Pye Green Valley Residents'. There followed a short but intense election campaign by the group lasting only five weeks which consisted of regular public meetings, the distribution of leaflet material on the issue and in support of the candidate, and door to door canvassing.

The local Labour party reacted fiercely to this challenge, and the campaign was a bitter and personal one. The local Labour party used tactics similar

to those of their sitting councillors, particularly emphasising the assistance given to the action group by the Conservative group leader. The party delivered a leaflet in the week before the poll which accused the residents' campaign of being 'bunkum', based on 'misrepresentations of the facts and distortions of the truth', and maintained that the group was a 'Conservative front'. The most stinging accusation made was that only 27 residents had objected to the road proposal in the local plan. The residents' group made accusations of a Labour 'dirty tricks' campaign and in interview the residents candidate stated his disgust at what he felt were the 'cynical' tactics employed and recalled:

The late leaflet from the Labour party was delivered so that we would not have time to respond, as it was we were so enraged that we had to put the record straight in our own leaflet and at the last minute. We handed in a petition with 2,300 names on it so I don't know who is doing the sums at the council. Also the Labour leaflet just attacked us, there were no reasons what so ever in it given as to why people should vote Labour, just why they shouldn't vote for us. The theme of the leaflet suggested that the party was totally in favour of the scheme. We were very surprised at the criticism because of the non-political nature of our campaign. Their leaflet was entirely about discrediting and ridiculing our group and anti-road campaign.

Labour also made accusations that the action group's meetings had been attended by members of the Conservative party and the National Front, while in fact they had also been attended by local Labour party members. These accusations were supported by the sitting councillor, and candidate, councillor D, identified earlier as unconvinced of the merits of the Labour

group's policy. A position she maintained despite the bitterness of the 1995 election campaign, which saw the local Labour party refer one of the residents leaflets to the police for a breach of election law.

A Labour party member interviewed at one of the public meetings said *'yes we've got them now, they left the imprint of their last leaflet, I've reported it to the police. Look if they are going to get involved in elections they've got to do it right or we're going to jump on them'*.¹ The 1995 election result saw a narrow victory by the Labour candidate of some 97 votes, as table 8.1 shows, a drastic reduction in the normal Labour majority.

¹ Imprint: The legally required notation of the printer and publisher of any election material. Representation of the Peoples' Act, 1983, sections 110, 111 and 112, HMSO, 1983.

Table 8.1. Pye Green Valley, local election results, 1986 to 1995.

Year	Party	Vote Received	Labour Majority	Electorate	Turnout %
1986	Con	155		5,297	42.78
	Lab	1076			
	SDP/Lib	1032	44		
1987	Con	279		5,361	50.62
	Lab	1356			
	SDP/Lib	1076	280		
1988	Con	253		5,594	43.48
	Lab	1333			
	SLD	845	488		
1990	Con	321		5,809	47.40
	Lab	1511			
	SDP	922	589		
1991	Con	884		6,026	37.03
	Lab	1337	453		
1992	Con	716		5,969	32.40
	Lab	1130			
	Mon.R.L.*	21			
	Nat. Fr.*	68	414		
1994	Con	326		6,097	33.30
	Lab	1326			
	Lib Dem	272			
	Nat. Fr.*	104	1000		
1995	Con	126		6,139	34.71
	Lab	1020			
	Nat. Fr.*	61			
	P.G.V.R.*	923	97		

* Mon.R.L. - Monster Raving Loony Party

* P.G.V.R. - Pye Green Valley Residents

* Nat.Fr. - National Front

As 1989 and 1993 were county council election years, no district elections were held.

Labour's vote and majority had not been reduced to such a level since the 1986 local elections against the SDP/Liberal Alliance. The Pye Green Valley residents, although unsuccessful, had in four short weeks of a bitter campaign come within 97 votes of unseating the sitting Labour councillor and closer than any other party in the last six local elections to defeating a Labour candidate.

At the count for the 1995 local elections, councillor B (the Labour council leader) on hearing the result, approached the unsuccessful residents' candidate and said *'we can have that meeting you've been asking for now'*. In response to this another Labour councillor who had just been re-elected to his safe Labour seat for another ward in the district, shouted *'no we bloody well won't and there's the reason'* at which he banged on the table and pointed to the piles of ballot papers. Subsequently, however a meeting was held between the residents group, the three ward councillors (B, C and D), the chair of the planing and works committee and the local MP. Of this meeting a residents campaigner commented, *'very polite, but no use, they didn't listen'*.

The residents' campaign was buoyed by their electoral near-success to such an extent that at the beginning of 1996 they declared they would fight the seat again that coming May when the Labour council leader himself, was up for re-election. The Labour party reacted angrily to the announcement, and in an open letter to the action group in the local press one Labour councillor attempted to shift the responsibility for the road onto the inquiry into the local district plan, and accused the residents of *'getting involved in politics'*. He continued:

I welcome the decision of the Pye Green Valley support group to field a candidate in this years local elections. We in the Labour party believe it is vital and healthy for democracy that more people take an active part in local politics. But this decision somewhat surprises me since it was reported in this paper that they had no interest in local politics. Surely by contesting elections they become political.

I am sure the electorate would also be keen to know what the candidate's policies on housing or employment are, or does he support Labour's manifesto pledge to acknowledge the outcome of the local plan Inquiry? By this we mean if the Inspector says no development in Pye Green Valley.

The author of the letter was councillor C, a Pye Green Valley councillor and also the Labour Party's Local Election Agent.²

The near-success of the residents election candidate in May 1995, their continued campaign against the road proposals, the evidence presented to the public inquiry in December 1995, and growing public awareness of the issue and criticism of the council, had an interesting political consequence. The leader of the council, (councillor B), due for re-election in May 1996 and a Pye Green councillor since 1984, declined to fight the seat. He was however selected to fight a by-election, for a safe Labour seat caused by the resignation of his wife, only a year after her own re-election to the council. She claimed pressure of work had led to her resignation. Councillor B claimed that his residence in the new ward would make it

² Letter from Labour Party election agent, *Chase Post*, 4 April 1996.

easier for him to represent its interests. The residents were thus robbed of the opportunity to unseat the leader of the council

The outcome of the May 1996 election for the Pye Green Valley ward was however a disappointment for the residents, in a straight fight against a Labour candidate who received 958 votes, the Pye Green Residents candidate collected 801 votes: a Labour majority of 157, an increase of 60 on the previous year, on a turnout of 28.6 per cent.

Meanwhile, two seats in the Brereton and Ravenshill Ward were to be re-elected in May 1996, that of the sitting Labour councillor, and a casual vacancy created by the resignation of the leader of the council's wife. Both seats were held easily by Labour with the leader of the council topping the poll with a majority of 79 over the sitting Labour councillor, who in turn was 782 votes ahead of the Conservative candidate. The leader of the council thus secured another four year term of office, and the sitting Labour councillor, who obtained the fewest votes of the two successful candidates, was re-elected for the three years that remained of vacated term of office.

Prior to this election the council leader stated in the local press that rumours of a 'rift' in the Labour party over his decision to fight another seat, were '*complete rubbish*', and that '*in all cases the support I have received has been unanimous*'. However local party sources quoted that the Leader was 'running scared' and that '*it is very embarrassing at a time when the party is doing so well nationally that Cannock's council leader has turned on his heels and run*'.³ At a meeting of the Cannock Chase

³ *Express and Star*, 3 February 1996.

District Labour Party in January 1996, the leader's intention to seek re-election to a seat other than Pye Green Valley, was condemned by delegates present, particularly the councillors in attendance. One councillor commented *'you should do the honourable thing, this is not honourable, stand by your ward and fight, fight, don't run like that'*. A second councillor stated *'you're making a big mistake, you're making it worse for us in Pye Green, it's just wrong'*. At the meeting no councillor spoke in favour of the leader's intention.⁴

In response to the leader's decision to fight a new seat, the Residents candidate, the same individual who fought in 1995 stated:

Part of me wants to have a dig at him, but he was always a gentleman towards us, not like [named four Labour councillors, not all from the Pye Green ward], they seemed to think we had no business in fighting an election, their attitude was always, "how dare you stand against us, how dare you use these elections against us". Still we are hopeful this year, but it is difficult to get elected on a single issue, but this is an important issue.

The four Labour councillors criticised by the candidate were interviewed for their responses to the residents fielding candidates in two local elections. The responses fall into two broad categories; first that the residents should stay out of party politics, and secondly that the seat was a Labour seat and any serious challenge was unacceptable. One of the councillors commented:

⁴ Cannock Chase District Labour Party meeting, 17 January 1996.

Look-the Tories can't win this seat, they never will, so they put up a front. If these people are as independent as they say they are then they should keep out of the local elections. Its that simple.

A second councillor stated *'they are wrong on the substantive issue, the road will regenerate the economy and bring jobs'*, while a third remarked, *'bloody cheek, come that close to winning the seat and want to met with us afterwards, and old [named councillor] agrees to it, I'd tell them to clear off in no uncertain terms and stay out of our wards'*

Use of the local elections then, a successful tactic for harrying and angering the Labour group whose policy the residents wished to change, but of negligible effect in securing the real victory they required, a reversal of that policy. An electoral success would have represented a symbolic victory and sent a powerful message to the ruling party group, but any Pye Green Residents councillor, as a lone voice, and set against the solidarity of the ruling group, would not succeed in reversing that group's policy.

ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

The link road case reveals a situation of political intransigence, and the construction and maintenance of firm boundaries around an issue, by the community affected and by the party group. Negotiation would achieve little, and even the statutory consultation procedures around the development of the Local Plan had not produced a compromise, or a relief of the political tension created around this issue.

Interviews conducted with those involved suggest that the political intransigence was the result of frustration amongst councillors generated by three sources. First, the existence of the road proposal for a period far longer than that of the action group's campaign and the slowness of the residents in reacting to an issue which had been public property since 1981. This situation reveals a criticism amongst councillors of low levels of public awareness of council affairs.

Secondly, that the Labour group's responses to perceived public criticism of 'policy' and the 'council' was translated as a political criticism of the Labour group. Similarly that a campaign against the 'policy' was a campaign against the Labour party by its political opponents. The involvement of the Conservative leader, councillor A, confirmed this opinion to Labour councillors.

Thirdly, a direct electoral threat levelled by the action group's decision to stand a candidate in the local elections. The conduct of the election campaign and the conflict between the local branch Labour party and the residents group was both a product and re-enforcement of this 'party political' interpretation. Labour councillors stressed their resentment at the residents decision to use the local elections on two occasions, and their anger at the closeness of the vote. Ward councillors and party members were particularly concerned at the embarrassing move to another seat, made by the leader of the council in response to the electoral threat.

The party political interpretation imposed on the issue by the Labour group is a common response amongst party groups faced with public criticism. In this case, that interpretation was exacerbated by the use of the electoral process to register a protest. To that interpretation must be added the

advantage of previous knowledge that councillors have in regard to both issues and the processes of consultation available. Councillors in this case were particularly scathing of opponents of the scheme, first as misunderstanding the impact of the development, and secondly as not appreciating the wider policy pressure on the council to meet government and county council requirements in the production of the local plan. A committee chair commented on the process of the decision and on the issue itself:

This decision was taken properly, council standing orders were adhered to and all the necessary requirements fulfilled.

Deleting the Pye Green Valley site [from the draft local plan] would have meant taking other green belt for development, and the road scheme is needed to put traffic calming measures on some of the roads in other areas. I am well aware of the concern felt by residents about the housing and road proposals in this area. But to comply with government policies on the long term protection of the green belt we have to consider sites within the urban core. People just don't understand that we have to respond to the demands, made on us for housing and industrial land by the government.

The party political interpretation led councillors to criticise the action group based on the assumption that 'elections' were to be fought and won by political *parties*, and that it was necessary to identify a broad political platform which could be opposed, rather than a single issue, which should be dealt with by other consultative processes or negotiation. In an interview a councillor expressed frustration at being, as he put it, '*unable*

to pin them [the residents group] down to anything specific other than this road'. He added:

what are they telling people about housing, employment, leisure, council rents, where do they stand on the government. That is what we want to know, we know what they think about the road.

Here we see the nationalisation of local politics being used as justification for a policy-broadening approach rather than a representative-specific approach.

The residents group were acutely aware of this political interpretation, even so some of its members, in interview, claimed the status of 'lifelong Labour voters,' despite the colour in which they were painted. This claim was even made by the residents candidate himself, and his wife, who was a leading member of the group. The road was thus not seen by them as a party issue. One campaigner commented:

I have voted Labour all my life, I am an ex-miner, what else can I vote? but never, ever again. That's quite an achievement for this lot, people all across the country voting Labour for the first time and me, never again, well not locally, I will for the government I mean.

The residents' main criticism was that the council and councillors were acting undemocratically, by which they meant engaging in no real or genuine communication, displaying no intention to act on residents' views, and showing a resentment of the residents' 'daring' to both campaign

against their policy and particularly to use the electoral process. Councillor A, the leader of the Conservative group, in a letter to the local press, summarised the residents' group attitude and attempted to out-flank the Labour group on the 'green left' of the political spectrum, thus:

There particular arrogance was never better demonstrated than by the council's portrayal of the public consultation phase of the plans. This gave the impression that public opinion would, in some way have a genuine influence on the council's final determination of the plans. Nothing could be further from reality, the petition was effectively binned...They [The Labour group] seem unable to recognise that public attitudes on health, pollution and the environment have changed dramatically over these years. The proposals for the Pye Green Valley are an offence against the very concept of democracy in local government.⁵

The residents' accusations that the controlling Labour group were somehow acting undemocratically were punctuated by reference to decisions being 'steamrollered', 'made in secret' by 'unresponsive' decision-makers who were 'uninterested in local people's views'. One campaigner stated 'we did a survey in this area and 98 per cent of the residents were against the road, they still won't listen'. The image presented was of a political monolith that communicated only when it had to and that would not respond to views with which it disagreed. A resident expressed the campaigners frustration thus:

⁵ Letter from the Leader of the Cannock Chase Conservative group, *Cannock Mercury*, 18 May 1995.

We didn't want to get involved in politics, but they forced us to because it was the only way to make them listen. It frightened them as well. You see all we kept getting from [named councillor] was: "it's a group decision, the group had decided, we discussed this in group". I had to ask him who this bloody group was and how could we meet them. He told me it was the Labour people on the council, but you can't get at them so we stood, that certainly got at them.

This case study displayed the specific impact of the use made of the electoral processes by a residents' group, but it was also important for the playing out of 'representation' in the party group and the local press and was particularly noticeable for its domination of the letters pages of the weekly free papers. The action group, local residents, the Conservative group leader, the residents election candidate, Labour councillors from Pye Green Valley and Anglesey wards, the chair of the planning and works committee and the Director of Technical Services, all used the letters pages of the local press to outline their positions and criticise their opponents. The power of public awareness and of the media as a theatre of representation was clearly evident in this case.

The residents group and in particular their candidate found themselves stepping into a more overt party political environment, in a letter to the local press regarding the VJ day celebrations. The candidate wrote:

It was a great site to see the Royal Brigade of Ghurkas and our old veterans, proud as ever, heads held high, chests stuck out marching through the High Street... Full marks must be given to our old boys.

It must be noted that the only councillors present in our proud march past were that of [councillor A, leader of the Conservative group and the Labour chair of the district council]. Of course these councillors will have very good excuses why they could not be present on this day, which was very important for our victorious lads of the forces. These councillors were elected by us, the residents of their wards to represent us in all aspects of our community and important functions of our area. Why are they there? Is it to better their own way of life or to serve the people who put them there, why were they not at the march past? Any person who is fortunate enough to be democratically elected to serve on the council should be proud to serve the people of their ward

The attendance at the VJ parade was high and hence we must fight to keep Hednesford on the map and not be swallowed up by our sister town of Cannock. We must preserve Hednesford and our way of life. Pye Green Valley has undergone many changes over the years and against all odds has survived to lend a beautiful sight to its many residents. Please help us to ensure it stays this way for our future generations. Finally it is my sincere hope that in the future I shall have the opportunity to serve the people of this community to the best of my abilities.⁶

This appeal to past glory, its linkage of fighting spirit with community and its criticism of councillors, which would particularly imply Labour

⁶ Letters page, *Cannock Mercury*, from the Pye Green valley Residents candidate, 11 October 1995.

councillors because of the party's considerable council majority, brought a furious press response from an Anglesey ward Labour councillor thus:

A recent letter to your paper criticised local Hednesford councillors for their non-attendance at the Hednesford Extravaganza. For that is what it was, the VJ parade having taken place on the previous Sunday... During the past 30-40 years many people have moved into the area and have added to Hednesford's unique character and strengths. I don't know how long [the residents candidate] has lived here but I have been fortunate to have been born and brought up in Hednesford. Added to this five generations of my family have lived here, many of them serving their country in two world wars. Myself I am privileged to serve the people of Hednesford on the district council and that is what I hope to continue to do.... If we as councillors do not care as is implied would we hold regular surgeries? Or spend many hours responding to letters and phone calls from constituents? Or the many hours spent paying people visits when asked to do so? The answer can only be given by the electorate, and at the proper time they will do so.

In conclusion I hope the letter writer has found this response useful and realise that there is more to being a councillor than jumping on any parade bandwagon just to get himself noticed, and I would hope that he does not in future use the memories of our ex-service people as a vote catching exercise.⁷

⁷ Letters page, *Cannock Mercury*, 18 October 1995.

After the residents' second unsuccessful attempt to win a council seat and to further exemplify the claim made by Labour councillors that the residents were indeed a 'political body' and not independent at all, a Labour councillor stated:

They now want to form a parish council, there you are that proves it, they can't get elected to the district so they think they'll set up a little parish council and snipe at us from it. If that's not being political I don't know what is. The people of Hednesford don't want, or need a parish council and they don't want to pay for it so these people can undermine the district council. If this is formed there will be trouble I guarantee it

The chair of the residents group denied the comment, stating:

We really have no interest in local politics, we have not approached the Staffordshire Parish Councils Association to form an active parish council, and some of the group are very anti the idea, but we have considered it, but we are just about the road.

When informed of a parish council's ability to conduct a referendum she replied *'oh, that's interesting, we didn't know about that, hmm, thank you'*.

This issue exemplifies the intransigence of a party group confronted by an active, unremitting and dedicated community group, with access to resources and a level of political appreciation that can be used to confront the political experience of a local party machine. It also illustrates the tendency for councillors to adopt a position based on the virtue of

permanency, that is that once a decision is made through the democratic procedures that are the closed party group, and abiding by the statutory criteria, no counter case can have a value exceeding the need to maintain the agreed group position on any issue.

In this case at least, the party group appeared to view community disagreement with its policy as a 'political' challenge leading them to further 'party politicise' the issue. Councillors here, when faced with such a challenge - when threatened by electoral competition and exposed to possible defeat - are nevertheless still drawn toward publicly supporting the group, and an open and public confrontation with the local community and their own electorate. Expressing reservations about that policy, as in the case of councillor D, is a matter not for the public but for the closed group meeting. A Labour councillor interviewed after the May 1995 election results, and soon to have the group whip withdraw for his activity in another anti-road protest said:

*All she [councillor D, the Labour candidate in the May 1995 elections] had to do was go to the first public meeting the residents ever had and say, I oppose this road and as your local councillor I will do all I can to stop it, they would have carried her into the council chamber and there wouldn't of been an anti-road candidate. She'd have had to have done it though, I mean fought the issue, I said to her tell the group to **** ***, it's your seat, you're the one going to lose, just fight it and them.*

When confronted with this advice the councillor concerned simply replied 'don't be soft'.

9. THE RELIEF ROAD

This case study concerns the Birmingham Northern Relief Road (BNRR), a major new road to be constructed through the areas of two county councils, Staffordshire and Warwickshire, three district councils, South Staffordshire, Cannock and Lichfield, one borough council, North Warwickshire, the Metropolitan Borough Council of Walsall and one City Council, Birmingham.

To elaborate the tension between party group, councillors and the community, this case study considers the political environment and activities only within those local authorities where a controlling party group supported the proposed road, and were faced with opposition to that policy from sections of their community. It also considers only those authorities through which the proposed road would be constructed and not those close to the route. This is because the physical impact of the road through a particular area motivates greater public awareness and activity than a development which does not physically impact on an area.

This case study concerns the political activities throughout the period 1993 to 1996 as this presents a manageable time span for the issue. Public debate concerning a road such as the BNRR had occurred since 1984, and a proposal to construct a relief road for this area of the West Midlands was the subject of a public inquiry in 1988. This case study refers to this earlier period only as necessary and sparingly. It considers the case study as a discrete issue in terms of the responses to the publication of the 1993 Draft Orders.

BACKGROUND.

The Department of Transport published the Draft Orders for the construction of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road on 15 June 1993, thus triggering the twelve week Statutory Objection Period. The £500 million BNRR was proposed as Britain's first privately-constructed toll motorway. It was designed by, and to be funded, constructed, operated and maintained by, Midland Expressway Limited (MEL), a consortium comprising Trafalgar House and the Italian construction company Iritecna. The concession period for the BNRR was to be 53 years, three years for construction and 50 years of operation. The BNRR would be a public highway, apart from the toll areas, and was scheduled for completion, and operation, by 1998/99.

The BNRR would provide a motorway link around the north east of the West Midlands conurbation from the existing M6 motorway, north of junction 11, to the M6 east of junction 4, thus linking the M6 in Staffordshire with the M42 at Coleshill in Warwickshire. This 27 mile stretch of motorway would be mainly dual, three-lane highway, but certain parts would be constructed as five lanes of highway.

In addition the construction project included a Motorway Service Area, a maintenance area and seven toll stations. The route also included a number of link roads, new carriageways, junctions, roundabouts and the re-alignment of existing roads, either proposed by MEL or by the local authorities concerned.

The construction consortium expressed four aims for the scheme; to provide relief to the existing M6; to provide a distributor road to the north

and east of the West Midlands conurbation linking the M42 and the proposed Western Orbital route; to have regard to the National road traffic Forecasts 1989; and to provide, as soon as possible, the infrastructure to relieve traffic congestion.

In addition to these claims the Staffordshire local authorities which supported the BNRR maintained that certain benefits would accrue from its construction. Namely, that the road would: provide an alternative for the heavily congested M6; provide relief to the existing road system north of the conurbation, in particular the A5(T) and the A452(T); provide links for and improved distribution of traffic between the major roads to the north of the conurbation including the M54, A5(T), A38(T), and the M42; and provide improved access for development for areas throughout the route.¹ The non-Staffordshire authorities also shared these broad aims.

The proposed road would form part of the Trans-European Road Network (TERN) which would enable traffic movement into the region direct from the continent, the purpose of this linkage was to facilitate long distance travel across Europe. The road would also link to the western orbital route. As such it can not be viewed simply as a 27 mile stretch of motorway but as an integral development of the local, regional, national and European road network and as a result its political impact extends beyond the boundaries of any one local authority.

¹ Birmingham Northern Relief Road, presentation to Kenneth Carlisle, MP., Minister for Roads and Traffic, report produced by Staffordshire County Council, Cannock Chase, Lichfield, South Staffordshire District Councils and Tamworth Borough Council, 1989.

The local authorities which supported the road scheme did so from a general belief in the economic regeneration properties of its construction and operation, specifically that of 'job creation'. Each local authority (and ruling party group) had its own specific reasons for support (or objection) to the road proposals, related to its own area and its perceived requirements, this was alongside more general grounds of support. The Labour groups concerned however, all opposed the private funding element, its construction as a toll road and had a policy which supported its 'public' provision.

THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT: COUNCILLORS AND THE PARTY GROUP

The controlling party groups which supported the construction of the relief road and through whose area it would run, were the Labour groups of Staffordshire County, Cannock Chase District, and Conservative controlled South Staffordshire and Lichfield Districts. The minority Conservative group of Staffordshire County Council also supported the road proposal whilst the minority Labour group of South Staffordshire District opposed it. The ruling Conservative group and minority Labour group of Lichfield District Council supported the construction. The Labour party assumed control of Lichfield Council in May 1995. The public inquiry had commenced by this time, and this was given as a reason by the secretary of that group for not reconsidering its existing policy.

North Warwickshire Borough Council had pursued an officer-led support for the proposals, but as a result of; the national Labour party policy for a moratorium on all new motorway construction pending enhanced

environmental studies, the 1992 general election campaign promise to oppose the BNRR and, two shadow transport spokesmen since confirming that position, the deputy leader of the group took action. A member of the shadow transport team, Joan Whalley MP attended a North Warwickshire Labour group meeting to stress the party's national position on the road and as a result the Labour group reversed its officer-led policy. During this consultation with the national party, no other groups, either national organisations, or locally formed action groups, were given the same opportunity to address the party group. North Warwickshire were however, the only group which supported the road to take advice on this, at a group meeting, from any source other than paid officers.

Commenting on the political position of the group, the former deputy leader of North Warwickshire, Borough Council (now a Lichfield district councillor) stated:

We were just going along with the officers, I always opposed the thing, but I had to get the party nationally to make the point. Some of our members wont listen to anyone but officers. I had a hard enough job getting them to agree to Joan [Whalley] attending a group meeting. There is absolutely no way they would meet with the public at a group meeting. Most of them didn't stay for the meeting with Joan, they just went off, but we got the policy changed and that's what mattered

In the local authorities whose controlling groups supported the construction, the motorway would run through a total of 10 district wards represented by 24 district councillors, and affect six county divisions. The political composition of the district wards was 15 Labour, four

Conservative, three Independent Labour, one Independent and one Residents Association. The six county divisions were represented by two Labour, two Conservative, one Independent and one Residents Association member. At the time of the study four of these county councillors were also district councillors, being Labour, Conservative, Residents Association and Independent, the latter two being members of the same district council.

The relief road was not a politically partisan issue, and both Labour and Conservative groups supported its construction. Partisan debate was limited to the private funding and toll elements with Labour groups opposed to, and Conservative groups supporting these aspects. Nor, within each of the party groups which supported the construction, was that support unanimous. Councillors in both Conservative and Labour groups, and at county and district level opposed the construction, although their opposition, and any articulation of community opposition to the road, by councillors, was largely maintained within the private meetings of their groups. Indeed, opposition was mainly evident from observation and interview with councillors opposed to the scheme. Councillor's positions were unaffected by whether the road would run through the electoral area they represented or not, as support existed in both situations. This was despite the existence of active community opposition to the road from within the wards and divisions.

Interviews with councillors did not lead to accurate figures for opponents within each group, as the original decisions to support a relief road had often been taken in the mid 1980's. Decisions related to the road were then passed as consequent upon an original decision, and were seen as ancillary to its implementation. Only two councils from those originally supporting

the BNRR had changed their position, North Warwickshire Borough Council and Warwickshire County Council, the latter change came as a result of the defeat of the ruling Conservative group in 1993, and the formation of a Labour minority administration with Liberal Democrat support.

Feelings ran high amongst the councillors interviewed. A Labour district councillor opposed to the road commented in an interview that:

This doesn't go through my ward, or even close to it but I don't agree with the road, but, you have to fight these things in the group, I take every opportunity to raise the issue, I won't let an opportunity go by, you know if we have a report or something. Now we [the group] had this report about progress of the Public Inquiry and I reminded them of all the opposition to the road, the petitions we had, made a speech against it, got some support, and then they agreed to note the report. I didn't repeat in committee what I said in group, there's no point. This is the first time we have controlled this council so the Tories are looking for any disagreements to jump on. Besides, I don't have to say things in public, I am opposed to it, I've told people against the road I am opposed to it, what I do in the council doesn't matter, as long as I fought the corner where it counted and that's in group.

A Conservative councillor from the same authority stated:

This affects my ward and there exists considerable opposition to the road, of which I am well aware, I have made some non-

committal statements in the press, but the Conservative group made a decision on this road some time ago in the knowledge that it would benefit the area. I will listen to people from my ward, what I will not tolerate is the professional protesters from [named organisation] their input is no value as they are opposed to all roads. I have spoken at group meetings and relayed the feeling in my ward amongst some people that are opposed to it. But then there is the silent majority that does not protest and I must also speak for them.

Another Labour councillor commented:

I support this road for one reason only, they have linked it to the Burntwood By-pass, no BNRR, no Burntwood by-pass and we desperately need this by-pass. The group supports the road and I will support it in public on that basis. I have argued at public meetings for that position and tried to explain to those against it that this is the only way we get the by-pass. I can understand their feelings when you are faced with a six lane motorway thundering past your house, but if they don't like my actions on this thing they can vote me out.

The reaction from councillors who supported the BNRR was sympathetic towards their colleagues that experienced pressure or opposition within their own wards or divisions. Conservative and Labour, county and district councillors recognised that a member had a local area to represent and that responsibility would on occasions involve conflict with a group position, particularly an issue on the scale of the BNRR. Representation however, could be conducted within the party group, and by acceptable methods

within council, such as the presentation of petitions. These, although much derided by many councillors as 'unrepresentative', were seen as an acceptable way by which a councillor could represent an area, without then having to publicly commit themselves to a campaign. As a Labour county councillor and committee chair, said:

What [named councillor] did was clever, we all know he is against the road, he handed in this petition, some of us at the group meeting expressed an opinion that he had probably organised and collected it, but we didn't really know if he had. He had made his point, through the correct channels you might say, and that was that. If we found out he had organised and collected it then there would be trouble.

Councillors of all parties were expected to act in an 'acceptable' fashion when representing those sections of the community that opposed their own group's position. Even minority groups expected their members to act cautiously and judiciously when handling opposition to the group's policy regarding the road. Acceptable opposition was that maintained within the party group, not spilling over into the public theatre of council, and particularly the press or public meetings. As a Labour group secretary and committee chair said of a fellow Labour councillor who had spoken at a public meeting against the road proposals:

I just couldn't believe it, he stood up, in a meeting of 200 people, and said he would do all he could to stop the road, he even gave out bundles of leaflets and petitions at the end of the meeting opposing the road for people to use. You cannot treat

the group in such a way, in my twenty years on this council I have never seen such disregard for group policy

In one ward, two out of three Labour councillors, although aware of the depth of opposition amongst their own electorate to the proposal, supported the road in public meetings, the press and council, in deference to group policy. The third, whilst opposing the road, admitted to having made no public statements of opposition and had not pursued the matter in the group. As a result of group policy he had declined to speak against the proposals at the public inquiry, offering a conflict of interest as the cause. Conservative and Labour councillors in other wards and divisions directly affected by the BNR, if opposed to it, concentrated their opposition at the group, and kept carefully worded press comment to a minimum up to and during the public inquiry. After the inquiry, and whilst awaiting the outcome, public protest noticeably declined, as it did amongst councillors, who used this respite to avoid the issue. The high profile opposition after the inquiry came mainly from Friends of the Earth.

A CASE OF GROUP DISCIPLINE

At the time of the study an incident of group disciplinary activity occurred which resulted in the withdrawal of the whip. A Labour county, district and parish councillor (councillor A) and an opponent of the relief road prior to his election to these bodies, was disciplined by his county and district groups. The proposed road would run through almost the entire length of the division he represented. Within his district ward, community opposition to the road existed, even though it was a distance from construction route.

Councillor A, used his election to the county council in 1993, as a platform to oppose the BNRR, despite a Labour group policy of support for it. He took the same approach on his election to the district council in 1994. A complicating factor was that councillor A used the parish council, on which there was no group whip, to criticise both the BNRR and the county and district councils support for it. These niceties notwithstanding, he was quoted variously in the press, as county, district or parish councillor. As a result of comments made, and questions asked at council meetings, the county and district Labour groups undertook disciplinary procedures.

In December 1994 after 19 months of county membership and open, public campaigning against the relief road, a disciplinary meeting of the executive committees of the county Labour group and county Labour Party was convened by the chief whip. Although willing to tolerate this councillor's opposition to the road, in county council committee, it was a series of press reports of statements made at public meetings and at district and parish council meetings, that prompted the county whip to act.

The meeting considered the councillor's statements, and a verbal submission made by him at the disciplinary hearing of his continued and public opposition to the Road. This meeting decided not to withdraw the whip and appreciated that divisional issues would need to be pursued by the local county councillor. He was advised to undertake his campaign in the same manner as a former Labour county councillor, defeated by a Residents Association candidate (and anti-road campaigner) in 1993: that was, to contain harsher criticism within the group and, if criticising the BNRR, to concentrate on the tolling issue, not to criticise the Labour controlled council or its position on the BNRR itself. As a result of such

assurances given by the member, it was agreed that no further disciplinary action would be taken. The chief whip commented:

We didn't want to lose him from the group, but he must understand, the group is bigger than any one issue. We put up with it for a while because he was a new member but I had no alternative but to call a clause 10 [disciplinary] meeting, especially when the district are disciplining him as well. He has sort of behaved himself, spoken out against the BNRR in committee, and we were unhappy about that, but it was really the press coverage. Someone, let's just say, sources at the district council sent us the newspaper articles, because, being the county we don't see all the local papers, no I am not saying who sent it, but once we had been made aware of the way the BNRR and county were being criticised we had to act, which we did. But we did not withdraw the whip on assurances of better behaviour and a more sympathetic understanding of the group's position. We are sympathetic towards his position as local county councillor, we just want the same understanding.

As far as the meeting was concerned we viewed his actions as a conscience matter and not deliberate action against group policy, but he was warned that any indiscretion along the same lines would leave us with no alternative but to withdraw the whip. It was a friendly warning really, there was nothing personal in the manner it was made, but we have to maintain group discipline

The leader of the county council stated:

It was honours even I think, and he had a surprising amount of support amongst the county party executive members, and the group members present, I think they are quite open to his honesty and commitment on the BNRR. But this group is known for being a tight ship and you can't let these things run and run, otherwise people will start to think if he gets away with it so can I and that means anarchy.

The district Labour group took a stricter interpretation of group discipline and procedure which involved a full meeting of the Labour group convened solely for that purpose, together with the district party executive committee. At that meeting, in November 1994, five incidents were presented as evidence of breach of standing orders, three involved councillor A asking questions at council and committee meetings, which opposed the relief road, and two concerned press reports of statements made by him at meetings of his parish council. At the meeting the chief whip proposed a motion for the indefinite withdrawal of the whip, an amendment was moved by a committee chair, that the whip be withdrawn for a period of six months. This was defeated after a vote, and the substantive motion then passed by the group.

At an appeal meeting with members of the Labour Party regional executive committee, councillor A stated that although he had acted against group policy he had supported '*national party policy*'. The response he received from a member of the appeal panel was that '*it was group policy and standing orders that are important, not national policy and it was standing orders that had been broken*'. However, the indefinite suspension was replaced by a nine-month period of withdrawal of the whip. Re-admission to the Labour group was to be after councillor A had re-signed a

commitment to abide by standing orders. If, after six months the group wished to re-instate the whip, they were able to do so; in this case they did not and the suspension ran the nine month period. The chief whip of the district Labour group is worth quoting at length on the issue:

It was the most serious breach of discipline we had seen in this group, his actions were vexatious and frivolous and his whole intention was to embarrass the chairman of the committees at which he spoke against group policy. It does not matter if he is reported as a parish councillor or county councillor, you are not to speak against group policy. The catalogue of offences was incredible, going to the press, speaking at committee, and council, and I would add on no occasion did he come to the group and try to change our policy on the BNRR in the proper place, the group. No he just took public opportunities to attack the group and the BNRR and to embarrass our chairmen.

There was no doubt his behaviour was not consistent with clause 8 which is fundamental to group discipline and an aid to the well being of the group.² Loyalty to the group is one of the declarations made by all Labour councillors, including him, even before they are selected. The place to air our differences is at the Labour group not the floor of the committee or full council meetings where we only play hostage to fortune with our political enemies present. Our chairmen are elected by the group and we all must be respectful of that. If members are going to raise controversial questions to chairmen it must be at Labour group or

² *Labour Party Rule Book*, 13A.8, 'Action by Individual Members', p. 62.

well in advance of meetings so that appropriate answers can be proffered when the press and opposition and public are present. Members have rights under standing orders and if they are in doubt what so ever they should consult the leader, deputy leader or other officer of the group.

I know I said this earlier, but what I, as chief whip, found as really offensive about his actions was the contempt for the group. He never once, tried to bring the issue to group, or to change our policy in group meetings. Such a short time on the council and the whip withdraw, it must be some sort of record, but shows his contempt for the proper group procedures.

Councillor A commented in response:

Not much to add to that really, yes, I did all that, but there was absolutely no point in raising the issue in the group, I know that group, I had been a district party observer for three years before becoming a councillor, they would not change their mind on the BNRR, no matter what I said and I had enough evidence against it. I represented my ward and they didn't like it. They withdraw the whip which really means that you can't go to the meetings to be told what to say and think, when you weren't doing it any way, a strange punishment. He's right I do hold the group in contempt, but that's only because they hold the public in contempt so they deserve it, besides I have no intention of standing for election to this lot again so they can do what they like.

The general consensus amongst councillors within the Labour group was reported by a councillor thus:

The leadership were out to get him, and he gave them all the ammunition they wanted, most of us are sure he did it on purpose. But if he'd have come to the group, we could have done something I am sure, we could change the policy on this road, some of us don't agree with it. But he went against standing orders, quite a few of us - I didn't count on the night - voted for an amendment to withdraw the whip for six months, I mean he did it, we had all heard him and seen the articles, so we couldn't just forget about it. But once the amendment was lost, we had to vote for the substantive motion to withdraw the whip indefinitely, you can't just let that sort of thing go, there are right ways of fighting a corner you know.

A committee chair, of whom councillor A had asked a question at council, the intention of which was to criticise the BNRR, commented at full council:

Councillors of councillor [A's] ilk will always take the easy route and say what people want to hear, we have to make some unpopular decisions sometimes and stand by them. Councillor [A] just takes the easy way and gets in the press. It's not that easy you have to make decisions some people don't like

The group had used the disciplinary procedures to draw in a recalcitrant councillor. Councillors finding themselves in opposition to the group, on an issue of importance to their electorate and themselves, are faced with a

clear choice of action. Take the issue and your position on it, to what is considered by many councillors as the proper theatre for decision, the group meeting, and argue a case. If however, the issue is lost at group, then any councillor becomes effectively bound by that decision which can then be used against him or her if they wished to continue public opposition.

Councillors may decide not to take the issue to group in an attempt to obtain greater freedom of action, however, as this case indicates, councillors can equally be criticised for not using the group to raise an issue, particularly if the group already has a policy on it. Either way, the party group is a closed theatre, which expects councillors to both act within it as a deliberative and decision-making forum, and to be loyal to its decisions once made. Councillor's freedom of action is thus constrained by the group.

CLOSED GROUP MEETINGS

Decisions had been made in closed group meetings, taking advice only from officer sources (except in the case of North Warwickshire). Councillors, whether Labour or Conservative, in majority or minority groups thereafter abided in the vast majority of cases, by those decisions. Representation took place within the group, and at its most public through guarded press comments or reports of meetings.

One of the most vociferous and vocal opponents of the road was a Residents Association county and district councillor. He had been elected on an anti-road platform and defeated, for his county seat, a sitting Labour

councillor, who, by the admission of the county Labour group deputy leader, had:

Fought that road all the way, but he did it correctly, in group, so [named residents councillor] could say he was doing nothing about it and in fact supporting it. That wasn't true. He fought it tooth and nail in group, but quite rightly did not criticise the group policy in public.

Thus a closed political environment had been created on this issue by party groups. Members of which voluntarily accepted that on this issue, as with many others identified during this research, opposition would take place within the group, and that group loyalty should not be compromised by acts of public representation. In such an environment, community action groups, national environmental groups and other organisations campaigning against the BNRR could not claim a priority over the group. It is to that community campaign and the relationship between representatives and represented that this case study now turns.

THE COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN.

Concentrating on those local authority areas which supported the construction of the BNRR, community protest consisted of three types of organisational input: community formed action groups, national environmental pressure groups and other institutions. Alongside this organised protest were individual reactions and protest made by people who were not members of any structured group. Action groups were formed along the 27 mile length of the route, with villages having their

own anti-road organisation. The opposition was not however unified with different groups either totally opposed to the BNRR, campaigning for amendments to the route, or for particular alternative routes.

In some villages more than one BNRR-group existed. Shenstone for example, sported both SMAG and SMOG, the Shenstone Motorway Action Group, which campaigned for what was known as the Boosie route, designed by a local resident, and the Shenstone Motorway Opposition Group, which campaigned on a platform of total opposition to the BNRR. In some cases parish councils took a leading role against the road, in others they worked in conjunction with community action groups to oppose the road. The groundswell of public awareness and campaigning on this issue that developed over the period from June 1993 to 1996, continued. The full range of media coverage was used by individuals and organisations, and MPs and MEPs were contacted by campaigners.

The BNRR also figured prominently in the 1996 Staffordshire South East by-election, in which each of the three main party's candidates responded to a request from the West Midlands Friends of the Earth for a statement of their position on the BNRR. Each candidate responded as opposed to the road. The victorious Labour candidate was the council leader, and former mayor of Tamworth Borough Council which, although the BNRR would not run through its boundaries, supported the construction. The campaign against the road was wide-ranging, extensive and well publicised and attracted the interest of national environmental groups. Friends of the Earth were instrumental in forming the 'Alliance Against the BNRR', an umbrella group representing organisations along the 27 mile route, which acted as a clearing house for protest and as a co-ordinator of action.

Councillors figured prominently as a focus for community activity, particularly those councillors who were members of a party groups which supported the motorway. Individual district and county councillors were contacted by national and local action groups for either support for the anti-BNRR cause or to pressurise those members who favoured its construction. One public meeting, organised by a parish council which opposed the BNRR, attracted an audience of 160 members of the public. Two of the three district councillors and the county councillor for the area were present, all were members of a party group which supported the BNRR. The three councillors spoke, two of whom presented a careful support for the road and the policy of their group, as well as their own personal arguments. A Labour district councillor stated at the meeting: *'the reality is this road is going to be built, it will come, we can't stop it so we must work to get the best for the village and that is what the council have tried to do'*. Another stated:

This road, whilst I admit causing problems will bring jobs and we need those jobs...you must take a wider view. This will regenerate the whole of the local economy...its going to be eight metres below ground level when it hits our village, they [the developers] wanted five but the district council fought hard on your behalf and got them to go down to eight metres.

In both cases those councillors were representing the party group's position to the electorate, rather than channelling the electorate's response back to the party group.

At a public meeting in another, smaller village, which attracted 95 people the Conservative district councillor commented:

I know you do not want this road, but there are 90 or so here tonight from this village, I have to think of what is right for all those not present. The district council believe most strongly that this road will be a tremendous boon for this part of the county and I know you do not want it, but in the long run we will all benefit. The district council on which I am proud to be your representative has your interests at heart, knee jerk opposition is fine at the beginning but we are sure in the long term this road will pay off.

The Labour county councillor was more forthright in his deference to the policy of the party group and stated:

Look speaking personally, and I must ask the press not to quote me on this, I am not really happy about the road, I share your concerns, I don't as you know live in this village, but where I do live we will certainly hear the road. You must understand I can only do so much, I will happily hand in petitions, organise a deputation to the county council, but you must appreciate I can not shout against this road from the roof tops, it would be against policy of the Labour group and against standing orders, I am sure you understand that.

A campaigner interviewed for this research commented of her councillors:

[Named county councillor] is great, really supportive, he does anything to stop this road, do you know they kicked him off the council for it [meaning withdrew the group whip] I didn't think they could do that sort of thing, he was elected to represent us,

they can't kick him off for that, that's what they're all there for. We all wrote to the papers you know, telling them what we thought about it. Now [three named district councillors] are hopeless, [named councillor], actually supports it, thinks it will be great, I mean he lives here we just can't understand it. We had him to a meeting you know, told him what we thought of him. At least he came, you don't see the other two, till they knock on your door for a vote that is.

The campaign along the route of the relief road varied depending on the area and groups concerned. It consisted of a high press and media profile, letter writing campaigns, petitions, leaflet drops, protest marches, lobbies of, and demonstrations outside, council meetings and deputations to ministers in London. The campaign galvanised a range of organisations from environmental campaigners to residents' associations and pony clubs, into a critical mass of protest, channelled at whichever representative or representative body seemed worth targeting. Amongst the 24 district councillors and six county councillors identified earlier, only two, one Labour and one Residents' Association, both of them parish, district and county councillors, took an active part in the community campaign against the BNRR. Their protest extended beyond representing local views in council to a full range of campaigning activity.

Amongst the remaining councillors, those opposed to the road articulated that opposition within the party group and those who supported it found themselves opposed by a well organised and high profile public campaign. Not one councillor was identified as having changed their position from support to private opposition, or from that, to public opposition, as a result of the public pressure applied. Such pressure was then largely

unsuccessful in either changing the position of individual councillors or their party groups, or in tempting individual anti-BNRR councillors in any party to break cover from the group. There was but one instance of this, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Labour whip from a councillor, the resultant press coverage and letters to the local papers protesting at this disciplinary action, was used by both the councillor concerned and action groups to further protest against the road.

The party groups were confronted not only by public pressure but also a weighty intellectual argument against the road, which consisted of independent and University-based research, from Britain and the United States, independent consultants and pollution experts, all of which undercut the arguments in support of the BNRR. Despite the public and intellectual campaign, the party groups remained unmoved, unresponsive to public pressure to change position, and defensive of their own position and arguments.

A Labour district councillor and committee chair commented:

All these protesters have their own cars and most of them drive to public meetings about the BNRR in them. The car has given a certain amount of freedom to people and people want to use them. The BNRR will relieve the A5 and M6 and make travel easier, that is why we support it.

The public inquiry

The public inquiry into the BNRR, under the government appointed Inspector, Sir John Fitzpatrick, sat from 21 June 1994 to 3 October 1995,

and became the longest running public inquiry into a new road proposal of this nature. It heard objections from groups and individuals, and received technical evidence both in support and objection to the proposals. A consortium of local councils supporting the road were legally represented by a Barrister and shared the cost of this, half being met by Staffordshire County Council and other half by four district councils.

An attempt was made by a county councillor to have the costs of legal representation for the opponents of the scheme also met by this consortium; as he commented at a meeting of the county council's special joint sub-committee:

You are using council tax-payers money to forward a scheme you support against the expressed wishes of thousands of those council tax-payers. How can you justify not financially supporting the objectors by giving them their own money back for legal representation?

The officers recommendation to this meeting which were accepted by the committee were:

The decision of the county council to support the proposed BNRR now subject to the detailed matters of objection referred to, had been taken by elected members of the county council through the democratic process of this sub-committee, and the planning and highways committees. The representation of those views at the Inquiry is a reflection of that process and the expenditure of the council on officers' time, and the sharing of costs of a barrister, is a corollary. Having expressed a

democratically-taken view on the proposed BNRR, it would not then be appropriate for the county council also to expend its resources promoting at the Inquiry views which are not those which elected Members had resolved that the county council should express.

It is not considered therefore that the request can be agreed.³

Introducing this report a council officer advised that it would be *'democratically inconsistent, to agree to this request'*. The councillor who had made the request, replied, *'I'll tell you what's democratically inconsistent, sticking two fingers up to all those people who want to stop this road. We should be representing them, that's what's democratically inconsistent'*.

Of the 24 district councillors and 6 county councillors representing the wards and divisions through which the road would run, only four spoke at the inquiry, the Residents' Association councillor and disciplined Labour councillor referred to above, and two Labour councillors from a minority district Labour group which opposed the BNRR. Other than the disciplined Labour councillor none of those councillors representing areas through which the road would run and who were members of party groups which supported the road, made a submission to the public inquiry.

With the Inquiry closed, the Inspector's determination is not expected until 1997.

³ Report to Staffordshire County Council's highways and planning special joint sub-committee re: toll roads, 3 June 1994.

IMPLICATIONS

An examination of the relationship between the councillors, party groups, individuals and organisations involved in this case study demonstrates the closed nature of the political environment created by the demands of loyalty made by party groups on councillors. That closed political environment is conducive to the 'policy broadening' effect of the group system and antithetical to a more representational and responsive orientation. Councillors identified as adopting a 'policy orientation' may be more the product of the group approach to representation that 'broadens' the representative horizon, than any innate preference amongst some councillors for 'policy' issues. The group system and its processes, including its ability to discipline members as necessary, and to secure their loyalty without recourse to disciplinary mechanisms, is a key element in diverting councillors' attention away from their local electorate.

Generalising from this case study, when confronted with a major issue, which impinged not only on a single electoral area but on a number of areas, and crossed a number of local authority boundaries, the group system displayed common characteristics, whatever the political control. Councillors who opposed the BNRB but were members of groups which supported the construction, irrespective of political affiliation and with one exception, restricted the nature of their opposition and confined its conduct to the closed theatre of the party group.

That a single councillor in this case chose to act against the group and in public was exceptional, and underlines the fact that for other members the proper course of action was not to oppose group policy in public. Even when faced with an issue of the scale of physical, economic,

environmental and social impact as the BNRR, the political and party political process and conflicts involved outweighed public awareness and concern. Councillors remained loyal to the group. At the same time however, the possibility of dissent being tolerated by the group, is the greater, provided it is 'properly' expressed, that is by the use of the group as a deliberative and decision-making theatre, and the avoidance by councillors of public acts of opposition to its position. When acts are undertaken by councillors, these must be of a nature 'acceptable' to the group.

The BNRR case study demonstrates the ability of the group to stand firm on a decision or policy that attracts considerable public opposition, and to maintain that position throughout a protracted time period. The group system strengthens councillors' abilities to make and maintain unpopular decisions and to deflect, rather than reflect public opinion. The nature, scope and impact of that issue makes little difference to this ability. Although the BNRR was the most important local issue for many of those involved in the public campaign against the scheme, and in many cases was their first, and only, experience of such campaigning, for the councillor it would not be the only issue with which they were involved. The councillor would still be engaged in a range of decision-making processes within group, committee and council and wider public theatres of representation on a range of other issues. The party group, and the associated council committee structure generalises councillors' interest, whereas the interests of the electorate are more specific and focused around issues and events of importance to their communities.

PART IV
CONCLUSIONS

10. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis began by setting out the tension inherent in local representative democracy, that between the electorate and the councillor and his or her party. That tension is integral to a system of local representative government, designed as it is to allow the electorate to select their representatives but at the same time allow those representatives to govern the locality. The existence of coherent groupings of councillors, elected through the use of some political agency increases the tension between councillor and electorate. Political groupings of one sort or another have long been a feature of British local government. What has varied over time and place has been the extent to which such groupings have acted as unified and disciplined *blocs* of councillors for the conduct of council affairs. The existence of party politics is not a new phenomenon in British local government. But the prominence of the national party label, and its use both to secure election and to operate as an identifiable party on any council, has heightened public awareness of the incursion of party politics into what was once the pursuit of a restricted social elite.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the thesis examined how the party system developed in local government and showed how the councillor is now confronted with not only a loyalty-demanding group, but equally with an electorate growing in confidence and assertiveness. The concept of 'event driven democracy' was introduced to explain how specific local issues can stimulate the electorate to protest a council decision and thus articulate a demand that the councillor 'represent' that view to the council. The councillor is faced with a *crisis of representation*, when the opinions of the group and the electorate collide, and when both demand that the

councillor 'represent' their views to the other. He or she must balance these demands and give greater weight to one or either of the protagonists.

Chapter 3 examined how councillors' attitudes towards democracy assist the group in interposing itself between the councillor and the electorate. For this purpose a number of questions were specifically formulated together with a number reproduced from the research conducted for the Widdicombe committee. A representative index was constructed from councillors' responses to these questions. The responses were scored on a positive and a negative index to produce a representative score which enabled councillors' attachment to electorate and party to be assessed. By examining councillors' responses through the filter of party affiliation, it was found that not only did councillors of different party background respond differently to different aspects of representation, but that some remarkably similar attitudes are also to be found across the political spectrum.

Chapter 4 looked at the various open and public *theatres of representation* in which councillors could perform the representative acts of speaking or voting. Councillors were asked for their responses to a series of questions testing their likely action (speaking or voting) when faced with a crisis of representation (where party group and electorate collide over a local issue). Councillors were presented with a range of theatres in which to act and with issues located within their own ward or division and outside of it. Thus they were given the opportunity to reveal the pattern of their attachment to their own electoral area and their party group.

Chapter 5 considered the exercise of councillors' representative discretion in the closed and private theatres of representation: the party group, the

local party and 'other private meetings'. As with chapter 4, councillors were presented with a question which located a crisis of representation both inside and outside the areas they represented, and were asked how likely they were to speak or vote against the group in those closed theatres. Again, a differentiated pattern of behaviour emerged with the party group being the theatre in which councillors were most likely to act, and with speaking a more likely act than voting. Councillors were less likely to act as the theatre of representation moved away from the party group and into gradually more open settings.

This chapter also compared the likelihood of councillors acting against the group in open and closed theatres, and again different patterns of behaviour were apparent across the political spectrum. But while party affiliation emerged as a predictor of the likely outcome of the use by councillors of their representative discretion, it makes less difference to representative acts than might be expected. The only clear party difference was the more dramatic decline in likelihood of the Labour councillor acting against the group in open as opposed to closed theatres when compared with Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. The same differentiated behaviour pattern as between open and closed theatres, and between speaking and voting, applied to Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors, only to a lesser degree than their Labour counterparts.

Chapter 6 considered the actual behaviour of those councillors who had acted against the group in any theatre of representation, as opposed to hypothetical acts considered in the earlier chapters. It was clear that the Labour councillors focused to a greater degree than Conservatives or Liberal Democrats on the group as a legitimate recipient of their loyalty.

Again, intensity of attachment to the group was the distinguishing feature between councillors of different parties, for not just Labour councillors but Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillors also see the group as a legitimate theatre for representation, the place within which they are most likely to act in a crisis of representation. Equally, they see it as a body to which the councillor owes his or her loyalty, and are prepared to give that loyalty. This chapter considered the reasons why councillors view the group in the way that they do. It discussed a number of loyalty-generating factors that were both shared across the political spectrum and also distinct to particular parties, what might be called the ideological or predispositional elements of councillor loyalty to the group.

The case studies set out in chapters 7, 8 and 9 considered actual crises of representation, along with the acts undertaken by councillors, the group and the community, in such crises. The case studies provided examples of how councillors acted and where they acted as representatives. The group was clearly an important theatre for the councillor to use in these crisis situations. Councillors' behaviour was to use the group for the purposes of deliberation on the issue and to ensure that deliberation and associated decision-making was restricted to the group. Although public acts were undertaken, by and large they were to support the group position and not to indulge in public speculation as to how the issue could progress. In only one of the case studies did a councillor go as far as to rebel in public. Acting against the group in public was clearly an unusual act for councillors. Its hypothetical possibility often seen by councillors as a pathological act against the rightful recipient of loyalty, the party group.

The party group and local government

In a comprehensive review of literature representative of the 'orthodox view' of local government, Dearlove noted that 'the local electorate, the councillors and the officers', are seen as the key participants in local democracy. Indeed local decisions are made through the electorate's input of votes, which councillors, via officers, transform into 'popular public policies'. As Dearlove points out, the success of a local democracy constructed around the electors' input of votes depends not only on those votes, but also on the closeness of the relationship between councillors and the electorate.¹ If the relationship is disrupted by a party group making a prior claim on the councillor's loyalty through the mechanism of party (a claim to which, as we have seen, councillors are by and large happy to respond), then the group itself also becomes a powerful key participant in local democracy, if one scarcely recognised as such.

This thesis has shown that the conditions for the party group developing this status and for the widespread development of a party group system in local government, have long existed. Certainly, these conditions pre-date the formation of the Labour party, despite which it has been held responsible, at least by its political opponents, for the introduction of party politics into local government. On the contrary, the party politicisation of local government is not a result of the introduction of working-class

¹ J. Dearlove, *The Reorganisation of British Local Government: Old Orthodoxies and a Political Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. 29-30. A similar model of the aggregation of political demands by parties into policies and the 'engagement' between councillors and officials which transforms those policies into 'outputs' was presented by A. Mabileau, G. Moyser, G. Parry, P. Quantin, *Local Politics and Participation in Britain and France*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 170.

political practices, solidarity or structures from the trade union movement, into an otherwise non-party political local democracy conducted by 'social leaders' of one type or another. Groupings on local councils, bearing a variety of labels from those of national parties, disguised versions of those parties, other political organisations, and indeed even of 'purely local parties' or organisations, have long existed. Party groups, to varying degrees across time and location, have equally sought to encourage, persuade, cajole or bully councillors, with differing degrees of success, into acting in a broadly cohesive fashion, or into following a particular leadership. The question this thesis addressed was this: what exactly has the party group and group system done to the processes of local representation?

The party group and the councillor as a local representative

Rao noted the importance to representative systems of: (i) responsiveness of the representative, (ii) the impact of locality on the councillor's roles and (iii) the representative linkages at the individual level.² This thesis has examined the strength and nature of representative linkages at the local level and found the party group acting as a filter of the representative processes (and linkages) as they relate to local issues and events of importance to the electorate.

In order to meet the representative expectations and demands of the electorate councillors are required to channel the electorate's views to the council, thus adding representative 'voice' to their concerns. Indeed, more actively, they may be expected to support the position of the electorate against the council and party group. However, the party group will, to

² Rao, *The Making and Unmaking of Local Self-Government*, p. 200.

varying degrees across party and place, require the councillor to be loyal to its decisions; where a crisis of representation arises, the councillor's ultimate loyalty is expected to rest with the group.

In any one crisis of representation councillors must use the discretion attached to their office to decide whether their loyalty will be granted to either their electorate or their group, if an acceptable compromise cannot be found. Equally, the councillor must decide which representative act - speaking or voting - they will perform and the range of theatres, from the open and public to the closed and private, in which they will act. The use of that discretion and the choice of theatre and act indicates how far the councillor is prepared to represent the electorate to the group and pursue the local interest.

The crisis point for local representation comes when the electorate require their councillor to act in public as their representative in those places where they perceive it matters, in the council or committee or some other public theatre of representation. It is precisely at that stage that councillors may be reluctant to transfer their representative activity to a public theatre from the closed party group. The public may view this failure to act in public as an act of betrayal, or as a sign that over-strict party discipline constrains the councillor's action. The councillor on the other hand will see the group - and not the more public theatres of representation - as the real point of decision-making. Any action that is transferred to open theatres may thus be no more than a symbolic indication of the councillor's recognition of the claims of their local electoral area rather than a genuine attempt to alter a decision. Indeed, the group may collude with the councillor in this misrepresentation of representation and permit its

members to voice, if not vote on, some local issue or other in a demonstrative fashion.

The importance of the party group within the processes of local democracy and its influence on the activity of the councillor as a representative of an electoral area is not specific to any one party. An expectation of loyalty to the group exists for all councillors, whether Labour, Liberal Democrat or Conservative. As the research for this thesis has indicated, councillors of all parties are willing to grant it that allegiance. In all parties the option for public dissent from group decisions on a local issue and for the councillor to publicly 'represent' the local electorate exists. Yet most councillors do not choose this route, preferring to take the electorate's views to the closed group meeting rather than the open council meeting.

The sources of loyalty

Although Labour councillors display the greatest propensity for group loyalty in a crisis of representation, both Conservative and Liberal Democrats also see public disagreement with the group as something to be avoided. Equally, examples of a willingness to act against the group and in support of the electorate are to be found amongst all councillors, irrespective of party. However, the validity of that act and the likelihood of its success is also influenced by the stance taken by the party group. Loyalty to the group is an important factor for all councillors when assessing crises of representation and considering the use of the discretion attached to their office to act in such situations.

The reason for councillor loyalty to the group is only in part a reflection of the firmness (or flexibility) of a party (or group's) approach to group

discipline, and the group's willingness to 'punish' any councillor who publicly dissents. Councillors make it clear that their loyalty to the group is only in small part a result of group disciplinary mechanisms. Although a certain amount of enforced loyalty through 'fear' of punishment appears to be present, it is by no means the only source of councillor loyalty to the group. Loyalty to the party group arises at least as much from a councillor's own predisposition towards democracy and their own political philosophy.

Councillors enter into a four-part 'contract of loyalty' with the group. First, there exists an element of loyalty that is born of a genuine fear of the consequences of dissent, in terms of the disciplinary processes and their possible outcome. This factor should not be overstated for it is clear from interviews with councillors that although the word 'fear' is used, it indicates more an intense sense of unease at the unknown element of the disciplinary processes and its outcome. In addition, there is an unwillingness to be seen as in some way having failed the group and party, and to have done so in public. Councillors use the discretion attached to their office with a careful eye to the anticipated reactions of their group alongside an understanding of how far it will tolerate public dissent and the nature of that dissent. Generally councillors expressed considerable reluctance to expose themselves to group discipline, some because they felt it as a block to progression to committee chair, most however because of the uncertainty, personal disquiet and feeling of embarrassment, isolation and failure such processes would bring. As one Labour councillor commented:

Look, I don't want to be disciplined by the group for much the same reasons as I don't want to be a in a disciplinary situation

at work, its just not a pleasant thing and you are highlighted as having done something wrong. Guilty before proven innocent if you like.

Secondly, the contract of loyalty involves a psychological element in which councillors feel predisposed to support their party colleagues, particularly against a opposing party. Group loyalty is often the result of general agreement on principles and policy. Any public disagreement, even on a matter specific to the councillor's electoral area, is at best disloyal to the party's programme and ideology, and at worst a betrayal of both the group and the individual's own beliefs that sustain their membership of a party. Put simply, councillors just do not like going against their party because they more often than not agree with it. Public dissent raises the question of the councillor's relationship with an organisation that is a prominent part of their daily lives.

Thirdly, the councillor's contract of loyalty might also contain a real contractual agreement and be seen as such by both the individual councillor and his or her party colleagues. This is more 'real' for the Labour councillor and such a contract is an important part of the party's rules. All nominees to Labour's local panels of prospective candidates must 'undertake, if elected, to accept and act in harmony with the standing orders of the appropriate Labour group'.³ No similar conditions exist for the Conservative and Liberal Democrat councillor, but the acceptance of candidacy and election as a councillor implies an expectation of support for the party which makes public acts of rebellion seem disloyal, and this implicit contract may be no less real for councillors of these parties.

³ *Labour Party Rule Book*, section 5. 5A.3 (c), 1995, p. 29.

Finally, the group is seen by many councillors as a team, a family, or at least a tight-knit group of colleagues to whom the same attachment is given to as would be given to the family. That the group is to be protected against 'outsiders' or opponents, that any disagreements must not be publicly displayed and that above all else and whether right or wrong the 'family' that is the group is generally supported even when internal disagreements exist. As one Conservative councillor commented, *'we all have our disagreements and spats, but I would always support my fellow Conservatives against the Socialists. Our very worst member is infinitely preferable to their very best'*. The basis of the contract, then, is one of reciprocity and mutual support.

Differences in political philosophy

Councillors' attitudes towards representation and democracy result in their being receptive to demands for their loyalty being made by sources other than the electorate. Indeed, for the Labour councillor the party represents such an alternative focus, more so than for either the Conservative or Liberal Democrat councillor. The Labour councillor often adopts a collectivist approach to political representation which reflects a political philosophy based on collective provision. Moreover the Labour councillor expresses a predisposition toward 'party' as a decision-making body and as a focus for representation based on an interpretation of democracy as rule by the majority. This majoritarian approach can, and indeed does, de-localise local issues.

The Conservative councillor reflects a preference for representative freedom from both the party and the electorate, and whilst expressing loyalty to both, prefers pressure from neither. The Conservative maintains

that the office of councillor should allow the individual councillor freedom to represent in whatever way they decide is most appropriate. Adherence to a philosophy based on individual freedom and responsibility enables the Conservative councillor to reconcile the seemingly conflicting beliefs of freedom and discipline, or respect for authoritative sources. It is this reconciliation that leads the Conservative councillor to prefer a degree of distance between themselves and both the group and the electorate. Thus although recognising the importance of locality the Conservative does not see his or herself as a delegate of that area, more a trustee of its best interests, which it is the councillor's task to decide. If the best interests of the locality are congruent with those of the party group, so much the better.

The Liberal Democrat councillor reflects both an individualistic, but also a communitarian orientation to political representation. The distinction between the Liberal Democrats and their Labour and Conservative counterparts is based on how community is a cumulation of individual needs rather than a collective general good. Individuals form a community and that community is not greater than the sum of its parts. Community representation means the Liberal Democrat working with individuals who are part of a campaign or some common purpose, but that purpose is defined by individual activity. The Liberal Democrats have an affinity with the Burkean concept of representation, because they see themselves as individuals who are part of a team, not just *as* a team. They require the same right to disengage from a community activity as to engage in it, and see the group in the same light as something which requires loyalty, until such time as that loyalty is inconvenient.

Liberal Democrats do not slavishly reflect every community reaction from their ward or division, with their Labour and Conservative counterparts, they reject the idea that they are a delegate of the community. Equally they recognise that collective and cohesive action by both the community and their group is the key to political success. As a Liberal Democrat borough councillor stated:

I feel I must draw in as much information and opinion from my colleagues [Liberal Democrat councillors] and from the people I represent when the sort of occurrence you describe happens. There are some things I would not do, like pander to racism, but many community campaigns do not have a party political element although of course they are political. I like the Liberal Democrats, I am at home here and I would do all I could to ensure I stayed in step with the group, or for that matter them with me. I take the same attitude to community campaigns, keep them in step with Liberal Democracy and that way the group and community do not clash. If they do, then circumstances must decide which way you jump, but at least you can jump.

Does the difference in approach between councillors of the different parties result in Conservatives and Liberal Democrats being more responsive to local issues than the Labour councillor? The evidence from this research suggests that, despite political and philosophical differences toward democracy, this is not the case. The greater room for representative manoeuvre created for the Conservative and Liberal Democrat by their own expectations of a greater freedom for party group enables them still to focus on the party group when a crisis of representation occurs. The difference is that the Labour councillor will openly expound the virtues of

loyalty to the group as a proper functioning of the democratic processes, whereas Conservatives and Liberal Democrats come to focus on the group from a different intellectual journey. It is their perceived freedom from party that simply enables them to accept, and offer to the group, their loyalty.

The group and the electorate

Why is it that party group looms larger in councillors' frame of reference than the electorate, even that within their own ward or division? Part of the answer is provided by considering councillors' attitudes toward the electorate's interest in, and motivations for action around, certain important local issues. Across the party spectrum, councillors expressed a broadly similar sceptical attitude toward the electorate as only interested in issues that affect them. The electorate are thus seen by councillors primarily as self-interested, short term and adhering to a 'Not In My Back Yard' perspective which fails to take account of the broader governmental needs of the authority as a whole. Councillors were as sceptical of the ways in which electors expressed their opinions as they were of the motivation for those opinions; both are viewed by their representatives with considerable suspicion.

In contrast, the group is able to prove itself worthy of a councillor's loyalty through offering a process of democratic debate, by enabling the councillor to contribute to that debate (and to articulate any concerns emanating from their ward or division) and through the acceptance, by the majority of councillors, of the majority rule principle. Added to this is the view of the office of councillor as 'free agent' or 'trustee' within a Burkean approach to representation which is reflective of the representative's right to use his or

her own judgement on any issue. A corollary of this approach is that the representative is also free to focus attention and loyalty wherever they think appropriate: most councillors select the group as such a focus. This process is made all the more easier for the councillor if their attitude to representation is such that the party is a legitimate focus of representation, or if the councillor feels he or she should be free to judge issues on their own merits, without the assistance of the electorate's opinions.

The group and local representative democracy: control or opposition?

Across the political spectrum, the party group is a common element of councillors' experiences of local representative democracy. Irrespective of political affiliation, the Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat councillor will be a member of a party group and will find themselves confronted by a cohesive block of councillors organised for the purpose of either governing a council or providing an opposition group. Equally, councillors will be part of a group which forms a majority or minority on a council, or indeed part of a shared administration. The councillor's membership of either a majority or minority group makes little difference to expectations of group loyalty and to the willingness of councillors to subordinate the wishes of their electorate to the decisions of their party group.

The overriding concern for many councillors is that the group should not appear disunited in public and that political opponents should not be provided with opportunities to embarrass the party group, irrespective of whether that issue is a major policy or a ward-based locational issue. Control of a council does not necessarily bring heightened expectations of loyalty; but it may magnify the consequences for the councillor of public

dissent. In interviews, councillors across the political spectrum emphasised their loyalty to the group as something uninfluenced by minority or majority status. Although a majority group in control of a council is more likely to be the target of protest, minority group councillors are not immune to public criticism of their position on an issue, particularly if minority councillors represent a specific ward within which an event is located.

The case studies indicate that when faced with public opposition to a group decision, councillors will not only generally support the group against the community but also seek to discredit any community group as 'politically motivated'. That implies that protest groups are organised, controlled and run for the benefit of supporters of another party. Discrediting a message by discrediting the messenger is a tactic that councillors are willing to undertake to protect the party group. Councillors often interpret local issues from a party political perspective, and by identifying community protest with party political opposition they can justify their own position and that of the group. Thus, no community protest can be totally free from an accusation of being a political front organisation, or a body created in direct opposition to the strongly held beliefs and assumptions of the majority party.

The consequences for local democracy

All councillors recognise that the success of their own political values and policies requires a degree of organisation and cohesion amongst their party colleagues. The group system provides just such organisation and cohesion. As a result, councillors accept that the discretion attaching to their office is in practice fettered by the decisions of the group. To these

they are expected, by and large, to adhere. They do not, however, allow their electorate to fetter their discretion to an equal degree

It is a shortcoming of the existing scholarly literature on local political life that these matters have received so little attention. Councillor role analysis may indicate the orientation of the councillor toward policy or representational issues but it does not explain the impact on the representative relationship - between the councillor and his or her electorate - of the organisation and activities of the party group. Nor does it explain the importance the group assumes for the councillor within local representative democracy.

What, in contrast, this research shows is that the group, operating within an adversarial political system at the local level, is able to capitalise on councillor's party loyalty, and to ensure that it is maintained when the councillor is faced with an issue of importance to his or her ward or division. The group does not necessarily need to resort to disciplinary mechanisms to ensure that loyalty and, throughout the research, such disciplinary action as was identified was seen to be far removed from the normal processes of representation that result in group cohesion. Councillors instead employ considerable degrees of self-discipline, which comes from their inherent acceptance of the group as both a theatre for, and their principal focus of, loyalty.

Whether the councillor can be categorised as Corina suggests as a party politician, ideologist, partyist, associate or politco-administrator, all councillors operate within a group system.⁴ Thus, whatever the

⁴ Corina, 'Elected Representatives in a Party System: A Typology'.

councillor's strength of attachment to party group, as either an ideological body, or simply as an organisation designed to ensure that decisions are made, he or she will in practice support the party group's decisions. Equally, the party group is the coherent and organised body that any categorisation of councillor must work within. Whatever the councillor's motivations, group loyalty can ensure the success of any objective only if all councillors operate through, and adhere by, the decisions of the group processes. All councillors then, have something to gain from group loyalty irrespective of motivation or political affiliation, and equally have much to lose from their own, or their colleagues', public dissent from the group. So self-discipline and restraint are powerful weapons in the group's disciplinary armoury and far more effective than more mechanistic approaches to securing group loyalty.

Individual discretion to undertake acts of representation in opposition to the group and in support of the position of the electorate on any important local issue is open to any representative. That they are not predisposed to undertake them and that they are more likely to attempt to solve any crisis of representation by a means that does not involve their public disagreement with the group (and particularly avoids them having to vote against the group), has important implications for local representative democracy. It is the party group that benefits from the councillor's use of representative discretion at the expense of the electorate. As a result, local opinion on a specific issue is likely to be frustrated by a system in which the party group is the most influential component. In time, councillors may come to be seen as less and less the representatives of a community and more and more as the representatives of a very specific part of the local political party, the party group. The stage is set for an increasing alienation of the community from its own representatives.

Tocqueville commented that 'the strength of free peoples resides in the local community. Local institutions are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they put it within the people's reach'.⁵ This work demonstrates that while the development of British local representative democracy encourages the organisation of councillors into effective *blocs*, the party group - as a coherent body - has gradually put local representation out of the reach of the people and into its own grip. Only the growing efficacy and assertiveness of the local electorate offers any hope of reclaiming local representation back from the group and placing it truly 'within the reach of the people'.

⁵ A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 62-63.

APPENDIX 1:

RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods used for this thesis comprised a review of the relevant literature, quantitative analysis of research data collected by postal questionnaire (appendix 2), in-depth interviews, participant observation and the construction of three case studies.

The survey

The questionnaire designed for this study is attached as appendix 2. The survey was conducted between May 1994 and December 1994. It was circulated to the entire council membership of 20 local authorities. Although the main survey area was the West Midlands the questionnaire was also circulated to members of Buckinghamshire County Council, and a number of Buckinghamshire district councils to ensure an acceptable number of Conservative councillors were contacted.

A total of 1067 questionnaires were circulated and 629 were returned, and usable for data analysis, giving a response rate of 58.9 per cent. This rate compares with the national surveys of councillors conducted in 1985 and 1993, which obtained around 60 per cent. Excluding the non-party councillors from the total received resulted in 548 questionnaire returns from party-affiliated councillors, and it is this sub-group who mainly appear in the analysis in chapters 3-6.

The questionnaire was based on re-use of questions from the Widdicombe committee research, with additional questions specifically designed for this study. The new questions focused on the relationship between the councillor, the electorate and the group. The tables generated by the data obtained from the questionnaire are included within the relevant chapters of the thesis and the presentation of this data has been elaborated with interview and case study material as appropriate.

Interviews

A total of 37 interviews were conducted with those councillors, mainly though not exclusively, from the West Midlands area, who had responded to the postal survey. Direct approaches were also made to councillors who had not returned the questionnaire. The main criterion for selection of the interview sample was that the councillors should be members of either the Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat parties. The interview sample consisted of seven Liberal Democrats, 13 Conservatives and 17 Labour councillors and a Conservative metropolitan group political assistant.

The majority of interviews were conducted between September 1994 and December 1995. However, councillors were also interviewed throughout 1996 as and when necessary. Interviews were unstructured in nature, but supported by appropriate probing questions. On average, interviews lasted about an hour. An unstructured approach allowed for a wide-ranging consideration of the party group and the collection of many examples of how councillors acted within a party group system. Councillors were informed prior to interview that the area of concern for this research was the organisation and activities of the party group and group system, and

their relationship with their own group. The choice of the interview subgroup was designed to ensure that councillors from each of the three parties, sitting on county, district and metropolitan authorities, were interviewed. The selection was also designed to ensure that council leaders, committee chairs and whips were included within the interview group. In the event of refusal, non-attendance at appointments, or difficulties in finding mutually convenient dates, approaches were made to other councillors to fill the interview quota.

When specific instances of councillor activity or issue occurrence were given in interviews, attempts were made to contact the other councillors mentioned to provide another interpretation of those events. Telephone interviews were also conducted with the Conservative local government officer at Central Office and a senior officer of the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors.

Participant observation

At the time of conducting the research for this thesis the author was both a Labour district and county councillor, as well as having served a term of office as a London borough councillor before moving to Staffordshire. As a serving member of two Labour groups the author was able to observe the councillor in his or her natural habitat, the party group. Attending group meetings, observing councillors in action and listening to the debates concerning local issues and decisions, provided both a wealth of elaborative material and an opportunity to compare councillor's activity in the group setting to their more public activity in open theatres of representation. Important to my participant-as-observer role was that as a

Labour party member of 20 years standing I had legitimately sought selection and election through the party, as both a London borough councillor and now as a county and district councillor. The decision to become involved in local politics was on my part both a personal and political one; it was not made to forward a research degree, and indeed I had served a term of office as a councillor before undertaking this research. I was thus a legitimate member of the groups concerned.

The role adopted by the researcher exists on a continuum ranging from the complete participant to the complete observer, encompassing the participant-as-observer and the observer-as-participant.¹ My position for this work was that of participant-as-observer within two Labour groups. The situation was complicated however by the fact that some of the councillors with whom I had a closer relationship than others were aware both of my research and its subject matter; others were aware that I was conducting a research project, but not its subject; whilst others with whom I had no, or minimal contact outside of the council, were unaware of my research. The knowledge of my research was more wide-spread amongst my district council colleagues than members of the county Labour group.

The problem identified by Gold of the researcher interacting with the study group as an ordinary friend 'jeopardising' field roles did not occur as I was indeed already an ordinary friend to some members of the group and

¹R.L. Gold, 'Roles in Sociological Field Observations', in G. McCall and J. Simmons (editors), *Issues in Participant Observation: A Text and Reader*, Reading, Mass, Addison-Wesley, 1969, pp. 30-38. Gold also refers to B. Junker, 'Some Suggestions for the Design of Field Work Learning Experiences', in E. Hughes *et al* (editors), *Cases on Field Work*, University of Chicago, 1952, Part III-A.

acknowledged this fact within the research process. With other councillors I was barely on speaking terms; with others merely cordial.² The risk of familiarity influencing the research was avoided as the familiarity I had with party groups enabled me to hold the group up to critical analysis rather than over sympathise with it and its position within the democratic processes.³ Indeed, I had already accepted the setting and its behavioural norms before entering the party groups rather than being influenced by them after entry. My not being a 'stranger' to the party group facilitated close observation and understanding of the minutia of group activity, and both its meaning to councillors and its impact on the electorate.⁴

Did my role as a participant-observer within the two Labour groups provide me with 'unsought opportunities to influence' the behaviour of the councillors I was observing? Did my presence either reinforce or weaken the convictions of other councillors, or in any way influence their actions and reactions within the Labour Group?⁵ My approach within group meetings was to observe and note comments and actions by councillors as they acted and reacted to issues before the group meeting. As a legitimate member of the group I was entitled to fully participate in the group deliberation on any issue. As with most councillors, some issues were of more interest and concern to me than others; I had no problem in contributing to any debate in a way that reflected self as a councillor rather

² Gold, 'Roles in Sociological Field Research', p. 35.

³ See, R. Burgess, *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1985, pp. 21-25.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 23-24

⁵ See, H.W. Riecken, 'The Unidentified Interviewer' in McCall and Simmons (editors), *Issues in Participant Observation*, pp. 39-45.

than self as a researcher. Indeed, with an eye to re-election and progression within the group it would have been difficult to do anything other than act as a councillor.

The influence I had on my group colleagues was as a councillor not an observer. The group meetings I attended were conducted no differently to how they would had I not been a member of the group. Any matters raised by myself were only raised because I had a legitimate councillor interest in them. Equally, I would be disappointed if after 4 years membership of the county council and 3 years membership of the district council Labour group, my presence had no influence on those groups. Of course my presence influenced the groups and their processes and activities, but that influence was through me as a councillor and legitimate member of the group. Indeed, at an important time during my research and writing, political circumstances became such that I was asked by a number of colleagues to seek election by the group to a committee chair. Thus political circumstances required me to act in a way that the demands of conducting research for a higher degree would advise against.

Participant-observation requires ethical justification and considerations arise, which have to be taken into account and reported. Homan argues that the researcher should ascribe to the:

doctrine of informed consent on the part of the subjects and accordingly should take pains to explain fully the objects and implications of research to individual subjects.⁶

Similarly Wax maintains that a:

persuasive argument can be made that the informed consent of the subjects should be solicited prior to the experiment, otherwise they should be free not to participate.⁷

How did my position within the two party groups match the criterion of informed consent?

An important ethical justification for my position was, although I did not announce at a group meeting that I was conducting the research and seek informed consent for it, neither did I deliberately withhold the fact from any of my colleagues. Indeed, I had often unburdened the usual student frustrations and anxieties of pursuing a research degree onto the shoulders of those councillors with whom I shared a social life. Thus, although not all the members of the two Labour groups of which I am a member knew of my research, it was no secret and - of ethical importance - it was not the reason *why* I was a member of those two groups. I also informed by the leaders of the county and district council of my research project.

⁶ R. Homan, 'The Ethics of Covert Methods', *British Journal of Sociology*, 31 (1), March 1980, pp. 46-59. pp. 51-52.

⁷ M.I. Wax, 'Paradoxes of Consent to the Practice of Field Work', *Social Problems*, 27 (3), February 1980, pp. 272-283. p. 274.

The participant-observation for this work was not fully one of operating covertly; although consent was not sought, the research was not withheld from other councillors. Wax notes that the 'requirement of consent by those studied seems dubious when that which the researcher seeks to study is either public or is the conduct of persons who are publicly accountable'. Wax acknowledges however that field work within some public settings would indeed require an ethical justification for not seeking informed and explicit consent 'to do what seems open to any person'. He gives explicitly political examples of a study of the U.S., President, or a member of Congress as not fitting the rubric of field work.⁸ Worth repeating at length is his comment that:

Where researchers deal with the public aspects of the activities of public figures, the notion that they must seek informed consent does seem inappropriate. Within governmental structures of the U.S., most officials are ruled by codes requiring that their activities be open to public inspection. The norm is that the activities are open and public, except for particular kinds of cases. Thus, under these circumstances, researchers who wish to study upward scarcely need to seek informed consent, providing they confine their interests to behaviour which is publicly accountable.⁹

⁸ Ibid, p. 276.

⁹ Ibid, p. 278.

A number of points arise here, first, councillors are public figures and are 'ruled' by various codes and indeed legislation concerning their behaviour and requiring that some of their activities 'be open to public inspection'. Secondly, their behaviour is publicly accountable. Thirdly, however, I did observe the behaviour in the private and publicly unobservable party group. Councillors' behaviour however, in the public and representative body that is the council, is indeed, influenced by their activity in the party group and this alters the nature of the ethical considerations. Indeed, it becomes obvious that the ethical arguments and concerns regarding consent are not as clear cut as Wax outlined.

The party groups of which I am a member consist of councillors, elected by public vote, to bodies with popular accountability and a requirement for transparency. Although the party group is a closed body its decisions and policies are enacted and supported by councillors in public. Indeed, that councillors may act differently in the party group meeting to how they otherwise do in public theatres of representation somewhat weakens the public accountability and transparency of the local council and local democracy. This weakened public accountability in turn qualifies the need for ethical justification for research amongst councillors.

Councillors as participant-observers are in a different situation from others involved in participant research. They are indeed genuine players in the processes being observed, having been party members, candidates and then elected as councillors. They are therefore legitimately entitled to take part in the representative processes as a full participant, and the writer is aware of no instance where his interests as a researcher led him to act differently as a councillor than would otherwise have been the case. Interestingly,

quite a few of the works on local authorities have been written by councillor-researchers.¹⁰

Participant-observation may be criticised as illuminating only the specific area studied, a similar criticism to that levelled at any case study. As a member of three Labour groups - two at one time - and comparing my experiences both in the group and of the group, there is no evidence to suggest that those groups operate in anyway as vastly different from the majority of Labour groups. As for the Conservative and Liberal Democrat groups, it seems that the difference between the parties in terms of the organisation and activities of party groups, lies only in the intensity with which they act, and not in their activities or behaviour.

The case studies

Part III of the thesis, entitled '*crises of representation*' comprises three separate case study chapters. These case studies examined the interaction between councillors, party groups and the electorate, in connection with a specific issue or event over which the opinions of the electorate were at variance with the decisions of the party group. In these circumstances the councillor could use the discretion attached to his or her office to reflect - or rather represent - the views of either the group or the electorate.

The case study issues were selected because the author, as a Labour councillor, had access to the decision-making processes, particularly two of the Labour party groups involved, as well as a closeness to source material

¹⁰ Wiseman, 'The Working of Local Government in Leeds': Part I and II. Corina, 'Elected Representatives in a Party System'. Dennis, 'Community

and key players within the councils and communities concerned. Equally, the case studies clearly present examples of councillors and the party group operating in a closed decision-making environment - at arms length from the communities they represent.

Case studies have their limitations. they often say much about a specific issue or event but offer little from which to draw general lessons about the processes of political representation. The case studies for this thesis, whilst concentrating on specific issues, do however display some general lessons regarding the relationship between councillor and his or her party group, and how that relationship influences the behaviour of the councillor as a political representative.

Although the case studies consist of three different issues, the influences of the party group in each case displays a consistency as a forum for decision-making and as the body which councillors come to represent. There is no particular reason to suppose that the activities of the councillors, party groups and electors in these cases is in any significant way different from that found in any local representative system in urban Britain.

SECTION A: YOU AS A COUNCILLOR

1. Please give the name of your authority _____

2. For how many years have you served on this Council?

[] years [] months

3. Are you:

- [] A continuing member - no plans to retire at next election
- [] A retiring member - planning to retire at next election
- [] A former member - came off the Council in May 1994

4. Are you now or were you prior to May 1994

TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- [] Leader of the Council
- [] Chair/Mayor of the Council
- [] A Committee Chair
- [] A Committee Vice-Chair
- [] A Sub Committee Chair
- [] A Sub Committee Vice-Chair
- [] Party Leader
- [] Other party group office holder or spokesperson (please state which position)

[] None of these _____

5. When you were last elected to the Council, did you stand as:

TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- [] A Conservative Party candidate
- [] A Labour Party candidate
- [] A Liberal Democrat Party candidate
- [] An Independent candidate
- [] other (Please specify) _____

6. Is the Ward/Division you represent

rural []
 urban []

7. How many members represent the Ward

one []
 two []
 three []

SECTION B: ABOUT YOU AND THE ELECTORATE

8. Below are a number of statements about some of the issues of concern to Councillors and Councils at present. For each one, please indicate whether you: agree strongly; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; or disagree strongly. It is appreciated that this may involve some oversimplification of complex issues, but we would be grateful if you could indicate which comes closest to your view.

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
i) Ordinary citizens should have more say in the decisions made by local Govt.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
ii) The way Local authorities are presently organised prevents them from dealing adequately with todays problems.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
iii) It is for local Councillors rather than members of the public and pressure groups to make decisions on local issues and priorities.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
iv) The first concern of the elected members of the majority party is to implement the party manifesto.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
v) Back bench Members have little real influence over decision making.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
vi) Council officials have too much influence on decision making.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
vii) People only become interested in local Govt when an issue directly affects them.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
viii) More should be done to interest people in local govt.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
ix) More should be done to involve ordinary people in local decision making.	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

9. In what ways, if any, could local authorities do more to involve the public in Local Government.
PLEASE WRITE IN

10. In what ways, if any, could Political Parties do more to involve the public in Local Government.
PLEASE WRITE IN

11. Could you list what you feel are the four most significant issues presently affecting:-

a) The Ward/Division you represent
PLEASE WRITE IN

b) Your Local Authority
PLEASE WRITE IN

12. Could you now list the four most significant issues that over the coming year you feel will most affect the:

a) The Ward/Division you represent.
PLEASE WRITE IN

b) Your Local Authority.
PLEASE WRITE IN (Some of these may of course be the same as question 11 above, but please replicate here if so)

13. If a group of electors from **YOUR** Ward/Division were opposing a decision or policy of your Party Group on the Council and you agreed with them on the issue please indicate by ticking the appropriate box, how likely you are to:-

a) Speak out against the decision or policy of the Party Group in the following places:-

	Very likely	Likely	Depends on the issue	Not very likely	Not at all likely
a meeting of your Party Group of Councillors	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
a meeting of your own political Party	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
private meeting of any kind	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
a public meeting	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
the local press	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
using local radio or television	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
at a Council Committee meeting	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
at a Full Council meeting	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
would never speak against a group decision	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

other (please specify) _____

b) Vote against the decision or policy of the Party Group in the following places:-

	Very likely	Likely	Depends on the issue	Not very likely	Not at all likely
a meeting of your Party Group of Councillors	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
a meeting of your own political party	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
a Council Committee meeting	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
a Full Council meeting	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
would never vote against the Group	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
other (please specify) _____					

14. If a group of electors from **OUTSIDE** your Ward Division were opposing a decision or policy of your Party Group and you agreed with them please indicate by *TICKING THE APPROPRIATE BOX*, how likely you are to:-

a) Speak out against the decision or policy of the Party Group in the following places

	Very likely	Likely	Depends on the issue	Not very likely	Not at all likely
a meeting of your Party Group of Councillors	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
a meeting of your own political Party	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
private meeting of any kind	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
a public meeting	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
the local press	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

	Very likely	Likely	Depends on the issue	Not very likely	Not at all likely
using local radio or television	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
at a Council Committee meeting	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
at a Full Council meeting	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
would never speak against a group decision	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
other (please specify)					

b) Vote against the decision or policy of the Party Group in the following places:

a meeting of your Party Group of Councillors	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
a meeting of your own political party	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
a Council Committee meeting	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
a Full Council meeting	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
would never vote against the Group	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
other (please specify) _____					

15. a) During your time as a Councillor have you ever spoken against Group decisions in one of the following places
PLEASE TICK

	Yes	[]	No	[]
a meeting of your Party Group of Councillors		[]		[]
a meeting of your own political Party		[]		[]
private meeting of any kind		[]		[]
a public meeting		[]		[]
the local press		[]		[]
local radio or television		[]		[]
Council Committee meeting		[]		[]
Full Council meeting		[]		[]
never spoke against Group decisions		[]		[]
other (please specify) _____				

b) If you have used any of the above PLEASE TICK if this was for

- one issue []
- two issues []
- three issues []
- more than three issues []

c) If you have answered b) above, please indicate an issue and your reasons for speaking
PLEASE WRITE IN

d) During your time as a Councillor have you ever voted against a Group decision in one of the following places PLEASE TICK

	Yes	[]	No	[]
a meeting of your Party Group of Councillors		[]		[]
a meeting of your own Political Party		[]		[]
a Council Committee meeting		[]		[]
a Full Council meeting		[]		[]
never voted against the Group		[]		[]

other (Please Specify) _____

e) If you have used any of the above in d) *PLEASE TICK* if this was for

- one issue
- two issues
- three issues
- more than three issues

f) If you have answered e) above please indicate an issue and your reasons for voting.
PLEASE WRITE IN

16. Could you identify below one decision or policy (or more) during your most recent term as a Councillor, over which in response to public pressure the Council changed an existing policy or decision. (that public pressure may include issues on which the Council were taken to Court.)
PLEASE WRITE IN

SECTION C: ABOUT YOURSELF

Finally, we would be grateful if you would give us the following details about yourself:

- 17. a) Are you: Male Female
- b) How old were you on your last birthday?

18. a) How old were you when you left school?

TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- 14 or under
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18 or over

b) Please indicate below any school or educational qualifications you have obtained.

TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- First Degree
- Higher Degree
- Professional Qualification
- Higher National Certificate/Diploma
- GCE A Level/Scottish Higher Grade
- Ordinary National certificate/Diploma
- GCE O Level/School Certificate
- CSE (other than grade 1)

Other (please specify) _____

No School or educational qualifications

19. At present are you:

TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- In full time paid employment (30 Hrs per week or more)
- In part time paid employment (less than 30Hrs per week)
- Self Employed
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Permanently sick or disabled
- Looking after a home/family
- Not working for some other reason

20. If you are currently employed or self employed, is the firm or organisation in which you work in:

TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- the public sector
- the private sector
- the voluntary sector

If you would be willing to discuss some of the issues raised above in more detail please indicate below and give a contact address and telephone number.

Name: *(Only if willing to be contacted further)*

Contact Address:

Telephone Number. _____

Once again thank you for your time and effort in helping with this research.

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