The Untold Story: evaluating the role of the local authority in regeneration amidst government and governance

Sophie Donaldson
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I'd like to dedicate this thesis to Janet Dixon by way of thanks for starting me out on the long and challenging but ever-stimulating journey that has culminated in its production. Through her inspirational teaching she encouraged my love of thinking and learning, whilst also taking the care to emphasise to me the importance of enjoying life as a whole.

The Untold Story: evaluating the role of the local authority in regeneration amidst government and governance

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with both evaluation and governance, which it brings together through a focus on a UK local authority. It presents a comprehensive investigation of the role of the local authority in regeneration, which is a gap demonstrated to be relevant to both these literatures. The investigation involves observation and interviewing, together with literature reviews and the mining of secondary data from documentary sources: it thereby makes connections between the specific and the general. This material is used on the one hand, to problematise conventional approaches to the evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative, and to assert a viable alternative. This addresses concerns related to the selectivity of conventional evaluative assessment, and the problem of the practicality of a more comprehensive approach. On the other hand, the material develops an understanding of the local authority as a distinctive but neglected actor within the contemporary multi-actor working environment in regeneration. This working environment is found to be usefully characterised as a situation of hierarchy and heterarchy, or multi-level governance, within which the local authority performs a vital middle or 'in-between' positioning. Such in-betweeness, which makes a situation of diverse capacities workable, denotes a mediation role, together with gap-filling and active orchestration; however this role is shown to be not without problems. A more comprehensive understanding both of the fate of the UK local authority and of the realities of governance is thereby contributed. Altogether, the thesis has implications for evaluation and research practice, evaluation theory, governance concepts and how local authorities conceive themselves and their essential tasks.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is the result of an ESRC CASE ('collaborative') Award, in conjunction with the CASE partner, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Regeneration Division, held between September 2003 and September 2006. The material that follows seeks to introduce the thesis in a number of ways. Firstly, the background rationale to the CASE studentship is discussed, contextualising it in relation to local concerns, albeit those that may also be felt elsewhere. Secondly, Blaenau Gwent's socio-economic characteristics are outlined, giving an insight into the broad target of regeneration initiative in the area, and indicating its flexible definition. Thirdly, the dual focus of the research as derived from the CASE obligations and requirements of a PhD is introduced as an important structuring influence. This enables the key contributions of the thesis and the structure of its presentation to be described.

1.1 Background to the CASE application – out of what context did it arise?

> 'People still harp on about Marine Colliery and Corus as if it were yesterday [and not much has happened since]' [Officer interviewee]
>
> 'I think all local authorities tend to do things, they start to do things, and then they carry on doing them without saying, 'well should we carry on doing this?' [Officer interviewee]
>
> 'It's driving an awful lot of things, some of which it's not getting the credit for' [External interviewee]

The authority's interest in supporting a CASE award focused on evaluating its regeneration initiative can be seen to be linked to various concerns or anxieties that it was, and continues to be, faced with. Firstly, regeneration activity has been successive and ongoing in the area since the 1930s (CAG, 2005). Yet evidently, the ultimate objective of this activity (i.e. successful, complete regeneration) has never been reached, despite the investment of vast sums of public money. This could be seen to call into question the basis or justification of the expenditure, a weakness that may have been brought into sharper focus by the awarding of Objective One status to the area which brought with it stricter requirements to deliver. Thus, this type of concern seemed to be linked to a wider anxiety about continued legitimacy to act. Moreover, coupled with these issues the authority could be seen to be faced with the conundrum whereby there is an expanded definition of what needs to

be tackled as part of the regeneration agenda (to make it work) without a proportionate increase in funding. (Donaldson, 2003). This makes decisions as to what to fund all the more important and pressurised. particularly within an authority with heavy budget commitments compared to grant levels. which in turn puts pressure on available match funding.

In turn there were (are) the concerns associated with more general drives for local government efficiency and effectiveness. most recently promoted by New Labour's 'Local Government Modernisation' agenda. Key tenets of this, echoed in the post-devolution Wales-specific version. (Martin. 2005) are the desirability of evidence-based decision-making. performance measurement and monitoring. and challenge and review. with the aim of achieving continuous improvement in public service performance and encouraging innovation. Local authorities must respond to this agenda, however problematic it is in practice. or face potentially far-reaching censure by inspectorates such as the Audit Commission. Research contact with the authority suggested that this was a pressure being felt particularly at senior levels. causing them to reassess their complacency towards review and justification procedures. This was despite the fact that Wales is supposed to have a more 'partnership-based' approach to local authority performance assessment compared to that in England (see e.g. Laffin, 2004) and seems to indicate the over-arching influence of the threat of intervention. Nonetheless, such pressure also seemed to reflect the competition for influence (and internal funds) within the authority which might be boosted by a 'good' external assessment.

Thirdly. an underlying anxiety seemed to be associated with new ways of working and associated expectations. That is. increasingly. the authority. in common with others. was being required and expected to work collaboratively with different external 'partners' and consult and involve its 'stakeholders' in its activities. rather than to go ahead alone and regardless. Such new ways of working brought with them a need to know whether they were 'getting it right'. rather than to face public criticism for not meeting expectations. Indeed. criticism of local authorities along these lines was a common feature

of official reports and discussions in the professional press about regeneration, raising the spectre that they could be next. With the hindsight of research contact, having 'independent' advice might also have been seen to be desirable to help officers instigate necessary change related to these developments where otherwise there was a reluctance to embrace it. Equally however, given the associated proliferation of agencies involved in regeneration work, there was some indication of concern about who should be doing what, particularly given the lack of statutory delineation of roles. For the authority, this situation had apparently additionally resulted in anxiety about the erosion of its distinctive role locally. A related concern lastly, was of how to take into account the combined actions or policies of others when planning activity from within the authority – needing to evaluate the combined impact and gaps in some way.

The themes highlighted here, which are essentially about governmental control and legitimacy, and governance as reality, are important not only as a context to, or rationale for the research, but also as themes of interest within the thesis itself.

1.2 A portrait of Blaenau Gwent: the targets of regeneration initiative and actors involved

Before describing the translation of these concerns and the requirements of a PhD into a dual research focus, it is important to first unpack what is meant by regeneration locally, as this is the overall frame of reference to the research. Here it is helpful to consider the ultimate targets of regeneration activity, or the existing characteristics of the area, rooted in its geography and history.

Geographically, the county-borough comprises three steep sided valleys, constraining both development and accessibility. The main development and growth of the area therefore originally occurred on the basis of its rich natural resources, notably coal and iron ore, which were significant enough to overcome these constraints. Numerous mines and a large steelworks eventually came to dominate the economic structure, along with other

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manufacturing industry, with population influxes to support them. The demise of these over the course of the 20th century, culminating in the closure of the steelworks in 2001, continues to have massive implications. Many such implications are problems more typically associated with urban areas undergoing industrial restructuring where there has been equivalent dependence on one sector. Yet, the c. 70 000 resident population of Blaenau Gwent is in fact quite dispersed with the largest of its 5 towns (Ebbw Vale) having only around 24 000 inhabitants (BGLHB/BGCBC, 2003) (see Figure 1). In fact the small size of the Borough and its non-urban location means that the problems are writ-large, given the lack of alternative, or wider urban buoyancy. There is also much competition between the 5 towns, because, as some explained, there is no *"natural centre"* – they are all about the same size.

Figure 1: Sketch Map of Blaenau Gwent showing the 5 towns

Source: compiled by T. Game from http://www.burrows.co.uk/blaenau/

Environmentally, whilst much land reclamation has already occurred, many brownfield sites remain. There are also high vacancy levels amongst industrial

and town-centre retail premises as well as certain types of housing stock, in many cases reflecting obsolescence due to qualitative changes in demand (Shared Intelligence, 2002; BGOILPB, 2003; BGLHB/BGCBC, 2003). In addition, much of the housing stock and other facilities are ageing and in poor condition, lacking investment, not least due to the problems of adjusting to lower population levels, such that funding has for instance been stretched over numerous sites each with lower than viable user-numbers (notably in the case of schools) (ibid.).

Economically, employment continues to be skewed towards job-types forecast to have least growth or to decline, reflecting the difficulty in changing the traditional skills-base and in attracting new employers (Shared Intelligence, 2002). This in turn is linked to low educational attainment, and significant problems with even basic literacy and numeracy. 2001 figures[1] show that 45% of the working age population had no qualifications (compared to an England and Wales average of 29.1%) and only 9.3% had a degree-level qualification (compared to 19.8% in England & Wales as a whole). 1998 statistics (Basic Skills Agency cited in Shared Intelligence, 2002) showed that around 40% of the adult population was functionally innumerate, 33% functionally illiterate; more recently, figures show that GCSE results continue to be below the average for Wales (9.5% below in 2005 (WAG, 2006)). Difficulty in attracting employers has been linked to this poor skills base, along with the generally poor image and reputation of the area and lack of suitable premises and developable land due to the physical geography and the industrial legacy (Shared Intelligence, 2002; BGOILPB, 2003; BGLHB/BGCBC, 2003). Self-employment and levels of SME formation are also below average, which may again reflect the skills base and historical dependence on large employers, and perhaps also emphasises the difficulty of attracting new entrepreneurs to the area (BGOILPB, 2003; BGCBC, 2003). Overall therefore, employment tends to be low-paid and often unstable, with high-levels of unemployment and economic inactivity (BGOILPB, 2003). Despite significant reductions in unemployment, 2001 levels were 4.7% compared to 3.4% in England &

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[1] All statistics unless otherwise stated from www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk

Wales as a whole, whilst inactivity was about 10% above the England & Wales average in 2001. Low income levels, declining population and 'leakage' have also compromised the local retail market (Shared Intelligence, 2002; BGO1LPB, 2003).

Socially, although cause and effect are complex, these problems translate into 13 out of the 16 wards within the County-Borough being within the 100 most deprived in Wales, (eligible for Welsh Assembly Government Communities First funding): that is, experiencing deprivation along multiple dimensions. Whilst low income is perhaps the most obvious element to this, other underlying and interlinked problems include ill-health. isolation and inaccessibility, low self-esteem. motivation and aspirations, high levels of social services intervention and petty crime (Shared Intelligence, 2002; BGO1LPB, 2003; BGLHB/BGCBC, 2003). Census figures indicate that in 2001, 24.3% of the population had a long term limiting illness and 50.3% of households had more than one person with a long-term limiting illness (England & Wales averages 18.2%, 34.1%). This means that according to 2001 figures, 12.5% of the population were acting as unpaid carers, in 30% of cases providing more than 50 hours of care a week (England and Wales averages were 10% and 21%). In turn, the dispersal of population in the area according to developable land means that many estates are considered isolated, a problem compounded by low car ownership and poor public transport connectivity amidst the difficult geography (ibid.). In addition, the population is ageing, which may heighten these problems (BGLHB/BGCBC, 2003). Low self-esteem and aspiration are difficult to demonstrate statistically, but are widely acknowledged amongst professionals locally to be reflected in a willingness to live on benefits, a tendency to leave school (and have children) early, and low academic achievement (Shared Intelligence, 2002; BGLHB/BGCBC, 2003). In turn, family support requirements are high, with children in care numbering 8/1000 in 2002 compared to a Welsh average of 5/1000, and significant levels of alcohol abuse and associated violence (BGLHB/BGCBC, 2003). Small-scale arson and car crime, particularly vehicle theft are also reported to be relatively high (ibid.).

Whilst this portrait of the area is inevitably somewhat superficial, it delineates the wide-ranging remit of activity that seeks in some way to contribute to the regeneration of the area, where this is broadly defined as the bringing about of lasting improvements in the face of multi-faceted decline. Such a mass or maze of interconnected problems offers numerous different starting or entry points for different organisations and projects to become involved in regeneration, which accordingly has a flexible definition in practice.. Indeed, this essential amorphism is acknowledged in various official documents concerned with regeneration in such areas, (e.g. Communities Directorate, 2001; HCRD, 2000; SEU 1998, 2000; WAO, 2006) and is further enabled by the range of regeneration programmes/funding streams for which the area is eligible. These include the flagship Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)'Communities First' scheme, aimed at long-term, community-directed regeneration; EU Objective One structural funding aimed at regional development, including community economic development, and employability and skills; the WAG/Corus Steelworks Regeneration Fund – a 'rescue' fund set up in the face of the sudden closure of a major employer locally; and numerous other pots and schemes from central government, the Welsh Assembly Government, National Lottery, small charitable foundations and so on. Regeneration initiative can therefore mean anything from a multi-dimensional project to a service or process designed to help one small part of the picture.

In turn, there is a wide range of agencies involved in regeneration activity in one form or another in Blaenau Gwent. These include various central and devolved government departments; arms-length quangos such as (at the time of the research) Education and Learning Wales (ELWa) and the Welsh Development Agency (WDA); other public sector organisations or agencies such as JobCentrePlus, the police and the local further education college; private sector initiatives such as the local chamber of commerce; voluntary sector organisations such as development trusts; national charities such as BTCV and NCH; and localised community-based organisations such as tenants' and residents' associations. In addition, there are various partnerships that bring together such actors for joint-working, some very local with

community involvement set up under particular policy initiatives such as Communities First; some more strategic, such as CCETs (Community Consortia for Education and Training); and some more ad hoc and local, convened around specific issues or projects.

Somewhere amidst this lies the local authority with its large corpus of competitive departmentalised professionals and long-serving politicians. The latter are and have always been predominantly Labour, enabling them to wield significant power within the area, in line with a wider South Wales pattern and tradition (Morgan & Mungham, 2000). Nonetheless they are also described locally as very competitive individuals, pertaining to 'turf'-based rivalries.

1.3 The dual research focus

Having defined the broad field of research, the next step is to introduce its main structuring principle: the juggling of two foci. On the one hand, consideration had to be given to providing something 'of use' to the collaborating body, the local authority: this had to be some kind of evaluative assessment of its regeneration initiative, picking up on the concerns described above as regards legitimacy and information gaps (Section 1.1). On the other, it became evident that there was an opportunity to contribute something of broader, more academic relevance at the same time: this was a focus on the fate the local authority amidst the widely discussed advent of governance. Again as suggested above, this could in fact be linked to the anxieties expressed by the CASE application about governmental legitimacy and coping with new working relations that needed to be addressed in the form of evaluative assessment devised to be of use to the authority. That is, the two foci could be compatible and complementary, although they were distinctive. This duality and complementarity is reflected in the two main sets of objectives and a combined set of research questions as outlined in Figure 2. These are dealt with more expansively in Chapter 4, where they are embedded more naturally in the course of the thesis.

Figure 2: Summary of research objectives and questions

Objective Set 1 is summarised as: *to demonstrate a theoretical and practical rationale for a different approach to the evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative*

Objective Set 2 is summarised as: *to contribute a better understanding of the positioning of local government in relation to existing concepts of governance*

Research Question 1: What is the role of the local authority in the regeneration process?

Research Question 2: What are the factors that shape this [regeneration] role?

Research Question 3: What room is there for all-round positive improvements to the authority's regeneration role?

The overall structure of the thesis and the types of contributions it makes also reflect the handling of these two foci, as outlined in the following sections.

1.3.1 Structure of the thesis

The broad structure of the thesis follows a pattern of bifurcation and combination. It initially bifurcates in line with the two research foci to facilitate the review of the literature in Chapters 2 and 3, but the foci are then combined in the research objectives, questions and methodology described in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapters 6 and 7 then separate out the two foci again as a way of structuring the analysis, whilst Chapter 8 brings the issues together to conclude the thesis. Chapters 3 and 7 are the 'meatier' more academic or theoretically-oriented chapters, Chapters 2 and 6 are the more practically-oriented ones.

Chapter 2 commences with an exploration of why the authority wanted another form of evaluative assessment when it was already subject to many others. This is initially by means of a review of the deficiencies and dysfunctional implications of existing forms of local authority evaluative assessment described in the literature and remedies suggested. This critique is then reinforced and slightly reoriented through a grounded perspective based on early fieldwork. An alternative approach to local authority evaluative assessment is thence devised. This focuses on being comprehensive in terms of the perspectives incorporated and understanding of the working context, and open-minded as to what is of value or problematic. The approach also pragmatically reduces the horizon of the assessment to focus on more

immediate impacts rather than ultimate regeneration impact. In describing and explaining this approach, the epistemological foundations of the thesis are also laid out.

Chapter 3 presents the more academic research agenda. It makes the case for a similar kind of investigation in the face of very limited discussions of the fate of the local authority in the academic literature that discusses continuities and change in the local authority working environment. The concepts of 'multi-level governance' and 'meta-governance' are used to summarise what can be excavated about the positioning of local authorities. These highlight the complexity that local authorities seem to be faced with, but overall it is shown that there is a lack of acknowledgement or detailed empirical investigation of this in the literature.

Subsequently, Chapter 4 takes a step back and explains the process by which the research agenda that has by now begun to emerge was arrived at, requiring some changes to the original CASE application. The agenda suggested is then translated into two sets of research objectives, and 1 shadow-set related to the CASE award, and thence a combined set of research questions. Chapter 5 goes on to describe and reflect on the extant methodology used to respond to these questions and objectives in a more considered and empirical way than is represented by the analysis in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the data that can be used to respond to the research questions from the evaluative or practical perspective. It unpacks substantive and evaluative (positive/negative) dimensions to the authority's regeneration role at different levels; the various shaping factors that affect this; and thence areas where improvements can be made, given the constraints noted. It demonstrates that the open-minded and comprehensive approach to the evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative is workable, produces useful insights, and may be of use in itself. It also consolidates the critique of more conventional approaches.

Returning to the more 'academic' focus, Chapter 7 analyses the data in response to the research questions as viewed from this perspective, focusing on the regeneration role being played by the local authority and the shaping factors. In doing so, evidence from elsewhere, where available, is compared to try to gauge the wider applicability of the findings. This enables a productive engagement with the concepts of multi-level governance and meta-governance to demonstrate what the findings add to them in relation to local authorities' positioning in the contemporary governing environment. From here there is a reflection back on the place of evaluative assessment within this environment.

As the concluding chapter, Chapter 8 aims to present a more integrated and holistic overview of the research. It details the response to the objectives, summary answers to the research questions and conclusions related to the objectives. Looking forward, it also discusses the implications of the research and possible ways of developing it in the future.

1.3.2 Contributions of the thesis
The thesis makes a contribution to two areas of academic work. This is firstly to the field of local authority evaluative assessment, or more broadly, the evaluation of public agency initiative as manifest in its actions, and secondly, to discussions of the contemporary governing environment or governance in the UK.

In the case of the former, the contribution is the justification, derivation and operationalisation of an alternative approach to the evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative. This demonstrates the otherwise often overlooked aspects of the picture and the implications of this for the functionality of assessment. Such an approach focuses on the substantive and evaluative impact of the local authority's actions on the regeneration process and/or work of other agencies involved in regeneration. That is, rather than being concerned with ultimate regeneration impacts, which are difficult to ascertain and attribute to the authority alone, it aims to discover more immediate or intermediate 'value' and 'value-inhibited' from a variety of

perspectives. In doing so it also seeks to avoid narrow normative conceptions of both value and what is meant by 'the local authority', as well as the strictures of 'policy' and 'project' evaluation. In addition, the approach unpacks the range of factors that shape this impact or role, directly, strategically and in the eye of the beholder (what is seen, against what it is judged). Together this information enables pertinent, sensitive and realistic recommendations for improvements to be made, whilst providing a comprehensive picture of local authority regeneration 'performance' and demonstrating the non-straightforward path to outcomes. This considerably problematises conventional approaches to the evaluative assessment of local authority (regeneration) initiative based on narrower definitions of performance.

In the case of the literature concerned with the contemporary governing environment or governance, the main contribution is the demonstration of the largely neglected fate of the (UK) local authority and yet its value as a window on governance. This is firstly through revealing the partial accounts present in empirical and theoretical discussions. In turn the research is framed so as to examine the contemporary role and positioning of a local authority in the regeneration field, whilst maintaining a comparative view with what can be seen about the situation elsewhere in the limited literature. This is presented as the findings of the research, developing the concept of meta-governance to reveal the both functional and dysfunctional relationship between the authority and governance, and its freedoms, capacities and constraints in doing so: an 'in-between' positioning.

The local authority is shown to be a vital and distinctive part of a governance environment that comprises power and capacity differentials. This is best conceived of as a situation of multi-level governance or a combination of hierarchy and heterarchy, incorporating an in-between body that allows for important gap-filling and mediation. The demonstration of the local authority's role as in-between is a considerable advance on conceptualisations of the contemporary role of the local authority that do not refer to this environment so comprehensively, as well as more straightforward concepts of

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the problems of governance. Such a positioning is however revealed to be considerably problematic and the subject of active contestation from inside and out. This is similarly a considerable advance on minor references to paradoxes and contradictions imposed on the authority from above. Lastly, inserting evaluative assessment into this picture places it in a new light, whilst helping to reinforce the arguments of both parts of the thesis.

The next chapter, as suggested above, is the commencement of the route to these contributions.

Chapter 2
Review of the Literature I: evaluative assessment of local authority [regeneration] initiative

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As Chapter 1 suggested, one of the two outputs demanded of this research was that it should provide some kind of evaluative assessment of 'use' to the sponsoring local authority. In response, this chapter makes the case for introducing a more open-minded and comprehensive approach to the evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative by problematising conventional approaches. This is through the examination of both a literature-based critique and the situation observable on the ground within the collaborating authority, relating this to the anxieties discussed in the Chapter 1. The concerns raised are addressed in the definition of the alternative approach, which through reasoning draws pragmatically from an extensive range of literature.

2.1 Setting the scene: introducing conventional local authority evaluative assessment and its significance

Local authority activity or initiative[1] is subjected to a variety of informal and formal evaluative or 'performance' scrutiny and assessment. In general, these seek to gauge value contributed by the authority - both actual and potential, and by default, value inhibited or at risk from being so, with the aim where necessary of instigating change processes to enable service or outcome improvement. Improvement related to such evaluative assessment is seen to be achievable through a variety of mechanisms, including: being held to account or responsible for failures; being motivated through targets and associated incentives; (clearer) understanding of where and how things have gone wrong or right; (improved) understanding of user/client/beneficiary needs; and being challenged to review the status quo (see e.g. Davis & Martin, 2002; Vartiainen, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003a; Behn, 2003; Cutler & Waine, 2003). It is also suggested that there may be benefits in respect of legitimacy and trust in the authority as its activities are made more transparent and more clearly justified, its competencies are demonstrated, and as it may be enabled to become more responsive (Boyne et al, 2002; Kelly &

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[1] Activity, action, initiative and work are used interchangeably from here on to refer collectively to individual and team-based action, projects, policies and strategies.

Swindell, 2002; Behn, 2003; Higginson et al, 2003). Indeed, new relationships may be forged through the processes involved (Higginson et al, 2003; Yang & Holzer, 2006). Others note that such mechanisms have the added advantage of potentially enabling the assertion and/or maintenance of control of standards at a distance, whilst perhaps allowing for flexibility in methods (Stewart & Walsh, 1994; Blalock, 1999; Greene, 1999; Lang, 2001).

There are three key types of evaluative assessment commonly applied to local authority (regeneration) initiative that frame the discussion that follows, and to which the term 'conventional local authority evaluative[2] assessment' is deployed to denote. These are:

1. Performance measurement through the use of performance indicators: the use of indicators that in some way quantify performance, whether in terms of throughputs, outputs, outcomes or efficiency ratios, or more aggregate gradings. It is thereby concerned with the question of whether local authorities are adequately translating their 'potential' into 'impact' within desired parameters of cost, time and so on.

2. Evaluations of projects, programmes and policies: this comprises the formal, 'systematic examination of a planned social intervention' (Clarke, 1999:1). They are relevant to local authorities where they have somehow been involved in such projects, programmes or policies. The pertinent evaluative assessment dimension relates to either the role the authority has played in helping or hindering particular achievements, or the value of the broader policy, programme or policy from which inferences can be drawn about the authority's capacity to respond to local issues.

3. Activity and capacity ('performance') inspections and reviews: these are broader overview-assessments of activity according to the parameters of broader (nation-wide) performance management programmes (Best Value, the Welsh Programme for Improvement) and ultimately, the Local Government Modernisation agenda. They

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[2] The term 'evaluative assessment' as opposed to 'performance assessment' is used to make clear the discussion is not limited to what is conventionally thought of as performance assessment (the use of indicators and performance inspection) but also includes certain types of evaluation.

may be concerned with future potential as well as the status quo. Performance measurement and inferences from policy etc evaluations may contribute to such assessments.

At this point it should be noted that despite devolution, and resultant variations such as Wales' emphasis on 'partnership' for improvement rather than public censorship (Laffin, 2004), the way in which local authority performance and capacity assessment is approached, remains similar across the UK and even beyond (Martin, 2005: 498; see also Greene, 1999; Khakee, 2003). This applies to both to what is conceived of as the object of assessment, and the type of judgements arrived at. Moreover, it seems fair to assume that the context in which such evaluative assessment is deployed, as referred to in Chapter 1 and developed in the second part of this Chapter and in Chapter 3, is likely to be common to most local authorities. Therefore the ground-level experience of local authority evaluative assessment, and complexity it has to contend with, may also be similar across devolved boundaries. On this basis, the proceeding discussion, in common with nearly all the literature refers to local authority evaluative assessment and more broadly, the evaluative assessment of regeneration activity in general terms, rather than being only relevant to England or Wales.

As suggested in Chapter 1, a concern with local authority evaluative assessment and, more broadly, performance and legitimacy has come to the fore in recent years against a background of local government or more broadly, state, funding and legitimation crises (Sanderson, 1998, 2001; Kelly & Swindell, 2002; Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003). More specifically in Britain, building on the Thatcherite legacy, a pattern of enhanced or reinvigorated evaluative assessment of local authority activity is seen to be part of a more comprehensive package of 'Local Government Modernisation' and a drive for more 'evidence-based policy' (Gray & Jenkins, 2000; Martin, 2005). These are both vital components of central government policy which is often dependent on local delivery.

Martin (2005) notes two trends that have resulted from the drive for evidence-based policy and a concern for the delivery of major New Labour initiatives

such as Local Government Modernisation. These are firstly, a step-change in the resource-prioritisation of policy-evaluation, and secondly an explosion in inspection, both in England and in the devolved contexts of Wales and Scotland. The contrast that can be drawn between these two tools of evidence-based policy is an important one for the purposes of this review, which seeks to draw a distinction between policy evaluation and a broader concept of local authority evaluative assessment. Performance inspection is a key over-arching component of the latter, and is distinguished from policy evaluation in its focus on judging and instructing the local authority. However, it should be noted, as suggested from the list above, that such a process might include making judgements about the local authority and its actions on the basis of policy, project or programme evaluations.

A new interest in policy-evaluation has resulted in well-resourced and increasingly sophisticated evaluations of many individual (albeit in many cases wide-ranging) central government policy programmes enacted at a local level which unpack 'what works' and how it does so (Martin, 2005). These include the local government modernisation programme itself, (a meta-evaluation) and elements of it, (e.g. Best Value, Local Strategic Partnerships, Local Public Service Agreements) the New Deal for Communities and Sure Start programmes, and Health Action Zones, (see e.g. Biott & Cook, 2000; Martin et al, 2001; Barnes et al, 2003; NRU, 2003; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). Such evaluations have moved away from old-style frequently criticised approaches, attempting to create something more fit for purpose in the face of complex policy situations (see e.g. Bovaird et al, 2001; Barnes et al, 2003). They can be seen to have involved academics applying much newer ideas circulating in the world of evaluation theory with an apparent personal commitment to reconcile different approaches and concerns to be of use to multiple audiences (e.g. Biott & Cook 2000; Sanderson, 2002; Barnes et al, 2003). Approaches applied have for instance, combined various types of method, and in many cases have been concerned with case-study level detail as well as the macro-perspective, aiming to promote mutual learning amongst different stakeholders, with a high degree of involvement (e.g. Biott & Cook, 2000; Barnes et al, 2003; Lawless et al, 2003). Many have also grappled with

complex causality, notably in their deployment and development of 'theories of change' evaluation methods (Bovaird et al, 2001; Barnes et al, 2003). However, it is notable that such policy evaluation has had limited impact amongst key decision-makers (Martin, 2005).

In contrast, Martin (2005) notes, performance inspection, which has expanded to include not only service quality, but also measures of 'capacity', holds considerable sway amongst decision-makers, with far-reaching implications for local authorities and individuals within them. This is because it tends to provide clean-cut and timely advice, with an 'aura of authoritative objectivity' (p. 500) as well as being seen as a means to improvement ends in its own right, in a straightforward way. Yet such neatness and simplicity is in fact questionable, for the very reasons that newer policy evaluations, in their incorporation of important detail, longer timescales and so on, have been praised (ibid). This is in fact a contradiction noted by many authors discussing such inspection and associated local authority (or more generally, public sector) evaluative assessment methods such as performance indicators, and the way they are presented and used: the questionable goes unquestioned (e.g. Smith, 1993; Blalock, 1999; Sanderson, 2002; Humphrey, 2001). Many of the criticisms they raise are long-standing, demonstrating how the sorts of evaluative assessment applied to local authority initiative, both by local authorities themselves and external assessors, have evolved little compared to developments in national-level policy evaluation.

The object of the following section therefore is to draw together these critiques to problematise the prevailing unquestioning acceptance of many forms of local authority evaluative assessment by key decision-makers. This includes reference to evaluations to highlight the dangers of certain types of evaluation being used to draw conclusions about local authority actions in the regeneration field. For, whilst not wishing to condemn all evaluations given the developments acknowledged above, it is easy to conceive how resource constraints, a desire for clear-cut answers and various confounding factors may result in evaluations being designed and used misguidedly in local authority evaluative assessment. Indeed, policy evaluators themselves

acknowledge the difficulty in coping with complex environments despite their methodological advances (e.g. Barnes et al, 2003). However, the concluding section to the review makes the connection with these developments in the discussion of how the critical literature suggests responding to the problems it highlights, indicating that the gap between these newer types of policy evaluation and local authority evaluative assessment ideally needs to be closed.

In the section that follows, the links between this critique and a grounded-perspective derived from interaction with the case-study local authority are demonstrated, extending the range of considerations. This perspective emphasises the authority's particular informational needs in relation to the realities of its regeneration activity and more general operation, highlighting the deficiencies of current evaluative assessments applicable to it in these regards. Out of this extension to, or alternative way of engaging with, the literature-based critique, an alternative pragmatic approach to the evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative is defined. This draws selectively on ideas presented in the literature as solutions to deficiencies observed, whilst to some extent refocusing the problem.

2.2 Problematising the evaluative assessment of local authority initiative: limitations and unintended consequences

2.2.1 Limited capture

As suggested above, the basic premise of evaluative assessment related to local authority (regeneration) initiative of whatever guise, might reasonably be supposed to be the gauging of value contributed and inhibited. Yet the literature provides extensive discussion of the problems with capturing performance with quantitative indicators, and the limitations of certain types of evaluations in this regard. There are two main dimensions to the discussions: the ways that conventional evaluative assessments select from 'the whole story' and the risk to conclusions that results. Importantly, such problems appear to be dangerously inherent, almost inevitably entailed through the practical operationalisation process.

2.2.1 a Limited capture: selectivity

The most logical way into this discussion is to consider what is meant by performance or value, for this is necessarily the starting point for measuring it or inspecting it. As many authors point out, such a concept is inherently contestable, with people likely to have differing opinions as to the significance of particular components and to judge them variously (e.g. Smith, 1993; Stewart & Walsh, 1994; Greene, 1999; Boyne, 2002). Moreover, as Abma & Noordegraaf (2003) suggest, not only may performance be difficult to specify in uniform terms, it may also be difficult to specify it in advance, particularly where actions are non-routine and involve significant levels of interaction (see also Stewart, 1996; Sanderson, 1998; Van Helden & Ter Bogt, 2001; Barrett, 2004). Even where a definition of performance is agreed upon and associated objectives outlined in advance, it may not be clear or agreed as to what constitutes their realisation (Shadish et al, 1991; Moore & Spires, 2000; Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003; Abram & Cowell, 2004).

From this array of possibilities, practicability dictates that through the definition of performance, even where multiple indicators are used to capture the different dimensions of performance valued by different stakeholders, (Greene, 1999; Spicker, 2004) certain things from the wide-ranging reality will go unmeasured or un-'inspected' (Boyne, 1997, 2002; Gudmundsson, 2003; Learmonth & Harding, 2006; see also Scott, 1998). Moreover, such selection may not be a case of systematic sampling, but may but may reflect issue or value-system fashion or the articulation of powerful interests (Stewart & Walsh, 1994; Levy, 2001; Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003). Performance indicators and inspection regimes defined from above (e.g. by central government) may be most prone to this given the policy objectives they are seeking to promote: assessments on this basis may therefore be highly normative, deploying particular theoretical assumptions that limit the perspective and that cannot be questioned (Biott & Cook, 2000; Andrews et al, 2002; Davis et al, 2004). Equally, selection may also be affected by awareness about activities or impacts that are valuable or cause problems, whether due to limited knowledge or limited visibility (e.g. Biott & Cook, 2000). As various authors point out, this may be problematic given for

example, that a significant proportion of what can be defined as performance of public agencies may be intangible, or counterfactual, and thus less likely to be acknowledged (Jackson, 2001; Kelly & Swindell, 2002; Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003; Abram & Cowell, 2004).

Indeed, selection of what to assess may also partly be a case of which aspects of performance can easily be translated into measurable components: it is commonly noted that this practice inherently discriminates against qualitative dimensions to performance and outcomes as opposed to outputs (e.g. Lipsky, 1980; Bovaird et al. 1999; Davies, 1999; Jackson, 2001). In turn, there is the question of performance-related data-availability: it is pointed out there may be problems with local authorities' data-bases in terms of the range and quality of data available to draw on, even in the case of monitoring data relating to their own work (Sanderson et al, 2001; Boyne et al, 2002; Davis & Martin, 2002; Audit Commission, 2003b). Similarly, the imposition of particular spatial units or other modes of aggregation and sampling through the measurement process will also incur selection from a wider picture (Bovaird et al, 1991; Smith, 1993; Kelly & Swindell, 2002; Higgins et al, 2004). Thus, performance measures and inspections capture a very particular story.

Turning to evaluation, it is easy to see how a similar process of selection may also take place almost inevitably. Indeed, one way to think about evaluation is the assessment of the 'performance' of policies, programmes or projects, or of the 'performance' of particular agencies within them. The first type of selection is through focus. As various authors note, whilst a comprehensive evaluation covering all pertinent angles in depth is desirable, in practical terms, resource and time constraints invariably mean that there are tradeoffs between them, or between breadth and depth (e.g. Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Blalock, 1999; Biott & Cook, 2000; Patton, 2002). Where, for instance, time is limited due to the imperatives of political decision-making, speed of information gathering and analysis is prioritised, and tradeoffs might include robustness, and information about long-term or more qualitative and indirect (and perhaps unintended) effects (e.g. Blalock, 1999; Martin & Sanderson,

1999; Shaw, 1999; Nutley & Webb, 2000). These considerations may likewise prompt the selection of a summative (focusing on impacts or achievements) or formative (focusing on process-outcome relations) approach. As Martin & Sanderson (1999) note, it is difficult to combine them (also Sanderson, 2002). Again, political or value stances, and the audience (e.g. local cf. central government) may inform these decisions (Geva-May & Pal, 1999; Ho, 1999, 2003; Biott & Cook, 2000). Indeed, Ho (2003) in her examination of urban policy evaluation in Britain suggests that historically the prioritisation of different values seems to at least partly characterise the transition from one 'generation' of evaluation to another, each having a different focus.

Beyond this, selectivity as with performance indicators/inspection may occur through data availability. Studies suggest that there may be particular problems with long-range data or data with adequate comparative baselines, although more generally many projects and programmes are apparently inadequately monitored or reliant on information-sharing that may be vulnerable to breakdowns in co-operation (e.g. Blackman, 1998; Wong, 2002; Ho, 2003; Boland, 2004). Even basic administrative data may be lacking: containing gaps and so on (Blackman, 1998). Where data is less of a problem, if for instance, the evaluation allows for dedicated data collection, selectivity will in turn again inevitably be imported through various choices. These include the choice of respondents, and where unaffected by decisions as to the broader focus, temporal, geographical and/or scalar (e.g. individual cf. systemic) delimitations and the balance of qualitative and quantitative data (see e.g. Fasenfest, 1997; Townley & Wilks-Heeg, 1999; Moore & Spires, 2000; Patton, 2002). Several authors point out that as with performance measurement, a quantitative bias may be observable, in this case due to the tendency to view such data as superior (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Chambers, 1997; Sanderson, 2000; Murtach & McKay, 2003). In addition, there is the selection of judgement criteria, from amongst widely differing perspectives, mirroring divergent stakeholders and debates as to organisational purpose, policy and programme objectives and so on (Shadish et al, 1991; Newman, 2001a). It follows that, as with performance measurement, the

operationalisation of evaluation can easily result in the selection of a partial story from a wider reality.

2.2.1b Limited capture: unsustainable or uncertain conclusions, propositions and judgements

Whilst such a partial story may, to some extent, be useful and expedient, particularly politically, several authors advocate a more 'modest' deployment or guarded use (Carter, 1991; Stewart & Walsh, 1994; Geva-May & Pal, 1999; Sanderson, 2002). This is because, though it is easy to assume that the selection made adequately mirrors reality, it may actually incur manipulation and embody ambiguity and inaccuracies. Conclusions may therefore refer to an overly simplistic picture of reality and be overly certain (cf. e.g. Scott, 1998; Learmonth & Harding, 2006).

At the most basic level inaccuracy may be imported through the poor quality of monitoring data used in assessment, which may under- or over- report dimensions of performance or value (Ho, 2003; Boland, 2004). As Boyne et al (2002) point out, data handling skills are generally deficient in local authorities (also, Ho, 2003). Moreover there may be perceived incentives in over- or under- statement of figures etc. (see e.g. Bartik & Bingham, 1997). In addition, the adequacy of baseline data may cause problems in assessing change (Boyne et al, 2002; Davis & Martin, 2002; CRG Research Ltd, 2003; Ho, 2003). In turn, ambiguity resulting from the comparison or aggregation of data deploying flexible concepts such as 'best value' 'satisfaction' and 'effectiveness', without investigating consistency in meaning, may be an issue (Martin & Sanderson, 1999; Newman, 2001a; Cutler & Waine, 2003; Higgins et al, 2004). Whilst their use might be deliberate to avoid having to agree on precise judgement criteria, conclusions using such aggregations have to make assumptions as to the most common meanings deployed, resulting in a significant reductionism of the actual variety in outcomes actually in place.

Indeed, selection inevitably involves some degree of reductionism as it incorporates ambiguity from a variety of perspectives. At the extreme, a common criticism is of the reliance on end-points or supposed outcomes to

draw conclusions about foregoing conditions even though there may be numerous other intervening factors that are not portrayed or measured. This is known as the 'black box' approach and is a criticism frequently levelled at summative evaluations and performance indicators (e.g. Chen, 1990: 18; Schmid, 1996; Ho, 1999; Behn, 2003). Its unhelpful consequences are variously described as: preventing learning by failing to provide necessary information about the 'hows' of impact; misattribution due to the failure to account for the influence of other factors or actors; over and under-estimation of value due to a failure to fully consider how other impacts may be being created; and excessive generalisation due to de-contextualisation (see e.g. Pawson & Tilley, 1997: Blalock, 1999: Davies, 1999: Ho, 1999: Stame, 2004). Thus the 'black-box' approach can be said to ignore or reduce complexity in the interest of convenience (see e.g. Sanderson, 1998, 2000, 2002; Cutler & Waine, 2001; Barrett, 2004). It imagines separation and simple, direct action-impact relations where there is entanglement and interaction, diversion and deflection (see e.g. Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Sanderson, 2000, 2002; Kelly & Swindell, 2002; Davis & Martin, 2002). It may also involve the deployment of debateable theoretical assumptions as to causality which may be normative and somewhat removed from reality (Blalock, 1999; Sanderson, 2000; Andrews et al, 2002; Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003). Resulting measures or foci may therefore bear little resemblance to what is actually done by the specific agency concerned (McKevitt & Lawton, 1996). Indeed, even where there is an attempt to unpack the black box, there may still be the risk of misattribution or misguided conclusions due to the inability to account for all factors, and imperfect knowledge or data (Pawson & Tilley, 1997:213; Ho, 1999; Davies et al 2000a/b; Sanderson, 2002). Consequently, assumptions and inaccuracies may still have to be built into the picture presented and conclusions drawn.

Conversely, it is widely argued that over-obsession with the 'black box' by way of a micro-level or formative evaluation focus, or prioritisation of indicators that focus on processes or outputs, also entails unhelpful reductionism, insofar as the 'bigger picture' may be lost in the disaggregation or simply not included (e.g. Smith, 1993; DETR, 1999; Davis & Martin,

2002; Oakley et al. 2004). This may make it difficult to make 'rounded' conclusions, particularly about the overall value of a programme or policy at the national level or about effectiveness (Bovaird et al, 1991; Davies et al, 2000a; Sanderson, 2000; Ho, 2003). Indeed, this may also be a problem more generally with evaluations and assessments that focus on checking for particular (often normative) definitions of value rather than taking a more 'open-ended' approach, as they may neglect for instance, problems of unmet needs, unintended effects or conflicting goals, as well as alternative dimensions to value (see e.g. Chambers, 1997; Bate & Robert, 2002; Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003)

Moreover, much evaluative assessment can be said to suffer from the 'snap-shot' problem such that it is disingenuously detached from longer patterns of events, and may mislead according to anomalies or other temporal factors that may skew data. These might include for instance, seasonal and project cycles, and the time it takes for effects to be produced as compared to the timeframe for measuring performance; indeed impacts may shift over time (see e.g. Smith, 1993; Munday et al, 2001; Cutler & Waine, 2003; Boland, 2004). The snap-shot may also have spatial or demographic dimensions which exclude important dimensions such as spill-over or displacement, or unintended beneficiaries (see e.g. Bartik & Bingham, 1997; Persky et al, 1997; Munday et al. 2001; Ho, 2003). Conversely, where the bounds are drawn too loosely, the impact on smaller sub-populations may also be overshadowed (Ho, 1999).

2.2.1c Interim conclusions

Overall therefore, it would be pertinent to bear in mind Fontaine & Warin's (2001:369) remark that evaluation (for which we can substitute evaluative assessment) is affected by constraints similar to those that affect action-oriented decision-making in the public realm generally. In other words, it has to work within limits to knowledge, understanding and resources/capabilities, and it is inevitably influenced by political or value choices (Fontaine & Warin, 2001; Shadish et al. 1991; Ball, 2002). This suggests that for example, performance indicators will only even be just that - indicators or proxies not measures, and may not even be good proxies (Boyne, 1997, 2002; Spicker,

2004). The general warning is that all forms of evaluative assessment need to be handled with care. The lazy interpretation of this is that all that is needed is guarded end use. A more rigorous approach however, might be to review the content and coverage of the assessment: that is, to pay greater attention to what is lost in the process of selection and reduction (where applicable) and undertaking it more self-consciously and according to desired ends. Given a concern for ends however, it also makes sense to be aware of the potential unintended consequences of certain configurations of selectivity and reductionism and means by which they occur. This is the purpose of the next section, which also introduces some possible ways forward to move beyond the critique.

2.2.2 Unintended consequences and the inability to effect desired change

As suggested in the initial discussion, the intended consequences of evaluative assessment are improvements to services and outcomes via the instigation of change processes based on enhanced information. However, the above analysis hints at a number of places in the assessment process where this course of events can be perverted, inhibited and perhaps even prevented. The following analysis examines this in a more focused way, looking at the way various dysfunctional scenarios contrary to the pattern envisaged might be related to particular combinations of selectivity and unsustainable conclusions, propositions or judgements. In turn, it outlines the approaches typically suggested in the literature to resolve such problems.

2.2.2a Unintended consequences: dysfunctional behaviour on the part of the assessed

Perhaps the most obvious starting point in investigating how the ideal improvement trajectory may be disrupted is to consider the responses to the assessment situation of those being assessed. Most work here is associated with the dysfunctional effects of performance indicators and associated inspection regimes. Nonetheless, its observations can forseeably apply in some degree to evaluations that select particular aspects of projects or programmes as their focus, or which rely on indicator-related monitoring data.

The classic dysfunction noted is that of distortion, whereby outputs highlighted by indicators, inspections or evaluations are focused upon due to the implication that they 'tell' people what they should be doing, what is and what is not valued. In turn may encourage neglect of other areas of work, perhaps even detrimentally affecting other work in the perverse incentives created or loss of incentives to work on more cross-cutting agendas (see e.g. Lipsky, 1980; Smith, 1993; Davis et al, 2001; Barrett, 2004). Selectivity here is seen in failing to account for other activities of value, perhaps on different timescales; it would also seem to reflect the unsustainable proposition that improvement in individual activities will bring about overall improvement, and in so doing, failing to account for tradeoffs and so on. Indeed, various authors note that it is indicators or indicator ranges that are excessively superficial and simplistic that are the main culprits here (Davies, 1999; Bohte & Meier, 2000; Kelly & Swindell, 2002). Equally though, a range of indicators that incorporate those more likely to be used as headlines as well as more developmental ones may likewise distort incentives (Cutler & Waine, 2001).

Another danger that is reported is the discouragement of innovation or responsiveness (e.g. Smith, 1993; Davis et al, 2001; Schofield & Sausman, 2004). This is usually seen to result from over-specification of results or activity that leaves little room for imagination and flexibility. As Greene (1999:169) notes, pre-conceived indicators or other judgement criteria make it difficult to challenge higher-level policy aims and their underlying assumptions, that may for instance, not suit local circumstances (see also Biott & Cook, 2000; Nutley & Davies, 2000). In doing so they also may embody the assumption that improvement is based on doing the same thing, (extrapolating forward in a linear manner). Instead, improvement may actually involve a trajectory that is punctuated with experimentation, taking activity in different directions; with a certain amount of failure (see e.g. Bartlett & Dibben, 2002; Corry & Stoker, 2002). Thus, divergence through innovation may bring feared censure, (see Smith, 1993) and associated selectivity may fail to acknowledge alternative ways of producing value, or alternative forms of value. On the other hand, the inhibition of innovation

may relate to the setting of targets that fail to challenge: a situation that may again reflect a lack of understanding of the capacity for change, perhaps by alternative means. Indeed, it is also suggested that a system that centralises performance management, implying mistrust of local agents, may inhibit learning by decoupling performance from local ownership and responsibility (Greene, 1999; Sanderson, 2001; Corry & Stoker, 2002).

Another type of dysfunctional behaviour may be the misreporting of figures or manipulation of their presentation (e.g. their categorisation or aggregation) so that they bear little resemblance to what is actually going on and hence have the potential to distort resulting decision-making (Smith. 1993; Humphrey, 2001; Corry & Stoker, 2002; Fitz-Gibbon, 2002; Behn, 2003). This may involve the creation of favourable smokescreens to disguise problems, or reporting performance and setting targets in such a way that little challenge occurs (Weiss, 1998; Davies, 1999; Martin, 1999; Newman, 2001b). Yet, a reasonable supposition may be that such manipulation is seen to be necessary due to the fear of unsustainable, unfair and reductionist conclusions being drawn from the data (see e.g. McKevitt & Lawton, 1996; Fitz-Gibbon 2002). For instance, conclusions or judgements derived from such data, perhaps relative to targets, may fail to take account of factors beyond agencies' control that make 'good' performance more difficult (e.g. Midwinter, 1994; Humphrey, 2001; Andrews et al, 2002, 2003; Boyne, 2002; Hill & Hupe, 2002). Others indicate that there may be competing demands on local authority resources, including more locally determined priorities, which again might affect performance as externally determined even though it may be regarded as superior locally (e.g. Ball et al, 2002; Corry & Stoker, 2002). Various authors also point out the contradictions embodied in higher-level agendas for local government: for instance, that local authorities are required to pursue performance improvements without extra funding to enable them (e.g. Benington, 2000; Ball et al, 2002; Davis & Martin, 2002; Cutler & Waine, 2003). It may also be the case that indicators or assessment have failed to keep up with changes in objectives and consequent impacts on outputs (Mintzberg, 1996; Newman, 2001a; Gudmundsson, 2003). Alternatively, as the Audit Commission (2003a) notes, poor timing of measurement may

encourage manipulation of figures by failing to allow time in-between measurements for requisite innovation and improvements to occur. Nonetheless, as noted above, a certain amount of manipulation may be inevitable due to the selectivity involved which simplifies overlapping circumstances and so on. Therefore the resulting aggregation or categorisation may always be contestable, and arguably distort decision-making.

Lastly, a less deliberate or subversive dysfunctional behaviour noted is that the work and cost involved in collecting and collating the data required can divert resources from actual productive work (see e.g. Cutler & Waine, 2001; Davis et al, 2001, 2004). In this case, the problem seems to be partly selectivity and partly due to an unsustainable proposition. Selectivity apparently entails a failure to account for the work involved in compliance with evaluative assessment regimes, and likewise a failure to recognise that such work is likely to be prioritised due to the fear of non-compliance even if it is not seen to be particularly valuable. The unsustainable proposition implied by such actions is that the processes of evaluative assessment are inherently worthwhile and do not involve tradeoffs but are directly related to an improvement. Along these lines Bartik & Bingham (1997) note the issue of the costs relative to the benefits of evaluations, whilst Davies et al. (2000a) question whether evidence-based policy (which evaluations may feed into) is universally appropriate.

2.2.2b Over-claiming success, deflection of blame and dissociation from responsibility: dysfunctionality amidst multi-agency governance

The second area where the ideal improvement trajectory might be disrupted is through the behaviour of those that control its reporting and design. This is less well documented, but can be pieced together from various observations, and is rooted in the notion that information is an instrumental force within power relations (see Geva-May & Pal, 1999).

Such observations note for example that many outcomes, and even outputs, may be the work of multiple agencies involved in complex interactions, rather than individuals or single organisations, linking into discussions of the realities of multi-agency 'governance' and multi-level government (see most

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recently, Sullivan, 2003; Exworthy & Powell, 2004; Hemphill et al, 2004; Armstrong & Wells, 2006). Yet, performance indicators and inspection in particular generally individualise responsibility, (Mintzberg, 1996) reflecting perhaps the difficulty of capturing, or controlling for, complex interactions (see also Sullivan, 2003). This, as Cutler and Waine (2001) suggest at the micro-level, fails to acknowledge the value of teamwork, or as Sullivan (2003) describes it, collective responsibility. In turn this could be seen to disincentivise it, and where it is significant in the creation of particular outputs or outcomes may forseeably impact on them negatively. Indeed, as Fontaine & Warin (2001) note in relation to the use of evaluations, there may often be an attempt to claim success by one organisation, even if many have been involved in its production. Where this succeeds in unduly rewarding or legitimating the action of one agency, this might be expected to impact on the morale of others, which may disincentivise further co-operation.

Conversely, following Guba & Lincoln (1989:32) individualising responsibility may result in the failure to acknowledge behaviour on the part of one agency or one section of an agency that impedes the production of certain favourable outcomes. Indeed, this may also be the case where responsibility is excessively collectivised (Sullivan, 2003). Blame can thus be deflected, responsibility dissociated from. Many critical reviews note that problems are created by (the requirements of) central government departments, government agencies or higher tiers of government (see e.g. Benington, 2000; Diamond, 2001; Humphrey, 2001; Exworthy & Powell, 2004). Yet, it seems that through the predominant orientation of evaluative assessment and publicity, there is most pressure on local government to bear the burden of this. Andrews et al (2002:10) note, for example, that an alternative interpretation of so-called 'coasting' authorities is that they are 'drowning in a sea of bureaucracy' imposed from above, but this is not acknowledged in top-down assessments. Similarly, McKevitt & Lawton (1996) describe how middle managers in their study felt under pressure to take responsibility for inadequate resourcing, even though it was not necessarily their fault. Such unfair blaming and untoward pressure would seem likely to impact on morale, as well as side-stepping potential

improvements based on the rectification of this situation by the responsible actor. Once again we see the problems of selectivity-as-simplification and unsustainable propositions/conclusions at play, this time highlighting the significance of uneven power relations that such 'knowledge' can be deployed to reinforce, and the continued significance of hierarchy amidst heterarchy.

A variation on this stance may be the deployment of 'narratives of success' that distract from other less favourable results. This has already been discussed in relation to manipulation by those being assessed. However, it may also be used to legitimate or justify the continuation of a particular programme, policy or way of working via selective assessment, or selective reporting (see e.g. Chambers, 1997; Townley & Wilks-Heeg, 1999; Newman, 2001b; Sanderson et al, 2001). Again, whilst useful for this purpose, the net result of the use of such a limited picture may be that problem areas of activity or of a project etc may not be attended to, or other activities may be compared less favourably than they might be (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Newman, 2001a). This re-emphasises the limitations imported by selectivity whereby it is deployable so as to favour over-simplified conclusions. It likewise highlights the significance of uneven power relations (i.e. uneven control over data design and dissemination) in the process.

2.2.2c The inability to effect desired change: irrelevance
The next type of problem relates to the lack of practical usefulness of evaluative assessment at the local authority level. The problem here is that it is not used or cannot be used in some of the ways expected in order to bring about improvements.

Firstly, there is the scenario where reporting becomes an end in itself, rather than as a means to reflect on issues relevant to local decision-making or to review activity locally (see e.g. Biott & Cook, 2000; Davis et al, 2001; Julnes & Holzer, 2001; Ho, 2003). This scenario would seem to be particularly likely where all monitoring and reporting is fed upwards for others to aggregate and analyse, and where it is designed accordingly, its selectivity being oriented to one type of end user (although it may also be affected by the limits to

knowledge). Thus whilst non-use may reflect a lack of 'learning culture' within the organisation, and lack of 'ownership' of responsibility due to upward reporting, or other contextual factors, (Greene, 1999; Sanderson, 2000, 2001; Lang, 2001; Ball et al, 2002) it also seems plausible that the root problem may lie elsewhere. That is, what is being measured or examined might not be seen to be relevant to the type of decisions made locally, whether due to timing or content (see e.g. Smith, 1981; Biott & Cook, 2000; Van Helden & Ter Bogt, 2001; Bate & Robert, 2002).

In the case of content, as was discussed above, the information needed for central or higher-level government decision-making or control purposes may incur selection and hence be lacking on several counts. This may be the case both with the information collected locally, and the way it is finally presented and fed back down in reports and recommendations. The information may for instance be insufficiently detailed or inclusive of different (value) perspectives and activities for appropriate conclusions to be drawn in relation to how to solve problems or enhance or maintain existing value contributions (see e.g. Ho, 1999, 2003; Biott & Cook, 2000; Stame, 2004; Hansen, 2005; Armstrong & Wells, 2006). Instead, all that might be gained is an idea of how to 'please' higher-tiers of government or inspection agents which may be at odds with or ignore locally-defined priorities/contexts, 'performance beyond the plan', unintended consequences or professional discretion (cf. e.g. Henkel, 1991; Stewart, 1996; Biott & Cook, 2000; MacKinnon, 2000; Audit Commission, 2003a). Thus once again we return to the problem of selectivity and the need to handle it carefully in the design of evaluation or designation of its appropriate audience.

Lastly, it has also been observed that the usefulness of performance measurement and communication in promoting trust in government is questionable: at the very least the relationship is under-researched and apparently not simple (Boyne et al. 2002; Van Ryzin et al, 2004; Yang & Holzer, 2006). For instance, it has been suggested that there is a lack of public interest in reports and indicators, which makes it difficult to build up a relationship through them, whether in terms of trust or as an accountability

mechanism (e.g. Smith, 1993, Talbot, 2000). Others point out that there is a lack of transparency in how overarching judgements are arrived at which confounds rather than increases transparency (e.g. Cutler & Waine, 2003; Davis et al, 2004; Kenway & Palmer, 2004). Here. it seems that once again, unsustainable propositions have been invoked to justify evaluative assessment.

2.2.3 Summary and conclusion

The unquestioning acceptance of conventional local authority evaluative assessment is easily countered at a number of levels. Firstly, there is the point that practicability entails tradeoffs in what is selected for attention, making it difficult to present the whole picture and achieve multiple ends. Secondly, such selectivity and other confounding factors imported in the process means that there may be deficiencies in the conclusions that can be drawn from such data, whether they are judgements or proposed alterations that aim to bring about improvements. Thirdly, as a consequence of these limitations which disrupt assumed behavioural responses or 'chain reactions' evaluative assessment may not have the desired effect, and may in fact promote dysfunctional behaviour. Indeed, in a multi-agency working environment where there are multiple competing interests, the whole process becomes easily infused with power relations and politics.

The literature associated with the problematisation of conventional forms of local authority evaluative assessment does however hint at various responses to these problems. These range from more modest or careful deployment of assessments, to more considered selection processes both in terms of activity-coverage and who is involved - in the definition of what to measure, and actual measurements. Such a considered approach is clearly evident in the discussion of newer forms of policy and programme evaluation (e.g. Biott & Cook, 2000; Bovaird et al, 2001; Pitcher, 2002; Barnes et al, 2004). Common themes that may be drawn from these discussions and the wider critical literature (from a range of perspectives) are of the desirability of collaboration/participation, inclusiveness and a qualitative, in-depth epistemologically-realist approach that unpacks complex causality, all in all,

broadening the field of vision. For instance, many suggest that to encourage 'buy-in', there is a need to engage with those at the 'coalface' to help design and undertake more appropriate forms of assessment (see e.g. Lipsky, 1980; Davis et al, 2001; Julnes & Holzer, 2001; Sanderson, 2001). They argue that this ensures that evaluative assessments are practicable for those that must be involved in their deployment, and properly reflect the range of activity undertaken and variables at play, whilst also perhaps encouraging self-reflexivity.

Similarly, the widely-suggested response to problems of uneven power relations and partial evaluation pictures is to include more voices in the assessment process, and to do so in an open-minded or 'goal-free' manner in order to allow for unanticipated effects (e.g. Scriven, 1976; Chambers, 1997; Sanderson, 2001 see also summaries by Shadish et al, 1991; Khakee, 2003). Indeed, some argue that the process of opening discussions may in itself be of value, helping to build external critical capacity and improve relationships by demonstrating willingness on the part of those in power to listen and explain (e.g. Chambers, 1997; Townley & Wilks-Heeg, 1999; Taylor, 2003; Yang & Holzer, 2006). In turn, an approach that unpacks the 'hows': the interactions between 'theories of change', actions, context and the targets of policies and programmes, is commonly seen to be desirable (e.g. Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Ho, 1999; Bovaird et al, 2001; Sanderson, 2000; 2002). This would help to unpack the roles of different agencies involved in producing particular outcomes, enabling the appropriate distribution of praise and blame and accurate remedial action, including the suggestion of alternatives.

Generally, it seems that in order to approach all-round functionality for evaluative assessment, 'eclecticism' or a combination of approaches rather than a purist following of any particular one is necessary (see e.g. Schmid, 1996; Sanderson, 2000, 2002; Greene et al, 2001; Patton, 2002). However, overall what is also indicated is a need for greater comprehensiveness in depth and breadth from an open-minded (inclusive) perspective. The question that remains though is whether this is practicable given the rationale for selectivity

outlined in the first part of the chapter. This may require a change in ambition, rather than attempting to be 'all things to all men'.

2.3 Connecting the problematisation of accepted common forms of local authority evaluative assessment to the grounded perspective

The following discussion seeks to connect this critique to an actual on-the-ground situation. This analysis reflects the initial fieldwork and exploration of the literature, which included existing examples of evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative (see Chapter 4). Whilst it is possible to imagine the links between the on-the-ground situation and the foregoing literature-based critique, starting from a particular empirical situation enables a fresh take on the issues of concern, and a more- and re-focused response, defining a particular fitness for purpose.

2.3.1 Responding to the concerns of the officers driving the CASE project

Early on it became clear, building on the issues highlighted in the Introduction Chapter, that the officers driving the CASE agreement had two main concerns to which they hoped the research would respond. Firstly, they wanted to know if what they were doing was working, preferably in terms of combined impact, yet they recognised that their research capacity was limited, that they had a poor in-house data-base and that many national statistics such as the Labour Force Survey had inadequate sample sizes for the County-Borough. This left them somewhat in the dark in their planning of activity and new initiative. Secondly, they were concerned that official or conventional performance indicators and other assessments were not adequately capturing their performance, which could reflect badly on them, making them appear incompetent or lazy, or distort activity if slavishly followed. Indeed, by the time the initial period of observation was completed, many clearly felt the authority to be considerably threatened by the imposition of an 'Advisory Board' with potentially far-reaching powers by the Audit Commission, in light of external concerns about failings in its performance. Unpacking these concerns suggested that there was a need to grapple with the operational-definition of 'what', 'working' 'adequate capture' and 'performance', using this reflection to produce a reworked approach or approaches to evaluative

assessment[3]. Any such approach however had to be practicable in relation to the issue of research capacity.

2.3.1a Lowering the horizon of assessment

A starting point was to recognise the significant difficulties created for the authority by other actors, notably funding bodies, and confounding factors, such as the hidden, informal economy and national economic trends. These could impact on amongst other things, whether a project was able to proceed, and the incentives with which particular interventions were competing: in effect sending well-intended effort well off course in respect of the outcomes achievable. However, it was apparent that there was little grasp of the implications of such factors in the existing system of evaluative assessment, which could clearly give a poor impression of the authority as well as leaving it under-informed about what it was targeting. For instance, any mentions of alternative causality or responsibility were as asides and more often than not as described above, responsibility was individualised and simplified to blame the local authority alone[4]. There was little attempt to factor in national economic trends in the use of (employment etc.) statistics[5]; nor had there been any research fed into the authority's database about the informal economy locally, despite indicators of its presence (e.g. drugs problems, benefits dependency making cash-in-hand work desirable – see e.g. Williams & Windebank, 2003; SEU, 2004; DoH, 2005). From another perspective, trying to capture local authority impact more directly was also hampered by the lack of tracking of its interventions, for example, there was little monitoring of projects for which officers had helped to get Objective One (or other) funding.

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[3] Such concerns can be seen to relate to, on the one hand policy or project evaluation, and on the other, performance assessment, but the following analysis demonstrates why this distinction is logically blurred under the umbrella of 'local authority evaluative assessment' by explaining the difficulty in delineating policies and projects and the common concern with assessing performance, just on different timescales.

[4] For instance, an Audit Commission (2001) Best Value report raises the issue of the very difficult economic climate in Blaenau Gwent. However it sustains the argument that the council should be able to monitor its effectiveness by keeping records of jobs created at firms it has given grants too. No suggestion is made as to how the economic climate might be taken into account.

[5] Cf. e.g. the methodology developed by Jones (2002)

Together, these circumstances suggested that for reasons of practicability and to avoid unsustainable conclusions, the assessment of whether 'what' they were doing was 'working', (i.e. their 'performance' or policy 'success') would have to focus on ascertaining more immediate impacts of actions. That is, because there was a lack of 'tracking' to follow the precise impact of actions, or resources to unpack this complexity post-hoc, it would be easier to capture their broad value in relation to the 'ingredients' of regeneration, including the work of others. 'Performance' was thus defined according to what the authority had most control over, or was most responsible for. An assessment of the effectiveness of the approach being taken in transforming the socio-economic or regeneration 'health' of the area would have to wait until a more effective 'tracking' strategy or intensive 'theories of change' based excavation was implemented (see e.g. Sanderson, 2002; Barnes et al, 2003; Oakley et al, 2004).

This approach finds support amongst various authors whose work falls within the critical literature discussed above, despite the overall thrust of this appearing to favour comprehensive evaluation (Khakee, 2003). Indeed, in suggesting a reduction in ambition it can be seen to reflect the ultimate pragmatic stance that evaluative assessment cannot be 'all things to all men'. For instance, lowering the horizon of assessment follows the logic of Bartik & Bingham (1997:255) who remark that intermediate outcomes are easier to measure than ultimate outcomes. They suggest that this focus avoids opening the 'can of worms' of subsequent interactions and other complexity, reducing the room for ambiguity and inaccuracy. This is echoed by Sanderson (2000) who notes that it is easiest to account for programme or policy impact on a defined population at the local level. Similarly, Geva-May & Pal (1999) argue that evaluation of this sort is more robust than policy analysis (which here would refer to the analysis of outcomes) due to its more humble ambitions. In addition, the proposition seems to be in line with Davies' (1999) call to distinguish between organisational and programme performance, (see also Kenway & Palmer, 2004) and Biott & Cook's (2000, following Helsby & Saunders, 1993) advocacy of the creation of developmental performance indicators to capture what comes before outcomes (see also Pitcher, 2002).

Overall, the aim of lowering the horizon of assessment in this way is to focus resources on what is most achievable, averting some of the risk of coming to unsustainable conclusions from the information gathered. Concurrently, the idea is to provide a good base to counter the unsustainable conclusions made by others on the basis of prevalent conventional approaches, by presenting a detailed view of what was going on within the authority's immediate control. However, it is accepted that the assessment should also incorporate a means to recognise and acknowledge if not precisely account for, why a 'good' more immediate impact is so difficult to achieve. An in-depth study of such circumstances could help to remind others, (notably higher-level agencies) of their responsibility and recognise the limitations to change, helping to manage expectations and better focus recommendations.

2.3.1b Broadening the reach of the assessment/altering the object of assessment: discovery of 'value'

In parallel with the recognition of the need to lower the horizon or ambition of assessment is the recognition that there is a need to broaden the focus of assessment, and reorient it somewhat. This position is rooted in observations that are taken forward with the help of a range of literature, enabling a re-conceptualisation of the object of assessment.

Contact with the authority made it increasingly apparent that there was a significant gap between the realities and nature of the day-to-day work of officers in the Regeneration Division, and what was portrayed by conventional regeneration, economic development and planning policy performance indicators or captured by the remits of performance inspections and evaluations (e.g. Audit Commission, 2001; CPC, 2001; Audit Commission, 2003b; CEDOS, 2003; CRG, 2003). Firstly, within the Division there was a huge amount going on and rather than people rigidly working on discrete objectives, projects or policies, activity was much more diffuse and fluidly intertwined, reflecting numerous stimuli and constraints from different sources. Thus for instance, it was evident that an evaluation focused on a specific project or programme (as was commonplace) would impose artificial boundaries around officers' work and influences on it. In so doing, such an

assessment could easily fail to acknowledge the impact on the policy or programme of competing priorities for officers' time and available finances, working relations soured in other contexts, or other work that produced synergies with it. Equally such a narrowly focused evaluation might not grasp value being contributed that is not tied to any particular project. Undervaluation seemed to be inevitable.

Secondly, much of officers' day-to-day work seemed to consist of activities far removed from outcomes, (e.g. advice, information-sharing) but which were evidently aimed at achieving outcomes ultimately, indicating the detail and complexity involved in their realisation. This was particularly the case in relation to work undertaken in the context of a multi-agency working environment, (or 'governance') which was at least as common as situations where the authority was working alone. Yet most evaluations and performance indicators focused only on the end-point or on normative reductions of how such an end-point would be achieved (e.g. via performance management systems) which did not capture this broader contribution. They also did not seem to be interested in the relation of the authority's work to that of others: rather, their working relationships with others were largely only considered in relation to the authority's own objectives and responsibilities (e.g. forms of consultation).

Thirdly, it was apparent that some activities might not achieve results that would conventionally be thought to 'count', although in fact they may still be valuable. For example, failed bids might be dismissed as failures rather than acknowledging value created in the process of the bid-writing: for instance, in partnerships brokered and research undertaken. Equally, the value of support beyond just attaining money in successful bids might also be ignored in this way. Likewise, a decision taken not to locate in an area on the back of advice given may conventionally be regarded as a non-result, yet such a decision shows that the advice has been useful. Conversely, it was also possible to envisage that there might be an equal lack of acknowledgement of aspects of such action that have negative impacts. There may be a lack of awareness that a problem was being caused for another agency for instance, due to limited

imagination or understanding or what is helpful and unhelpful. Overall, the system appeared to be poorly geared to coping with a multi-agency working environment and the multi-faceted, highly involved and complex world of regeneration work.

These observations echo certain insights that can be drawn from slightly different literatures to those covered by the main counter-discourse presented above. Firstly, it may be helpful to consider Elsbach's (1999) comment on organisational studies (as opposed to evaluations) which is that they may lead to an awareness of otherwise invisible phenomena. She refers to the work of Benner (1984) who made visible previously unacknowledged competences demonstrated by nurses, revealing the blindness perpetuated by convention in academic studies of nursing practice. Indeed, this echoes elements of the more mainstream critical literature that refer to the blindness of external aloofness. Such blindness ignores the detail that does not fit with a particular normative view of the world, or inhibits the perception of intangibility (e.g. Chambers, 1997; Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Biott & Cook, 2000). A link can also be made with those critics that point out that superior and complex performance may not be specifiable in advance or even imaginable - in other words, the researcher may not know what they are looking for (e.g. Rist & Joyce, 1995; Jackson, 2001; Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003; Behn, 2003). As above, this points to the importance of an open-minded approach that collects the full range of relevant detail about the black box and its antecedents (albeit with the smaller ambitions described above) from a variety of privileged-observer (stakeholder) perspectives (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Chambers, 1997; Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Greene, 1999; Ho, 2003; Khakee, 2003).

The work of Implementation Theorists such as Barrett & Fudge (1981) can also be drawn upon here. Their argument is that policy does not exist independently of action − that policies are meaningless in themselves until they are translated into action, during which process their definition may undergo considerable negotiation (see also Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973, Lipsky, 1980; Schmid, 1996; Stewart, 1996; Hill & Hupe, 2002). This further implies that it is meaningless (and virtually impossible) to evaluate policies:

what should be the focus of evaluation is action. Barrett and Fudge (1981: 4) describe this action as 'policy-action' whilst O'Toole (2004:314) refers to it as the mobilisation of 'energies of disparate stakeholders' (see also Schmid, 1996). Again, following this logic, such action may have positive or negative consequences, which may or may not have been expressed in initial intentions, and may in fact reflect numerous policies and agendas rather than singular ones. This explains the difficulties in delineating an appropriate object of assessment. In a similar vein, within the critical management literature, an article by Learmonth & Harding (2006) makes the connection between ethnographic studies of organisations that reveal contestation in the workplace, and the illogicality of universalistic managerial approaches, such as those that refer to singular best practice. They argue instead for the validity and usefulness of heterogeneous evidence, including informal knowledge, such that details various means to ends (see also Scott, 1998). Once again this proposes the need for an approach that re-conceives the object of evaluative assessment, in this case as something much broader from which selection is inherently distorting.

However, working out whose inputs are necessary to have the relevant insight to the invisible and unspecified, and that this needs to be conceived of in an un-bounded way, falls short of ascertaining precisely what it is we want to grasp in relation to local authority regeneration initiative. Here, the work by Armstrong & Wells (2006) is useful in pointing out the lack of attention in conventional evaluation approaches to multi-agency governance or the working environment in which regeneration outcomes are created. They suggest that in order to assess regeneration impact there is a need to examine the roles of all the different stakeholders and partner organisations within this, to include an investigation of their resource needs in relation to being able to play an effective regeneration role. Reading between the lines, a refocusing can be envisaged that views local authority action in relation to these needs and other agency roles as something to be valued, rather than an inconsequential managerial detail, that is as a consequence, systematically neglected. The local authority's role in the round may also be important, with

much worthwhile value needing to be captured in any evaluative assessment appropriate to this circumstance.

In turn the more diffuse and multi-dimensional notion of 'additionality' or 'added value' described as the focus of assessment by Buisseret et al (1995), Luukkonen (2000) and Sanderson, (2000) would also seem to be helpful. These authors deploy the terms in respect of relational processes, asserting their value, rather than simply focusing on narrowly-defined end-points, outputs or throughputs. Sanderson (2000: 446) for example refers to the added-value in *'avoiding duplication... adaptation and flexibility... 'catalytic' support... innovative approaches and... capacity building'*. Indeed, a broader focus would seem to be in line with the very wide contemporary definitions of regeneration and economic development explored on a self-identifying basis in the literatures. These acknowledge the importance of intermediate steps such as the building of capacity amongst the community, and the diffuse and vaguely defined nature of such interventions, as well as the time such processes take (e.g. Haughton 1998; Boland, 1999a/b; Purcell, 2004; see also Pitcher, 2002). From this perspective, it is possible to argue that many activities contribute to regeneration even if not obviously, directly, solely or immediately so: they may have quite invisible qualitative impacts which can easily be missed. These points help to clarify the invisibilities referred to in more general terms, and contextualise the observations made within the authority, which can be seen to be part of this wider picture of value.

Drawing together the observations and these particular dimensions to the literature with which the need for a new focus to assessment in order to 'adequately capture' 'performance' and to pinpoint 'what works'. Rather than projects, policies or programmes and straightforward, pre-conceived and controlled products, there is a need to grasp value that is more qualitative, diffusely and collectively effected and (more negatively) affected often at more intermediate points, amidst multi-agency relationships. Here, a concept

that I shall term 'performative action'[6] seems to capture the desired object —
the 'what' or 'performance'.

Building on Barrett & Fudge's (1981) concept of 'policy-action' this wording
helps portray the situation whereby firstly, action taken has the potential to
produce good and bad impacts; secondly, that the impact of individual actions
(or policies etc.) may be hard to disentangle from other actions; and thirdly,
that impacts may or may not have been intended and may or may not be
consciously produced. It also conveys the idea that there may be value in the
processes involved in producing particular end-points, rather than just in the
specific end-point, and that there may not be full control of the factors that
create the ultimate end-point - or what is conventionally defined as the
'performance'. As a generic concept, exploration of it would allow for the
consideration of value contributed or inhibited by actors within the authority
other than Regeneration Division officers, including elected members and
officers from other divisions, as well as the aggregate whole. This builds on
the idea that regeneration can be affected in numerous ways and also serves as
a reminder that local authorities are much more than the narrow managerial,
service-delivery agencies conceived of under the Conservatives (Lowndes,
2000). Lastly, it would allow for the incorporation of both internal (broadly,
producer) and external (broadly, consumer - colleague) perspectives as to
what is of value, 'performance' or 'what' is working (or not). This in fact,
following the suggestions in the literature discussed above, is how it is
proposed that such invisibilities are uncovered, and is important given
indications of limited awareness of certain added-value or problems/needs
from both perspectives on their own. Indeed, in including external viewpoints,
the timescale of the perspective could be extended beyond the view of the
producer or policy-[en]actor.

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[6] Whilst all kind of links could be made between this and the concepts of performativity and
performance found within the social science literature in relation to identity and social
categories, (see e.g. Gregson & Rose, 2000) as is explained, I have chosen this concept to
refer to something slightly different, according to what the words imply to me.

2.3.1c (Re)defining 'adequacy'

From here a number of points can be added to explain and clarify how this approach provides for 'adequate capture' of local authority regeneration performance, in contrast to conventional evaluative assessments on their own. This deals with the pitfalls described in the counter-discourse, whilst exploring different conceptions of adequacy from a grounded local authority perspective. In so doing the detailed requirements and epistemology as well as the limits to the approach are explained.

The main point is that the approach is concerned with a full awareness of what local authority performance in the field of regeneration constitutes, and thus at the more immediate level, would be more adequate than most conventional assessments and measures that select from this full picture or beyond it. Locally it was envisaged that this should enable better, more-informed decision-making as regards for instance, the deployment of staff time, and self-awareness of problem areas to help avoid them or mitigate them. This was the type of use that could be conceived of on the basis of the informal, often ad-hoc decision-making and juggling that was observable (see also Weiss, 1999). In turn, following various authors it was envisaged that the information could perhaps also be used to produce new local performance indicators that would better reflect where exactly value was being added or problems were being caused (see e.g. Davies, 1999; Blalock, 1999; Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003; Grace, 2003). In addition, this particular approach was seen to be important in connection with the need to capture the authority's raison d'être in relation to regeneration: to reassure them that they continued to have a role within the regeneration field, but perhaps helping them to re-conceptualise what it was.

Adequacy here is therefore conceived as a question of whether practitioners feel that they can relate to the information and would feel it to be usable and useful. Consequently, the aim is to get as close as possible to the full range of what actually goes on and how it is experienced whilst also being sure to probe for typical patterns of events rather than taking a snapshot. A subscription to a qualitative approach is clearly indicated, linking to the

critical literature's disquiet at the privileging of quantitative methods (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Chambers, 1997; Sanderson, 2000; Khakee, 2003; see also WEFO, 2002). In respect of this, one problem that could be envisaged is that it might be criticised as inadequate in terms of being evaluation based on 'say so'. However, qualitative theorists have developed alternative standards of validity which are useful here. On the one hand there is evidence that users of evaluation, at least at the local level, prioritise practical adequacy over the elimination of uncertainty, and are willing to trust experience and tacit knowledge (Cronbach et al, 1980; Patton, 1997, 2002; Learmonth & Harding, 2006; see also Sayer, 1992:69). Nonetheless, as realists suggest, it should be possible to excavate the foundations of 'say so' to particular grounds such as expectations and experiences (e.g. Pawson & Tilley, 1997). On the other hand, various authors suggest that critical [stakeholder] review and the search for persuasiveness – the evidence being coherent, making sense and being believable to those familiar with the situation, are desirable features of the evaluation process to make it more robust (Guba & Lincolm, 1989; Shadish et al, 1991; Davis et al, 2000c; Patton, 2002). Thus discussion and feedback within the process will be important, as will efforts to enhance coherence and believability such as ensuring a sufficient number and range of respondents to allow for common themes to emerge and to rationalise inconsistencies (after Shadish et al, 1991; Sayer, 1992:79).

Also important in terms of adequacy, in order to avoid distortion and promote robustness, is the inclusion of external as well as internal perspectives. This recognises, as the critical-literature describes, the potential of 'self-evaluation' to be at the very least, conservative, as well as disempowering to those excluded from exercising voice (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Chambers, 1997; Weiss, 1998; Townley & Wilks-Heeg, 1999; Newman, 2001b). It follows that external perspectives may help to stimulate new ideas, through confronting the authority with different ways of seeing things, rooted in different experiences, interpretations and expectations: a 'creative destabilisation' of normal internal world views (Learmonth & Harding, 2006:262; see also Kelly & Swindell, 2002). Indeed, dialogue of this sort between different local authority constituents and external stakeholders on an ongoing basis would

seem to be a way of ensuring that evaluative assessment is more dynamic and remains relevant. This is another dimension of adequacy which conventional approaches seem to engage with on only a limited basis, in relation to their own agenda changes only. In fact, there is also the potential of the process helping to build trust as each 'side' becomes more aware of the other, (or others) rather than there being a situation of one-sided unconstructive, dead-ended criticisms. This builds on the idea that the process of evaluative assessment can achieve desired ends in its own right (e.g. Yang & Holzer, 2006) – though gaining the trust of citizens as opposed to external colleagues may be another challenge entirely. Generally the idea would be to encourage more reflective practice in the vein of Schon (1987) (see also, Rist & Joyce, 1995). This 'evaluation for development' may be seen to be another dimension to adequacy which has seemingly gone unexplored in the prioritisation of 'evaluation for accountability' (Biott & Cook, 2000).

In turn, the statement about what external stakeholders bring to the table in terms of data requires a clarification of the epistemological position, for it takes us into the territory of both constructivists (e.g. Denzin, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and realists (e.g. Sayer, 1992; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). From constructivism is drawn the acceptance that actions may have different meanings for different people and that an internal or preconceived perspective will not always be able to pick up on this. Here though, this is taken to imply that different people will have different experiences and judge things variously. This contrasts to the more extreme constructivist position that suggests that meanings are entirely constructed and not rooted in reality. Instead, following realists, as stated above, it is suggested that this reality needs to be (and can be) excavated beyond the different 'meanings' in terms of expectations and differential impacts/experiences or awareness of actions (see e.g. Sayer, 1992; Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 216). Yet, as realists in particular once again propose, the evaluator may need to exercise their own craft and judgement in stitching together the different stories, considering both structure and agency (Pawson & Tilley, 1997:23, 218; Sanderson, 2000:449; Pitcher, 202). This may be important in order to avoid manipulation, to remain in control, and due to the limits to stakeholders'

ability to articulate the issues and agree amidst themselves on a coherent story (see e.g. Smith, 1981:234; Pawson & Tilley, 1997: 20; Huebner & Betts, 1999: 350). Relativism, as Sanderson (2002) notes, does not sit comfortably with a political need to act. On this basis it is also suggested that this approach would enable the determination of appropriate action to deal with underlying problems, rather than intervention being futile. Returning to the constructivists however, there is the acceptance that solutions may not be universal: they may involve tradeoffs, and may need to be multiple to deal with different perspectives.

Beyond this, it might be thought that adequacy for local use would result in inadequacy for use at other levels; a trade-off suggested in the discussion of selectivity above. However, this has mainly been observed in relation to evaluative assessment oriented to non-local users (i.e. mainly central government and its agencies) which is seen not be useful or not used locally because it lacks relevant detail (see e.g. Ho, 1999; 2003; Biott & Cook, 2000) Stame, 2004; Armstrong & Wells, 2006). In contrast, when this situation is viewed from the other way round, it can be argued that the purposes of higher-level bodies that undertake evaluative assessment may also benefit from an approach that adds in detail rather than there being a trade-off. Currently, though particular common forms of evaluative assessment may be useful to them in advocating change of a certain sort or attempting to present a summary strategic picture, they may also be self-limiting in their narrow view (see e.g. Stewart & Walsh, 1994). This narrow view may obscure valuable components of the picture that could be capitalised on, or problems that need rectifying. To enable such capitalisation and prevent the described dysfunctional patterns of non-use/usability and misuse related to under-informed judgements and decisions, or the fear of this therefore, such top-down evaluative assessment may usefully be complemented by this broader approach. Indeed, modifications without a change in approach (e.g. efforts by the Audit Commission (2004a) to attend to the problems of context and distortion within Comprehensive Performance Assessment of local authorities) are able to only go so far towards preventing such dysfunction as

the overall conception of what is of value or problematic continues to be overly narrow.

Without such a review, on the basis of the grounded perspective it is also proposed that there is a justifiable need for evaluation as defence or legitimation despite this tending to be viewed negatively in the literature (see e.g. Giloth, 1997; Pawson & Tilley, 1997:212; Townley & Wilks-Heeg, 1999 Sanderson et al, 2001). At the time of the initial research contact, there appeared to be a sense of general beleaguerment and low morale within the authority. This seemed to be related to extra Audit Commission scrutiny, (an imposed Advisory Board with far-reaching powers): voluntary and community sector suspicion of the authority resulting in high-levels of (potentially unjust) criticism; and awareness of being the target of many jokes about poor performance amongst their peers. What was envisaged therefore was a need to deploy this open-minded approach to evaluation firstly, to demonstrate the extent of regeneration work being undertaken by the authority, and its particular contribution to the multi-agency environment which was not readily apparent. Secondly, where applicable, it could be deployed to justify why there had been deviation from singular normative visions or a lack of response to short-sighted criticism. Thirdly likewise it could be used defensively to enable more informed-decision-making able to deal with the roots to criticisms, redirecting blame/recommendations for change as appropriate. Adequacy for this use once again rests with the breadth of the investigation (and the rigour outlined) which stands in contrast to other conventional forms of assessment (including media/public scrutiny) that as suggested above, are often too narrow and normative, and liable to be used to pass on blame inappropriately or to undervalue the authority (cf. e.g. Lowndes, 2000). Thus evaluation for defence may in fact require the opposite of the selective review or reporting used to create a smokescreen envisaged by critics: the broader view being presented as a challenge to the inadequate narrow one.

One threat to the overall adequacy of the approach remains. That is, the critical literature suggests that such modesty of ambition, as a form of

selectivity, would not be without tradeoffs. The key concern here is that such a focus risks losing sight of the bigger-picture: indeed it does not prevent others from coming to potentially unsustainable conclusions about ultimate outcomes beyond its horizon of interest. In response though, it can be argued that this approach can contribute much more than a simple output-based evaluation; a pigeon-holing implied by such a criticism. That is, investigating value-contributed and inhibited and constraints in this way should reveal more than easily discernible positive and negative impacts, because actions are likely to be valued or found to be problematic on the basis of projections back or forwards, rather than on a standalone basis. Therefore information about needs and expectations, potential opportunities, (e.g. to meet unmet needs) un-stated theories of action or agendas, (see e.g. Hanberger, 2001; Sanderson, 2002) and some of the 'worms' that confound attempts to create positive ultimate outcomes may be extracted. In addition, the resulting picture would not be so small in any case, given the horizontal and temporal ambitions of the approach: that is, the various perspectives to be incorporated, and the emphasis on typical rather than one-off patterns of events.

Beyond this, as suggested in Section 2.3.1a, it is not proposed that this approach should substitute for the tracking of impacts (see e.g. Barnes et al, 2003; Rossi et al, 2004; Oakley et al. 2004) or of attention to broader indicators of local 'regeneration health' (socio-economic conditions, preferably controlling for wider economic trends). Rather it is suggested that these await development in themselves, as and when resources become available. The approach outlined here meets particular needs according to the circumstances found at the time that the research started; it can only be recommended that due attention is also given to ultimate impact and effectiveness evaluations as other important informational needs. Indeed, this type of information may prompt greater challenge to existing practice compared to that likely to emerge from the focus of the approach proposed here (see e.g. Shadish et al, 1991: 477). As such in some ways the approach proposed can be seen as only one part of a wider complement of evaluative assessment.

2.3.2 Summary and conclusion

The grounded perspective therefore ensures that what is defined as 'fitness for purpose' in respect of evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative is particularly attuned to the nature of the work involved and associated working conditions and relations. The perspective re-focuses the critique of (multiple types of) conventional evaluative assessment on the systematic blindness to the multi-faceted and staged nature of the regeneration task and hence activity/initiative, and the multi-organisational environment. This clearly reflects the concerns indicated in Chapter 1 as regards identity and credibility. The proposed approach also prioritises information needs according to what is practicable, rather than trying to rectify all deficiencies at once, recognising the need to design approaches that complement each other, so that overall, deficiencies are compensated for, strengths built on.

Altogether, the analysis and response reaffirm the value of an approach that is as detailed, qualitatively nuanced, inclusive and open-minded as possible. As a result the response avoids commonly acknowledged pitfalls associated with deficiencies in these regards. It thereby seeks to encourage deployment with desirable rather than dysfunctional effects. However, the approach refines the position found in the mainstream critical literature by recasting the problems and therefore solutions according to what seemed to be most pertinent and politically astute from a ground-level perspective. It proposes a reconsideration of what is taken to be the object of assessment (drawing notably on Implementation Theory) and the ambition of that assessment. In doing so, the proposed approach more directly tackles the realities of capacity constraints and helps to better conceptualise what currently falls between and beyond written policies, planned programmes and normative assessments, indicating how this data may be accessed in a rigorous and robust manner.

2.4 Overall summary and conclusion

Overall it is clear, following Khakee (2003) and Henkel (1991) that a wide range of evaluative assessment typically and authoritatively applied to local authority (regeneration) initiative is badly affected by a failure to engage with the literature that suggests problems with it and potential solutions. Further analysis suggests that in addition there has been a lack of engagement with the

insights to be drawn from discussions of the nature of regeneration; how it is or might be effected or affected by various agencies; what in turn, their interventions might consist of; and how the value of such interventions might be grasped. As a result, problems with data, attribution and communication, as well as who has influence over the assessment process are identified as key deficiencies in both discussions in the literature and from a grounded perspective. These deficiencies pertain to dysfunction or non-use/usability that contrasts to the straightforward functionality portrayed by the managerial discourses that promote them. The case is thereby made to introduce a form of assessment that is more open-minded and comprehensive in relation to what is assessed and taken into account, whilst devising an approach that ensures that this is practicable. This is an approach that focuses on the detail and extent of the authority's regeneration-related 'performative action', assessing it from a variety of perspectives in terms of its intermediate as opposed to ultimate impact. What remains is to operationalise and test it in practice to see what it reveals which might otherwise be ignored. This is taken forward in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Firstly however, the second research focus needs to be developed. This is concerned with the contemporary role of the local authority amidst other organisations in the governing environment or the working environment in which 'public good' outcomes such as regeneration are enacted. This chapter has indicated, as was suggested in Chapter 1, some overlap with this second focus. Firstly, it has presented the need to incorporate some understanding of the multi-agency working environment into the design of adequate evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative. Secondly, it has argued that this should give us a better understanding of what it contributes (positively or negatively) to this environment. In addition, the analysis has suggested how evaluative assessment may be a powerful political weapon in the hands of those in control of it which may be used to enhance or disrupt typical relations of domination and subordination as well as collaboration in this environment. As such, it would appear to be an important structuring force to be aware of in its own right. The next chapter and subsequent

associated analysis will present an equivalent overlap from the alternative starting point of this focus.

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Chapter 3
Review of the literature II: the local authority and governance

Chapter 3
Review of the literature II: the local authority and governance

Chapter 2 made the case for reviewing local authority regeneration activity in a more comprehensive and open-minded way from a practice perspective. This chapter seeks to make a similar case from the perspective of academic discussions concerning the nature of the contemporary working context that local authorities fit into. It thereby extends, as well as contextualises, the initial research agenda. In doing so a critical view of the existing literature about local authorities in the contemporary environment in which they work is presented, revealing a combination of un-pursued leads that indicate a potentially productive line of research. Various similar strands of the literature that have tended to remain separate are brought together, demonstrating how the links between them may in fact be quite insightful. The review commences by delineating the parameters of such a context in terms of continuities and change. Subsequently, it examines the absences and presences of local authorities in accounts which are overall shown to be inadequate in respect of them.

3.1 Setting the scene
In recent years there has been much discussion about the constitution of the current environment in which public policy objectives, including regeneration, are enacted at the local level, both in terms of participants and how it is ordered and operates. This has mainly occurred in literature that can be broadly described as associated with some concept of what is known as 'governance' - elaborating or critiquing it. Such a concept is deployed as outlined below with various meanings, but generally refers to multi-actor participation and influence in relation to public-good outcomes. In some cases, relevant discussion is also found in literature discussing the impact of local government reforms and particular regeneration policy-programmes.

Many accounts identify drivers of change in such an environment, including socio-economic trends manifest globally, and more instrumental and political acts, albeit again with certain common trends internationally (e.g. Jessop, 1997, 2006; Rhodes, 1997; Ansell, 2000). Nonetheless, other accounts stress

continuities, particularly in the distribution of power and resources (e.g. Shaw, 1993; Imrie & Raco, 1999; Davies, 2002). In either case, in such accounts, as noted by Ward, (2000: 172) local government has not generally been the object of study. Instead, the focus has been, not merely on change as Ward suggests, but often on quite specific elements of change. The focus seems to have been on asserting their independent significance, absence or presence, rather than taking a more rounded and composite view.

The starting point for this review is that accounts of both continuities and change are relevant to the UK local government context, for nothing remains entirely static given ongoing policy initiatives and innovation, but nor can the slate be wiped completely clean (Clarke & Stewart, 1994; MacLeod & Goodwin, 1999a; Newman, 2001b, Lowndes, 2005). Indeed, an alternative perspective is suggested by Kooiman's (2000: 142) statement that what is significant is a broadening of the view of factors impinging on the act of governing:

> 'There seems to be a shift away from more traditional patterns in which governing was basically regarded as 'one-way traffic' from those governing to those governed, towards a 'two-way traffic' model in which aspects, problems and opportunities of both the governing system and the system to be governed are taken into consideration'

Thus, as Sibeon (2000:297) asserts it is also important to pay attention to reality as opposed to things that have been mythologised in academic discourses, (see also MacKinnnon, 2000:299; Peters & Pierre, 2004: 89). Indeed, others point out how normative (often policy) discourses likewise often gloss over the complexities of actualities (e.g. Martin, 1999: 57; Cowell & Martin, 2003: 177; Bache, 2006:20).

As such therefore, we are not interested in whether or not things are new, but with an up-to-date view of this working environment and the particular elements of it that are significant for local authorities (cf. Rhodes' 2000 statement, p. 64). In turn, the question that arises is, 'how do local authorities relate to and experience this environment (in relation to the definition and realisation of regeneration objectives)?' This demands an interrogation of the literature to provide a coherent account both of the contemporary working environment, and of how local authorities are positioned within it in terms of

aspects within and beyond their control. The following questions help to define what is of interest:

a. In the field of regeneration, what are the parameters of the working environment (including elements of continuities and change) that UK local authorities are operating within?

b. Are local authorities a distinctive actor within this environment?

c. Do local authorities take an active or passive, functional or dysfunctional stance vis-à-vis this environment?

d. Does this environment confront local authorities with particular problems?

The relevant literature, although it is wide-ranging, provides material that can be loosely connected under three thematic headings. These are fairly different, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, and can be usefully interrogated as accounts of the fate of the local authority to answer these questions. Such material comprises a certain degree of empirical research reported in the literature, but is also derived by inference and reasoning from its assertions. It should be noted that the coherence of these accounts is somewhat contrived due to the lack of clear-cut discussion of local authorities, but drawing them out in such a way serves as an important structuring mechanism to unpack the complex picture indicated. As such, some overlap of authorship between the differently themed accounts may be noted. Whilst this exercise might be seen to be artificial, deliberately creating easily-demolished 'straw men' it is a comprehensive reflection of the state of the literature which is very weak in respect of local authorities, often infused with politicised discourses. Ultimately moreover, it is the individual components of the literature and their cumulative value that are criticised rather than the themes themselves, with the themes used to draw out useable material.

The first theme is of the local authority being a dysfunctional anachronism in a new type of world where government is displaced by governance. The second suggests that governance is in fact an instrumental construction by government, over which it therefore retains influence, but which it tends to deploy in a self-interested way. The third theme is of local authorities'

functionality, taking or at least able to take an active and constructive role in relation to new challenges and opportunities. The following sections expand upon and critically examine each of these themes as accounts of the fate of local government in turn. They are considered in terms of the robustness of their constituent parts and given their weaknesses, the degree to which they can be triangulated against or reconciled with the other themes. Finally, the overall reconciliatory potential of the more overarching and multi-dimensional concepts of multi-level governance and meta-governance is discussed, before concluding that overall a 'back to basics' study of a case-study local authority is justified.

3.2 Theme 1: Local authorities as dysfunctional and redundant

3.2.1 The key tenets of the theme: interdependency, self-governance, and refusal to learn the new rules of the game

The first theme, of local authorities as dysfunctional and redundant, is very common in the literature that centres on regeneration activity. It has been suggested that the field of regeneration is one where governance is particularly prominent (see Davies, 2002:301). This can be related to an expansive definition of regeneration, (see e.g. SEU, 1998; HCRD, 2000) with little accompanying statutory delineation of who should do what in the regeneration field, and insufficient funding for the state to take on sole responsibility. These circumstances set the stage for a wide range of organisations to be engaged in what can legitimately be described as regeneration; their work interacting and coming together in complex ways. This is the definition of governance associated with this theme.

One reading of this situation is that initiative and influence may thereby be de-centred: that 'governing' in the sense of organisation to produce public good outcomes may occur without the formal institutions and authority of government. In Rhodes' (1997) account, 'governing' in this sense instead takes the form of self-organising networks. The network here is seen to be an important acknowledgement of interdependency – the idea that in this decentred world of multiple actors no one has the full complement of

resources necessary to achieve its (or more general) goals (ibid). Indeed, others (e.g. Carter, 2000; Jackson & Stainsby, 2000; Keast et al. 2004) suggest that such networks relate to the collective acknowledgement of the need to mobilise to deal with otherwise unsolved 'wicked' problems, of which regeneration would be one. Such ideas, various authors note, are also echoed in the work of Growth Coalition and Regime theorists, who observe tendencies towards voluntary association around local interests, mobilising collective capacity in the fight against global competition (see e.g. Shaw, 1993; Lawless, 1994; Stoker, 1998a, Davies, 2002).

An extension of this logic suggests that government, whether local or central, is no longer necessary, or that this is the inexorable development trajectory on which they find themselves (Stoker, 1998a: 24). Its conventional influence is said to have been considerably eroded through such 'hollowing out' and not (yet) replaced with any effective new mechanisms (Cochrane, 1993; Rhodes, 1997:57). Indeed, the boundaries between it, the market and civil society are said to have become blurred, producing ambiguity and duplication that are also threatening the distinctiveness of government as an actor particularly at the local level (Stoker, 1998b, Bennett et al, 2004). Thus the argument implies a certain redundancy of local government, and some have indeed forecasted it withering away, powerless in the face of change (e.g. Cochrane, 1993).

However, others suggest that the problem lies in failing to adapt to new circumstances – that redundancy may be overcome by taking a constructive role in the new environment. This apparently demands a willingness to engage in much more trusting and co-operative relationships, accepting the aforementioned reality of interdependency (Stoker, 1996, 1998a:23; Jessop, 1998: 43). Following this line of argument, local authorities, if they are involved in the action, are seen to be just one among equals, or perhaps not even significant enough to warrant a specific mention. This is evident in the criteria of various evaluations and good practice guides (e.g. Carter, 2000; Webb & Frye, 2002; Rhodes et al, 2003). In turn, we arrive at empirical studies of partnerships, which many see as the hallmark of governance and the acknowledgement of interdependency (see Davies, 2002). Such studies, and

indeed formal evaluations, frequently comment on the problems created by local authorities within them, caused by for instance, a tendency to dominate proceedings and to be obstructive to changes proposed from other quarters `(e.g. Miller, 1999; Carley, 2000; Bristow et al, 2003; Rhodes et al 2003; NAO, 2004; Rowe, 2006). If this theme is followed to its logical conclusion, such behaviour is seen to be quite deviant, since local authorities are failing to transform their behaviour and subsume their interests to the common good (see e.g. Miller, 1999; Mayo & Taylor, 2001; NAO, 2004; Rowe, 2006). Thus it is suggested that in failing to learn the new rules of the game, local authorities are merely dysfunctional players within it.

3.2.2 A critical review of this theme as an account of the fate of the local authority

In assessing the extent to which this theme provides a robust account of the fate of local authorities, a number of weaknesses can be discerned. Firstly, there has been a failure to engage with some of the detail of the changes that are purported to have taken place. Such detail is actually provided by the main theorists such as Rhodes, but it seems that the tendency has been to reduce their work to more palatable 'sound-bite' caricatures. For instance, the ideas of self-governing networks, and the reduction in effectiveness of authority deployed through hierarchy alone, have apparently been reduced into the idea of 'governance without government' (a phrase used by Rhodes). In turn, this has been deployed to imply that all forms of government as entities distinct from other governance actors and forms are totally eclipsed (e.g. Carley, 2000: 293). Yet there is no accompanying investigation or explanation of how this is possible. Indeed, this is an argument advanced by those who criticise the transfer of US-origin Growth Coalition and Regime Theory to the British context, where government has traditionally held more sway (e.g. Lawless, 1994; Harding, 2000; Davies, 2002). Similarly, asserting that networking and partnership are the new necessities and that the work of the whole is worth more than the sum of the parts, (Carley, 2000:293; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000:140) ignores the possibility that the parts (i.e. partners such as local authorities) may also have important 'stand alone' features and functions. It assumes, as described by Diamond & Liddle, (2005: 106) that there is

universal failure of agencies' actions beyond this. As Lowndes & Skelcher (1998:331) suggest, these ideas seem to relate to a 'myth of progress': the notion of governance being superior to government, and the concept of a neat transition from one type of governing epoch to another. A more accurate account they and other observers propose, in line with the rationale proposed above, is a much messier situation with elements of continuity and change (e.g. Shaw, 1993; Ward, 2000; Davies, 2005; Lowndes, 2005). Traditional forms of government might therefore continue to have significant influence in certain arenas on a standalone basis. Moreover, as in fact Rhodes and other network theorists (e.g. Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000) acknowledge, there is also the potential for public managers to develop network management capabilities: just because they have not done so does not mean they cannot.

It is at this stage helpful to reflect on the links between the theme's focus on local government as redundant and dysfunctional and the Thatcherite claim that local government is inherently dysfunctional in its tendency to defend producer interests (see e.g. Geddes & Newman, 1999; Stoker, 1996). The next step of this (Thatcherite) logic is that the functions of local government can be largely replaced by the private sector or organisations mimicking the private sector, as was promoted by quangoisation, funding cut-backs, compulsory competitive tendering, and the encouragement of public-private partnership (Cochrane, 1993; Rhodes, 1997; Geddes & Newman, 1999; Pierre & Stoker, 2000). In fact, some might argue that New Labour have promulgated a similar sentiment (see e.g. Cole & John, 2001). It too seems to mistrust (at least some parts of) local government and has promoted consumerist concerns, as evidenced by the emphasis on extra scrutiny of local authority activities and a further opening up of its functions to alternative delivery agents through the Best Value regime (Martin, 1999; Pierre & Stoker, 2000; Newman, 2001b). This indicates how this theme may in fact be politically loaded, and though able to contribute to reality by being operationalised in these ways, is in itself open to accusations of partiality, insofar as the whole story is deliberately not told. The counter-defence would be that the logic risks 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater' through its failure to engage with what good local authorities can and are doing, or the problems associated with alternatives.

Such an alternative way of thinking requires for instance, the problematisation of the convenient concept that local government in the Post-War period has been nothing but a service-provider (Stoker, 1996: 188; Lowndes, 2000). Interestingly, those who discuss alternative futures for local government in the face of Thatcherite reforms often revert as a starting point to justifications for local government as a counter-balance to the market and centralisation, as well as it being able to respond to the deficiencies of the new governing environment such as accountability and fragmentation (see e.g. Butcher et al, 1990; Clarke & Stewart, 1994). Together these suggest continuing potential for local authorities even in the face of challenges to their authority, but such potential seems to have been skimmed over in many of the accounts of change related to this theme. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the politically-motivated critiques described above do have some validity. Local authorities were not and are not perfect and change has been seen to be necessary in the face of the failure of past modes of operation (Clarke & Stewart, 1994). These are all relevant impetuses within the environment under consideration and indicate a much more complex picture than the theme portrays.

Another implication of the shorthand translation of the 'governance without government' thesis means that it is implied rather than demonstrated that the increase in interdependencies and rise of partnership has occurred spontaneously or at least out of a voluntarist ethos (cf. e.g. Jackson & Stainsby, 2000: 12). This is again to misread Rhodes, (1997 see p.51) who clearly identifies the role of central government in the UK in the rise of networking through the creation of agencies, encouragement of public-private partnership and so on. That is, rather than there being an entirely spontaneous emergence of multi-agency governance in regeneration simply due to the innovation space derived from its broad contemporary definition and the state being over-stretched, there is a significant degree of state-orchestration (e.g. Edwards et al, 2001; Davies, 2002, 2004). Others suggest that the failure to acknowledge the role of government is to assert that agreement in governance is in fact always possible, and that divergence from universal standards is tolerable (e.g. Jessop, 1998; Cowell & Murdoch, 1999). The neglect of this

dimension in material associated with this theme means that the demise of hierarchical influence and independent government initiative may be overstated, leaving open another area for investigation. Indeed, Rhodes fails to develop this logic in his discussion – instead he seems to imply that although the state has been instrumental in producing governance, in doing so it subsequently has had difficulty in exercising power over it, in effect handing over the reins. Nonetheless, it would also be unreasonable to entirely overlook independent initiative: several case studies indicate the importance of this in the face of the inaction or inefficacy on the part of local authorities for instance (e.g. Ward, 2000; Bassett et al, 2002; Hendriks & Tops, 2005). Yet, the case studies also suggest that such initiative does involve significant interactions with the local authority. Therefore, this may also indicate potential roles for local authorities in such a context that may merit systematic investigation if we are to develop a fuller account of their positioning within it.

Another weakness is the apparent tendency in such accounts to conflate certain developments that have been observed with others that may be more normative rather than representative of reality. Whilst for instance, the notion of inter-organisational interdependency in the policy environment has now been long-established and indeed is not necessarily particularly new, (e.g. Hjern, 1982, Rhodes, 1988, Jessop, 1997) the claim that this means all are equal in such an environment is more questionable (Keating, 1998; Newman, 2001b). Indeed, the use of this claim as a normative statement against which inequalities are judged as deviant ignores the possibility that its ambitions may by requiring a square peg to fit into a round hole. This may explain the lack of equality observed in reality. It seems unlikely for example that the long-standing power inequalities experienced by the voluntary and community sector vis-à-vis the state would disappear overnight (see e.g. Mayo & Taylor, 2001; Franklin, 2003: 182; Diamond & Liddle, 2005). Thus Jessop (1998:43) refers to government within this situation as *primus inter pares*, based on its deployment of the law and financial might. Yet in the accounts critical of local authorities that contribute to this theme, there has been little attempt to investigate why local authorities dominate partnerships

or fail to learn new ways of working. Nor is there any discussion of the functionality there may be in local authorities acting in this way: it is merely assumed their motive is malign and outcomes sub-optimal (though Mayo & Taylor, 2001 and Bristow et al, 2003 are partial exceptions discussed further below).

Lastly, a further weakness that underlies these criticisms is the very limited exemplification of the theme. That is, by and large the only studies that can be even partially related to this theme that refer to local authorities directly and specifically, are those that discuss partnerships or more general interactions with community groups in the course of community economic development (see e.g. Boland's 1999b). It cannot be concluded from the evidence presented by these studies that local authorities exert a negative influence in all other spheres of the contemporary context relevant to regeneration that they operate within, nor that they have become wholly redundant or are in danger of becoming so imminently. If for instance, the actual impact of the compulsory competitive tendering impetus is analysed, it can be seen that in reality many local authorities became experts at playing the game. They squeezed out other tenders, in many cases retaining in-house service provision, thereby continuing to be significant public service providers (Stewart, 2000; Stoker, 2004). What is implied is a much more complex reality which merits a more detailed, rounded and nuanced investigation.

Overall this first theme provides a useful entry point into the field of governance and aspects of change within the local governance environment. However, as has been demonstrated, it remains far too basic and clean-sweeping in respect of the fate of local authorities.

3.2.3 Summary: what are the contributions that can usefully be taken way from a critical review of this theme as an account of the fate of the local authority?

Despite its weaknesses, the theme in its less problematic aspects provides a useful starting point to answering the questions posed at the start. Firstly, it effectively highlights the realities of heightened interdependency in an operating environment where there are numerous actors with relevant but diverse capabilities and where local authorities' powers and adequacy have

been challenged. The need for co-ordination derived from fragmentation is also implied. From another perspective, a critical review of the theme as an account of the fate of local government usefully points to other potentially fruitful questions to investigate. These relate to the actual rather than assumed fate of local authorities, and the implications of any continued inequalities in such an environment. The dependency of local authorities on central government is indicated as one such inequality. Secondly, there is the idea that local authorities are not necessarily sitting entirely comfortably (from their perspective as well as others') within the context so far described and in respect of the new ways of working demanded of them. The key here is to investigate why this is this case, comparing self-interest with imposed or inherent difficulties. Thirdly, what is implied is that local authorities' input and contributions to the wider actor environment are seen to be desirable, given that there is dissatisfaction when they are not seen to be deployed in a worthwhile manner. Indeed, other interactions and aspects of distinctiveness indicated in such an environment suggest that local authorities may have developed roles within it that this theme, as an account of the fate of local authorities, is too simplistic to accommodate. Each of these points can be followed through in relation to at least one of the other themes.

3.3 Theme 2: Governance manipulated by government

3.3.1 The key tenets and variants of the theme: the continued and instrumental influence of government within governance – maintaining the capacity to act, maintaining the capacity to govern, maintaining distinctiveness and power

A second theme is derived from implicit and explicit criticisms of the notion that governance occurs without government; it is told from a much more 'state-centric' position rather than discussing the environment in more general terms. Such criticisms take further Rhodes' (1997) contention that the British governance situation was at least in part driven by central government policies of increasing the role of market, quasi-market and arms-length mechanisms in achieving public policy objectives. They suggest that the state has a highly instrumental role in the governance environment, which in this case is defined by agency pluralism and an increase in public/community group involvement in the planning and delivery of public good outcomes. Such pluralism

includes more independent government activity. Within this environment however, state-instrumentalism has been conceived in various ways.

One perspective on state-instrumentalism starts out from the observation that without some kind of management it will be difficult to achieve any public good outcome within this environment (see e.g. Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000:140). Firstly, the problem of fragmentation is highlighted, with the assertion that there is a need to join things up, bringing together complementary resources. As such it echoes the work of those authors that propose that networking is a response to wicked issues (see above) – recognising that something like regeneration requires multi-dimensional action, acknowledging interdependencies (Carley, 2000; Carter, 2000; Stoker, 2004: 194). However, rather than networking and partnership being spontaneous, the argument proposes that they will not emerge or survive unless they are deliberately promoted and incentivised: there is a requirement for 'network activation' and 'network management' (e.g. Ansell, 2000; Jackson & Stainsby, 2000; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Davies, 2002, 2004). This intervention is in part necessary due to the transaction costs that are involved, and in light of this the role of funding criteria set by central government (and sometimes the EU) is frequently cited as an important lever here (see most recently, Royles, 2006 and Davies, 2004). This indicates the unique authority of such funders within this environment, suggesting the continued relevance of hierarchy within it.

Another possible dimension to this version of governmental instrumentalism is derived from claims that past regeneration efforts have failed due to lack of community or broader stakeholder involvement. Under the Conservatives, this was initially related to the need to inject private sector expertise into the process but more recently, alternative expertise in the community and voluntary sector has also been recognised (e.g. Bailey, 1995; Atkinson, 1999; Pearson, 2001; Pearce & Mawson, 2003).. Increasingly, moreover, community involvement is seen to be a pre-requisite for successful resolution of problems, for local people are seen to be part of the solution (Atkinson, 1999; Pearce & Mawson, 2003). This suggests that the emergence of multi-

agency and community involvement in the regeneration process has been an instrumental act on the part of government. It is able to promote the participation of these groups in regeneration through attaching conditions to the significant amounts of funding it provides and by opening up public service provision (a strategic lever within regeneration) to community involvement and alternative providers (see e.g. Harding, 2000; DTLR, 2002).

In these initial translations of the theme, local authorities can be found in two places. Firstly, they are submerged within partnership, presumably responding to the same incentives as other agencies locally in 'signing-up' to the idea of it (see e.g. Peck & Tickell, 1995; Bennett et al, 2004). Such an incentive structure would also seem to require them to open up to multi-agency and community involvement, although there may be added coercion involved through performance assessments etc. (see e.g. Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Geddes, 2006). Such subscription or 'buy-in' is clearly a significant instrumental act, just as promoting it in other ways is (Carley, 2000 notes how partnership may be compromised without it). In this conception however, local authorities, along with others, are in very much a subjugated position within a vertical hierarchy of power.

Secondly, local authorities may be seen to act as the local agent of central government as a key point of access through which to organise community engagement and in doing the 'donkey-work' of partnership and network formation (see e.g. Stoker, 1996; Gray & Jenkins, 2000; Lowndes, 2000; Ward, 2000; Pearce & Mawson, 2003). This would seem to rely on their having the local knowledge and experience and delivery capacity as compared to central government (Gray & Jenkins, 2000; Ward, 2000; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001; Pearce & Mawson, 2003). Studies also indicate that they may help carry the costs of partnership working and network operation, by for instance, providing necessary staff (Carley, 2000; Bristow et al, 2003; Franklin, 2003; Fuller, et al, 2004). Moreover, it is also suggested that public agencies have the requisite authority to undertake network/partnership management and leadership as may be important to maintain commitment to the partnership and its objectives (e.g. Ansell, 2000; Jackson & Stainsby,

2000; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). In the British context, local authorities might logically be the agency to have this capacity locally (see Stewart, 1998; Bennett et al, 2004; Sweeting et al, 2004; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). Again these actions would seem to be significantly instrumental within such an environment. However, though ostensibly for the common good, they imply a distinction within the governance environment between local authorities and other agencies.

Though such a distinction might be created by such actions, there is the possibility that it may also be an explanation for why local authorities and not other local actors take on such a role in the first place. One line of reasoning is that such facilitating actions have the potential to reflect positively on government, where continued failure or inaction due to their absence would call its wider legitimacy into question (see Newman et al. 2001's description of how the search for legitimacy drives innovation). Government – both central and local - can claim at least a portion of the success achieved, and though this may be important to other agencies, one logic might be that it is more so to government due to the propensity of people to blame it for perceived failures (cf. Jones, 1998; Franklin, 2003: 190; Uitermark, 2003). In addition, local authorities' independent initiative may be much more constrained than that of other agencies, due to their particular dependency on central government for funding and authority. Cutbacks in recent years are suggested to have resulted in two responses by local authorities that are relevant here. In order to access essential funding they are seen to be toe-ing the central government line favouring partnership, by promoting it and securing it locally (Bailey, 1995; Wong, 1998; Ward, 2000; Geddes, 2006). Equally, in order to secure savings and lever in money to supplement shortfalls they are seen to be pursuing and embracing other agencies' (potential) contributions (Bailey, 1995; Harding & Garside, 1995; Leach & Wilson, 1998; Ward, 2000).

This points to a much more calculating, self-interested instrumentalism at play. In this version, working to create partnerships and networks and generally promoting agency pluralism is seen to be about retaining authority

by ensuring there is the capacity to act through combining the resources of others (Bailey, 1995; Peck & Tickell, 1995; Stoker, 1996; Davies, 2002: 314; Swyngedouw, 2005). This is also seen to be the motivation behind the concern with public/wider stakeholder involvement: ensuring that actions are vested with sufficient legitimacy (Brooks, 1999; Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Cowell, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2005; Royles, 2006). It is suggested that through these actions, the state can re-assert control and leverage over a fragmented governing environment, not least due to its ongoing control of significant levels of resources and the terms and policing of collaboration (e.g. Peters, 2000; Edwards et al, 2001; Davies, 2002; Swyngedouw, 2005; Geddes, 2006). Some describe this as the operationalisation of governmentality, which is seen to be a desired objective of both central and local government (Edwards et al, 2001; Swyngedouw, 2005). That is, their objective is not purely to secure public good outcomes; rather their ultimate concern is with their own power. Indeed, the condition of governance may enhance state power, as the state is the one agency left with overall responsibility (Jessop, 1998:43). In this account therefore, local authorities are found in a similar position to that in the initial account related to this theme, subscribing to and facilitating aspects of governance. However, in so doing, along with higher tiers of government, they can be seen to be in line to reap additional rewards in terms of authority and legitimacy as compared to other agencies.

A third account of instrumentalism within this environment suggests that through these actions, government is creating a new role for itself, reasserting its distinctiveness. In doing so it can compensate for what might otherwise be perceived to be lost amidst pluralism. Jessop (1997:575, 1998:42-3, 2000:23-5) for instance, refers to the facilitation of 'self-organisation' and 'relative coherence' as the operationalisation of a new type of role he calls 'meta-governance' (see also Kooiman, 2000:159; Bache, 2006). He goes onto suggest that the state has a major part to play in effecting this. Network theorists, in response to criticism that they have written out the role of the state, have also identified potential new network management roles for the state (see e.g. Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). Indeed, others refer to the room for experimentation created by the destabilisation of the previous governing

regime (e.g. Painter et al. 1997:243; see also Diamond & Liddle, 2005). However, Jessop additionally suggests that meta-governance tends to involve imposing the 'the shadow of hierarchy' on governance and there seems to be an implicit focus on central government in his delineation of it (e.g. Jessop, 1997:575, 1998:43). This is also the case with authors such as Cowell & Murdoch (1999), Bache, (2000), Whitehead, (2003), and Davies (2002) all of whom refer to the reinvented role of central government or its agencies (e.g. GORS - Government Offices of the Regions, RDAs - Regional Development Agencies). They suggest that this role involves controlling or policing various forms of governance with the aim of making it work better, but also ensuring that for example, partnerships do not compromise the objectives of central government (also Edwards et al, 2001; Lawless, 2004; Davies, 2005; Geddes, 2006). In respect of local authorities however, this strand of the instrumentalist theme is silent, except that it might be envisaged that in participating in governance they might also be subject to the 'shadow of hierarchy'.

Nonetheless, there has been some work on how local authorities have attempted to reinvent themselves, albeit not necessarily taking governance as a starting point. The idea that local authorities might find a new role for themselves first began to be analysed as discussed above, in the face of the threat posed by Thatcherite reforms. The pro-active stance of local authorities in response to crises in their authority and resources, and to economic and social upheaval within their areas was noted (e.g. Butcher et. al. 1990; Stewart, 1995). This was seen to indicate a capacity for local authorities to undertake such self-reinvention, a reinvention which some have labelled entreprenuerialism (after Harvey, 1989; see e.g. Bailey, 1995, Loftman & Nevin, 1998). Others proposed possible new roles for local authorities associated with steering and facilitation (e.g. Cochrane, 1993, Clarke & Stewart, 1994; Stewart, 1995).

Entrepreneurial local government has been described in turn to create space for others to participate in regeneration, helping them to do so effectively, whilst taking on responsibility for activities of general benefit such as

marketing. Jessop (2000) in a rare empirical example in fact refers to Manchester City Council carrying out a meta-governance role in taking on responsibility for promotional activity and project management. Harding & Garside, (1995) similarly describe various ways in which authorities in the North West of England seemed to be evolving to take on more 'enabling' roles vis-à-vis other agencies (including business) in the early 1990s. Indeed, the concept of an 'enabling authority', albeit narrowly defined, gained official recognition by the Audit Commission around that time (Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001). This suggests therefore that local authorities might be able to take a new but distinctive stance within the governance environment, benefiting it and themselves, echoing Jessop's ideas of meta-governance. As such, these roles once again imply an instrumental role for local authorities in the sense of governance being upheld by their action, as well as this being of tactical benefit to them (self-interested instrumentalism). This situation would also seem to fit with the other strands of instrumentalism described above: toeing the line to retain the support of central government, and ensuring legitimacy both by apparently helping to make things work and ensuring capacity to act indirectly.

This apparent potential and need has since been translated into a New Labour formulation labelled 'community leadership'. This has been variously defined in different policy documents, but is supported with a new general well-being power and requirement to produce an over-arching community strategy in the Local Government Act 2000 (Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). The definition of community leadership given in the 1998 White Paper (DETR, 1998) refers to the key role of the local authority in having an overview of community needs, (including promoting debate) taking the initiative in finding ways to meet them, (e.g. though entering into partnerships, being at the centre of public service provision) and ensuring cohesion and coherence. This agenda and references to local authorities capacities in respect of it, seems to represent a more explicit recognition of the need to reinvigorate the role of local authorities whilst acknowledging the neglected potential of their democratic basis (see Stewart, 1995, Stoker, 1996; Pierre & Stoker, 2000; Lowndes, 2000 though note the different

interpretations of Community Leadership discussed by Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). Interestingly, Bennett et al (2004) found that by 2001-2 such new ideas had made little difference to the activities undertaken by those authorities surveyed. Nonetheless, a later and more detailed study by Sullivan & Sweeting (2006) found examples of how various interpretations of community leadership were being played out by local authorities. This could be seen to imply that local authorities are trying to toe the central government line insofar as it is coherently defined. This would seem to be desirable to 'please' central government and indeed to earn a certain amount of autonomy from it, a mechanism described in the 1998 and 2001 White Papers (DETR, 1998; DTLR, 2001). It would also seem to be instrumental insofar as it bears the potential of more direct benefits for local authorities in terms of renewing their relative status locally.

To recap, the main thrust of this theme, insofar as it can be pieced together to form a whole, is that far from fading into the sunset, government is alive and well in the contemporary governance environment. This is because it contributes to the very nature of governance, being instrumental in its set-up and ongoing existence. As a component of government and party to such instrumentalism, local authorities, where visible, can be seen to be playing to various definitions of self-interest. This self interest may or may not be aligned with the interests of others in the wider governance environment.

3.3.2 A critical review of this theme as an account of the fate of the local authority

One of the problems of this theme as an account of the fate of the local authority is that its contributors often start out from a top-down perspective concerned with the act of governing. In turn there has tended to be greater examination of the arguably clearer cut power and influence of higher tiers of government than of the position of local authorities (see e.g. Bache, 2000; Stoker, 2000; Davies, 2002; Whitehead, 2003). Indeed, many authors fail to distinguish between the different levels of government, (i.e. central cf. local) referring to it in general terms (e.g. Jessop, 1997, 1998; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Swyngedouw, 2005). Certain authors nonetheless imply that it may be

reasonable to read off certain logics as applying to the state in general (e.g. Jessop, 1997:575; MacLeod & Goodwin, 1999b:518). However, an entirely straightforward reading-off from one level of government to another is problematised when the ambiguous nature of the relationship between local authorities and the government-hierarchy is considered (as noted by Peters (2000: 36) in a footnote). That is, while local authorities are embedded within such a hierarchy, the variants of the theme indicate that their interests are not necessarily aligned in one direction within it, and may also spread beyond it. In particular though they may be part of the creation of governing capacity for higher tiers of government, their own influence, authority or governing capacity may in some respects be compromised by the line taken by such higher tiers.

Unpacking this situation, it is possible to construct an alternative account or counter-theme. That is, another possible conclusion about the fate of local government derived from a concept of instrumentalism within the environment credits local authorities with more independent initiative in reinventing themselves. In doing so, they have interests that go beyond simply pleasing higher tiers of government. As such local authorities may toe the line only as far as it suits them or is sufficient to secure their ability to act. Beyond this point they may violate central government's intentions and the expectations initial compliance might create (see Ball et al, 2002). This alternative account thereby acknowledges the dependence of higher tiers of government on local authorities for the delivery of their agendas, noting that in turn, this provides them with a significant degree of leverage over what happens on the ground (see e.g. Rhodes, 1988, 1997; MacKinnon, 2000; Uitermark, 2003; Laffin, 2003; Lowndes, 2005). For example, it may be perceived by local authorities that there is greater value in terms of self-interest in maintaining as much of the status quo as possible rather than embracing governance more positively (see e.g. Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Lowndes, 2005). As such they could assert the continued superiority of representative democracy and/or professionalism over enhanced participation. This can be seen to be another way in which local authorities can maintain their distinctiveness within a more pluralistic governance environment, further

acknowledging that in embracing it they may have more to 'give' or in other words, 'lose' as compared to other agencies. Indeed, it would seem to be a plausible and rational explanation for the apparently 'dysfunctional' behaviour of local authorities within partnerships and within wider regeneration/community economic development contexts as described in relation to the first theme. Behaviour such as the domination of partnerships, reluctance to pass on relevant information to other agencies/community groups, and tokenistic community involvement would all seem to relate to a jealous guarding of existing influence, maintaining hierarchy rather than subscribing to heterarchy (see e.g. Thake, 2001; Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Rowe, 2006).

Another manifestation of such independent initiative would seem to be apparent in a case study described by Rydin (1998) of a regeneration scheme in the Thames Gateway area. She argues that the local authority, through deployment of the language of partnership and entrepreneurial practices, was able to create a unified front locally, bringing together local business and other interests, to enable the lobbying of central government for money and other action. This implies the orchestration of governance capacity in a much more subversive way, (from a top-down perspective). Other authors have also noted a lobbying role taken on by local authorities (e.g. Harding & Garside, 1995; Ward, 2000; Sullivan et al, 2004; Armstrong & Wells, 2006). Sullivan et al's (2004) case studies refer to how the local authorities successfully lobbied to be allowed to construct partnerships in ways they saw to be more appropriate to the local context as compared with those initially envisaged by central government. This seems to imply however, an official acceptance of such 'subversion', suggesting it is less risky than might otherwise be the case. Indeed, interestingly, this type of role seems to be envisaged by the Government in its reference to a potential component of community leadership being the scrutiny of other agencies' work, where it is of relevance to local well-being (DETR, 1998:§ 8.17).

This additional, less mainstream dimension to the instrumentalist theme suggests that in reality there are divergent possibilities for local authorities in

relation to such a working environment. This prospect in fact sits more comfortably with analysis that indicates variety in how new 'trends' in governance are played out locally (e.g. MacLeod & Goodwin, 1999a, 1999b; Lowndes, 2005; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). Yet the sparse coverage in the literature tends to refer mainly to one version, or at least one version at a time, which further fails to acknowledge that there may be competing and conflicting interests at play (see e.g. Rhodes, 1988). As such, there is the implicit assumption that self-interest is uniform throughout local authorities, rather than there being the potential for tensions between different constituents within it – for example, between elected members and officers, or between officers in different departments (see Lowndes, 2005). The alternative, supplementary account described here, that tells of authorities' reluctance to buy into the governance environment in a positive manner may particularly apply to local councillors for example, given the apparent threat to their status (see e.g. Sullivan, 2003; Rowe, 2006). Yet the internal tensions implied by this are not explored by the main proponents of the instrumentalist theme.

Accompanying such accounts is the tendency to forget that authorities may be playing to multiple audiences, such that governing capacity and authority, particularly in respect of legitimacy, may require a variety of different actions or behaviours (cf. Sullivan 2003 – which discusses LSP accountability in these terms). Interrogating the mainstream instrumentalist theme together with the supplementary, counter-theme, suggests that relevant actions taken by local authorities have to at once satisfy higher tiers of government as the source of money and legal authority; interests within the authority to ensure sufficient support or 'buy-in'; and interests beyond it comprising the electorate and the stakeholders whose co-operation such action may depend on. Moreover, these interest groupings are not necessarily internally coherent, further multiplying the variety to be played to. As Sullivan & Sweeting, (2006) point out, there may be contradictions within, and various possible responses to, even one government agenda. This implies a much more complicated juggling act, suggesting that the operationalisation of self-interest is not nearly as simple as is implied by the mainstream elements of this theme.

Such simplicity is perhaps derived from the lack of comprehensive investigation of local authorities' self-interest within such an environment.

Indeed, the literature accompanying the instrumentalist theme mainly refers to self-interest in crude carrot/stick or simple action/response terms. A more nuanced interrogation of the situation means that it begins to be questionable for instance, that legitimacy can simply be 'bought' through opening up processes to increased participation. Several authors point out that the 'community' may not wish to be engaged (Foley & Martin, 2000; Ball et al, 2002; Pearce & Mawson, 2003). Others point out increased participation may in fact create problems by inviting conflict and raising expectations, and that the pressure to compromise values may be resented by the voluntary sector (e.g. Leach & Wilson, 1998; Bennett & Payne, 2000; Carley, 2000; Taylor, 2003; Davies, 2004; Diamond & Liddle, 2005). It might also be noted that local authorities continue to be vested with regulatory responsibilities, and this may prove to be a conflict of interest in collaborative contexts. They may for example have to defend values not shared by others within such a context, but which are seen to be in the wider public interest and hence related to their wider legitimacy (cf. Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000:154; Cowell & Murdoch, 1999 - both refer to national government, but equivalent situations could forseeably apply to local government). Thus it can be seen that the act of 'governing' governance is not simply about marshalling practical capacity in an organisational sense, but may entail more subtle tweaking.

Yet such subtleties seem to be written out of accounts that contribute to the instrumentalist theme. These do not generally refer to things that do not suit the designs of government (cf. Peters, 2000:41). There is often no concept, in accounts that refer to the creation of governing capacity, or of the assertion of new roles, of such actions having side effects or being contested, and the impact that this might have on the local authorities' choices and actions. One such side effect may be in the expectations of equality apparently created by partnership, as described by the first theme (see also Diamond & Liddle, 2005: 109). The instrumentalist theme suggests that the creation of partnership is an instrumental act on the part of government, yet as the critical

review of the first theme suggests, such expectations may be unrealistic, exposing the authority to criticism. Furthermore, whilst local authorities may desire to claim the credit for the results of collaboration, (i.e. one instrumentalist logic discussed) Lowndes & Skelcher (1998) suggest that in reality, there is competition for it. Equally, an instrumentality stance might raise the possibility of partners feeling 'used' and resentful, affecting the viability of future working relations. This may be particularly the case given the mistrust built up between local authorities and for instance, the community and voluntary sector (e.g. Miller, 1999; Boland, 1999a/b; Bristow et al, 2003).

Equally, it seems somewhat improbable that the assertion of new roles is simply a question of coming up with an idea and putting it into action. Returning to the implementation theorists we are reminded of the concept of negotiation that implies some 'give and take', if differences can be resolved at all. Jessop (1998: 43, insets added) in fact acknowledges this, in suggesting that in building its meta-governance role, the State *'is no longer the sovereign authority...* [and must] *contribute[s] its own distinctive resources to the negotiation process'*. He also suggests (1998, 2000, 2002, 2006) that even with active management, 'governance failure' (loss of coherence etc) can only ever be deferred, and this requires a great deal of 'reflexivity' in the operationalisation of meta-governance. Together these points would seem to open a whole new dimension to the picture, raising the possibility of local authorities taking on roles that are more responsive to the needs of other actors, rather than directly in their interest, a potential 'blurring' of objectives (Rhodes, 2000: 74).

Following the logic of Lowndes (2005) therefore, the investigation of new roles with which this theme is essentially concerned, can be seen to require attention to the implications of drivers and barriers, mediation and tolerance. The literature associated with this theme however, has only done so in a very truncated fashion. A key problem has been the lack of focus on local authorities: a point that can easily be evidenced in looking at the way in which the whereabouts of the local authority in this theme has had to be 'excavated'

and pieced together rather than it being dealt with explicitly and empirically. This, as suggested above, fails to draw out the ambiguities and complexities. Yet, the work that deals with local authorities more centrally also has its limitations. For example, Rydin's (1998) case-study is project specific rather than looking at the local authority's position in the round, and is now quite dated (as are Jessop's (2000) examples from Manchester and London). Several accounts in contrast are wide-reaching but lack detail, being survey-based or focusing on numerous but limited examples from different local authorities (e.g. Harding & Garside, 1995; Bennett et al, 2004).

Moreover, whilst there is much useful discussion of government/local authority potential and of central government policy impetuses and their implications for local authorities, (e.g. Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001) there is little exploration of their overall impact, such as how they mesh with prevailing practices and norms. Sullivan & Sweeting (2006) make some advance in this direction in investigating the translation of 'community leadership' policy discourses into practice. However, because their interest is quite narrowly drawn around this agenda, their approach seems to have been to test whether certain models of it are discernible, rather than investigating the situation in a broader, more grounded or bottom-up fashion. This also seems to have been Harding & Garside's (1995) approach to exploring the concept of an enabling authority: a search for positive examples of it rather than an exploration of what else the authority does. In addition, as noted by Sullivan et al (2004:264) there seems to be a general neglect within the literature of interactions between government and more autonomous action (i.e. that are not necessarily orchestrated in the fashions described). This again seems to link to the top-down, self-seeking conception of instrumentalism that seems to inform most accounts that give rise to the instrumentalist theme, which as a consequence seem to be blind to indirect influence within the governance environment.

Therefore, although this theme redresses the balance of the first and provides a much clearer focus on the position of government within the environment described, it is still too silent on the specific positioning of local authorities.

As a result, it fails to engage with the complexities indicated by a more critical reading of the situation. It provides a reasonable basis for a storyline as to where local authorities have 'gone', but one that warrants a more detailed investigation.

3.3.3 Summary: what are the contributions that can usefully be taken way from a critical review of this theme as an account of the fate of the local authority?

Overall a critical review of this theme as an account of the fate of the local authority can be seen to be compatible with several aspects of what can be drawn out from a critical review of the first. As stated above, it provides some indication of the ongoing significance of government including local authorities, acknowledging that inequalities (in resources, capacity and power) relating to historic positioning cannot be entirely wiped away. Instead, what is suggested is that they are re-configured within the new context, a reconfiguration that includes responses to the challenges posed to them by an increase in inter-dependency and need for greater collaboration and co-operation. Government, and more specifically local authorities, therefore emerge as quite distinctive actors within such an environment, exerting a shaping influence within it, which as well as suiting them, may benefit others. Therefore instrumentalism does not rule out the possibility of functionality. In addition, the counter-theme and the difficult negotiation between interests suggested by a more critical reading of the mainstream versions of the theme provide an explanation for the possible discomfort of local authorities in the new environment (discernible from their dysfunctionalism) in indicating the potential for tensions. In turn, they also point to a more complex positioning within such an environment than one that is purely instrumental in the sense of an emphasis on narrowly-defined self-interest. Lastly, despite the thrust of the theme tending to conflate them, a critical reading highlights conflicts of interest in the hierarchy between central and local government, and between local authorities and a situation of heterarchy, whilst also emphasising the continued influence of central government.

3.4 Theme 3: Supported governance

3.4.1 The components of the theme: governance needs/inadequacies; local authorities' supportive position in relation to this – direct and complementary

This theme is founded in the notion that multi-agency and participatory governance requires support for it to function in a manner that is effective and in order to uphold a broad-based public interest. That is, governance on its own is subject to inadequacies that require intervention or at least complementary action to be 'repaired'. Whilst the instrumentalist theme suggests certain needs and relative capacities, this theme extends the picture by examining it from a less State-centric view and proposing a less controlling, self-interested State. It looks at local authorities relative to other actors, suggesting why it might be the one to play a functional role as opposed to other agencies. Building on the definitions linked with the first two themes, governance is here seen to refer to the combination of standalone action with public good objectives by individual agencies or sectors; involvement of the public and other stakeholders in activities once the sole preserve of government; and associated partnerships and networks. Inadequacies identified, both of its constituent parts and organisational forms, can be seen to of three main types: capacity-related, relational and accountability-related.

Capacity-related inadequacies are those associated with the difficulty of achieving desired ends independently or within partnerships or networks. In the case of local communities, a frequently articulated concern is that they are not confident enough to get involved in regeneration activity, or that if they do, they are not able to think in a sufficiently strategic manner for their input to be constructive (e.g. Atkinson, 1999; Diamond, 2001; Davies, 2004:580; Geddes, 2006). Others point out that individuals may have judge that they have more worthwhile things to do with their time, a problem also noted in respect of business involvement in regeneration activity (Peck & Tickell, 1995; Wong, 1998; Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Davies, 2004). In turn, even the more formalised community and voluntary sector, and broader-based partnerships may lack the knowledge/information and expertise (including that learned through experience) necessary to formulate effective action or

funding bids (see e.g. Lawless, 2004; Boland, 1999a/b; Mayo & Taylor, 2001; Thake, 2001; Royles, 2006).

Direct delivery capacity and general impact may also be lacking in various dimensions (see e.g. Atkinson, 1999; Painter & Goodwin, 2000). In addition, the voluntary and community sector presence may be vulnerable to the vagaries of time-limited grant funding. This may compromise their ability to plan on a long-term basis and lever in match-funding, as well as distract them from more productive activities (Bailey, 1995; Thake, 1995, 2001; LGHC, 2002). In turn this may affect the capacity of this sector to act as an effective advocate for local communities, particularly due to the implications of such weaknesses and internal divisions in the face of other powerful interests (Miller, 1999). Indeed, some have also identified partnerships more generally to be vulnerable to external organisation or policy change (see e.g. Rhodes, 2000; Lawless, 2004). In contrast, even the relatively mighty quangos (or 'non-elected agencies' of state) are described by Painter et al (1997) to suffer capacity weaknesses particularly in respect of legitimacy and information.

Alongside this delineation of weaknesses is a recounting of local authority strengths. Some such strengths are identified as being deployed directly within governance, for example those supporting the operation of partnerships described in relation to the instrumental theme above. Here local authorities are seen to have superior staffing resources in terms of numbers and professional expertise, which in turn can be justifiably diverted to support partnerships and networks given public good objectives (see e.g. studies by Mayo & Taylor, 2001; Bristow et al, 2003; Franklin, 2003; Fuller et al, 2004; Williams, 2006). Local authorities may likewise account for the actual implementation or delivery of many agreed actions due to their delivery capacity, which others may not wish, as well as not necessarily being able, to devote time to (e.g. Lawless, 1994; Peck & Tickell, 1995; Stoker, 1996). Indeed, they also have significant financial resources to contribute relative to many partners, making them an important partner to have on board, not least because through match-funding requirements, money begets more money (e.g. Lawless, 1994; Bailey, 1995; Bennett & Payne, 2000; Fuller et al, 2004).

This can also be seen to be the case in respect of their planning and legal responsibilities, which are important hurdles to be crossed in the realisation of any ideas conceived within governance arenas (e.g. Painter et al. 1997; Rydin, 1998; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001; Williams, 2006). More broadly, local authorities, echoing the counter-theme described above, may also forseeably use their influence within the government hierarchy, and their general prominence, to champion local interests shared within local governance arenas (e.g. Harding & Garside, 1995; Rydin, 1998; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001; Williams, 2006). As Rydin (1998) points out, they may be particularly significant in providing a constant local voice in their relative permanency.

In addition, it can be suggested that aspects of current local authority dysfunction within the governance environment are indicative of potential to contribute more positively. For instance, inequalities in expertise, information and match-funding access that tend to inhibit bottom-up autonomous community economic development activity (see e.g. Boland, 1999a/b) may conceivably be deployed more positively to support such activity through capacity-building and so on (see e.g. Vigoda, 2002). Indeed, more generally domination is often described as inadvertently masking potential that could be realised through stepping back to enable others to get involved (see e.g. Ward, 2000 - discussion of Birmingham; Diamond, 2001; Hendrik & Tops, 2005; Rowe, 2006). Similarly, 'exploitation' of the lower costs of voluntary sector provision may be transformed into a process that uses contractual influence to encourage innovation within the sector with overall public value benefits: the voluntary sector has been found to be significantly reliant on public sector support (see e.g. Leach & Wilson, 1998; Osborne, 1998; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001). The potential in these regards is briefly suggested by Bennett & Payne (2000) who describe how local authorities are increasingly developing an 'interface' support role for the many agencies that are developing a role in regeneration. This fits likewise with those who describe the desire of local authorities to take on as positive a role as possible locally and their experimentation in an attempt to do so (e.g. Rydin, 1998; Diamond & Liddle, 2005).

Other strengths may be conceived of as enabling independent complementary action, (by the local authority) the significance of which reflects the continuing relative magnitude of local authority public sector service provision, land ownership and leverage capabilities (see e.g. Boland, 1999a/b; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001; Harding, 2005). Indeed, Stoker (1996) points out that many people would probably be content to allow local authorities simply to 'get on with it' rather than get involved themselves. Independent local authority activity can therefore be seen to be complementary to broader governance arrangements in its own right; indeed some might argue that this is all the more important given the unproven effectiveness of alternative mechanisms such as partnerships (Ansell, 2000). Others suggest the potential for more deliberate complementarity that may be achieved through strategic positioning by the authority itself or by others in relation to it (e.g. Harding & Garside, 1995; Thake, 1995; Bennett & Payne, 2000). Beyond this, it is also increasingly common to note the potential of local authority 'mainstreaming' - or the redirection of mainstream service delivery budgets to support wider agendas, such as those agreed within area-based partnerships (Bennett & Payne, 2000; Morgan, 2002). This may include attending to the leverage potential of procurement and staffing as well as altering the way services are designed and delivered in respect of particular communities (Stewart, 1995; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001; Lindsay & Sturgeon, 2003; Pearce & Mawson, 2003). This is the logic behind local strategic partnerships and community plans, which aim to formalise this strategic alignment and in which local authorities are key participants (Sullivan, 2003; Bennett et al, 2004). In this respect we can also see the complementarity in the vertical dimension of local sensitivity as opposed to rigid or distantly composed national approaches which as Jessop (1999) notes is particularly important in an era of supply-side interventions.

In turn the theme tells of relational inadequacies. These are, in fact, perhaps better conceived of as needs related to the aforementioned situation of interdependencies, particularly where there has been a general proliferation of initiative as in the field of regeneration. Firstly, as detailed in relation to the instrumentalist theme, studies suggest that partnerships and networks, though

a helpful response to problems of fragmentation, may often require active intervention to build them, as well as ongoing management (Agranoff & McGuire, 1998; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; McGuire, 2002; Davies, 2002, 2004). Management needs are said to include leadership or steering; facilitation of the development of a shared vision and agreed priorities and roles within it (conflict management, relationship brokering); responding to change and evolution of purpose, (e.g. through alteration of membership); and the promotion of mutual learning (Jackson & Stainsby, 2000; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; McGuire, 2002; Sweeting et al, 2004). Secondly, various authors suggest (as referred to from a slightly different perspective in the discussion of instrumentalism above) that there is a need for more over-arching management of the diverse and fragmented interests within a locality to achieve broader systemic coherence, reduce conflict and so on (e.g. Jessop, 1997, 1998, 2000; Kooiman, 2000; Cowell, 2004; Etherington & Jones, 2004). This is seen to be achievable to some extent through the production of over-arching strategic mechanisms or leadership, (Jessop, 1998, 2000; Bennett & Payne, 2000). It is also seen to be supported by careful management of expectations (Jessop, 1997, 1998; Diamond & Liddle, 2005).

Alongside this depiction of needs the previously discussed concepts of network activation and network management, and superimposed on these, meta-governance[1], have emerged. The State is said to be ideally placed to effect each of these. There is reference variously to its financial might, and its authority and advantageous nodal position derived from accepted governmental norms, being responsible for overall community social and economic well-being of a particular area and elected basis (e.g. Clarke & Stewart, 1994; Jessop, 1998; MacLeod & Goodwin, 1999a; Ansell, 2000; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). Indeed, the orchestration of partnerships described under the previous theme would seem to be readily associated with this theme also, with local authorities being well-placed to do what has already been argued to be necessary donkey-work. Lawless (1994) suggests that due to the significance of the authority in the field in which his case-study partnership

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[1] Refer back to page 70-1. A more extensive discussion of its various nuances is found in the conclusion section to the chapter pp. 94-5, & pp. 97-9

was focused, others would not have joined in if it had not been on board. In turn, in relation to ongoing management it has been suggested that local authorities can, and are beginning to, learn new competencies (Diamond & Liddle, 2005). These arguments suggest that such roles can be rooted in what is most practical as much as self-interested instrumentalism, although the two are not mutually incompatible.

Similarly, various actions are suggested to contribute to the realisation of meta-governance to achieve overall coherence in this environment, and local authorities may in turn have key roles in making such actions work. These include the co-ordination and implementation of strategic planning — or, as most recently conceived, community planning, local strategic partnerships and local area agreements (Abram & Cowell, 2004; Cowell, 2004; Sorabji, 2005; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). Some see local political leadership to have important capacities that might be seen to have potential in relation to necessary actions here, including ready access to the media, networking and diplomatic capabilities and general profile, elite/authority status (e.g. John & Cole, 2000; Leach & Wilson, 2002; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). In addition, local authorities may be conceived of as significant information banks in respect of such processes (Harding & Garside, 1995; Painter et al. 1997; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001). Others have further suggested how local authorities may bring important coherence and co-ordination in respect of central government policy initiatives and strategy (Lawless, 1994; Sullivan, 2001). Again practicability could be seen to reign here, albeit not necessarily crowding out self-interest.

Turning lastly to accountability inadequacies, these are seen to be two-fold. Most common is the idea that a situation of governance, particularly inter-organisational collaboration, reduces transparency by increasing negotiation and blurring roles, increasing the complexity of actions (e.g. Rhodes, 2000; Leach & Wilson, 2002; Sullivan, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2005). This is said to make it more difficult to identify who is accountable for what, and to hold them to account (Abram & Cowell, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2005; Geddes, 2006). More generally, there may also be a lack of oversight of decentralised

activity (e.g Watson, 1999; Davies, 2005:325.). Secondly, there is the idea that governance, both individual non-governmental (including private sector) or quasi-governmental organisations and organisational forms such as partnerships, is accountable to a narrower constituency. That is, such organisations/groups of organisations are not particularly obliged to consider the range of interests within society, and may be skewed towards those more powerfully articulated within them through direct participation: some may in fact be excluded or at least not represented (see e.g. Stoker, 1996; Brooks, 1999; Atkinson, 2000; Maloutas & Pantelidou-Malouta, 2004; Geddes, 2006).

In relation to this dimension of the theme, local authorities can be found to be positioned variously in accounts in the literature. Some see the importance of accountability as explaining why local authorities continue to have a dominant position, particularly in partnerships (Bennett & Payne, 2000; Bennett et al, 2004; Rowe, 2006, Sullivan forthcoming). As accountable bodies with well-developed accounting systems, local authorities are highly likely to have funds channelled through them (Mayo & Taylor, 2001; Bennett et al, 2004; Williams, 2006). Similarly, they may be particularly concerned with the nature of action and control of performance as they may be more liable than others to be held accountable for it, whether through elections or hierarchically (see e.g. Stoker, 2000: 100; Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Geddes, 2006). In this sense, though such behaviour may be at odds with ideal notions of partnership, local authorities can be seen to support their functioning in the context of broader societal objectives. Local authority representatives may also for example, be in the position to be important advocates of otherwise unarticulated weaker interests (Sullivan, 2001, 2003; Maloutas & Pantelidou-Malouta, 2004).

Alternatively, there is the idea that local authorities may be less directly involved in governance, but may serve to scrutinise the activities of other agencies at a distance, again acting as advocates in the interests of a broad definition of community well-being. The 1998 White Paper (DETR, 1998) refers to their being well-placed to take on such a function in terms of their ability to 'reflect local views and promote debate' (§8.17). Others refer more

generally to the monitoring potential of government (Jessop, 1998; Watson, 1999; Stoker, 2000). Such scrutiny and advocacy may also build on local authorities' regulatory functions and their control of important procurement contracts (see e.g. Stewart, 1995; Stoker, 1996: 206; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001; Jackson, 2001). To certain agencies and governance forms it may also be seen as necessary to enhance their own legitimacy, prompting a certain amount of voluntary liaison (see e.g. Painter et al. 1997; Rydin, 1998; Williams, 2006). Indirectly, the local authority may also constitute an important complementary decision-making and action forum, where in taking the strategic view, it may implement actions designed as compensation for what is neglected through governance (Stewart, 1995; Jessop 1998; Sullivan, 2001, 2003; Teisman & Klijn, 2002). Given an overall objective of securing public good outcomes in the broadest definition possible, local authorities can again be conceived as supporting the functionality of governance.

3.4.2 A critical review of the theme as an account of the fate of the local authority

Perhaps the most important contribution of this theme is to stress the idea that local authorities are distinctive actors within the governance environment in this perspective, having distinctive capabilities. In doing so it provides a means to reconstruct tales of dysfunctionalism and dominance within partnerships or in relation to other governance actors, suggesting that such behaviour may not always be malicious or self-seeking, or purely negative. It also suggests that contrary to narrow versions of the previous theme, local authorities may plausibly have to have broader interests at heart than their own, or as suggested by the counter-theme, that their interests are not narrow and straightforward. Nonetheless, some overlap with the previous theme would seem to be inevitable, demonstrating that they are not mutually exclusive..

However, once again as an account of the fate of the local authority, this theme can be seen to be undermined to some extent by its own simplicity. In focusing on the potential for local authorities to be functional within the governance environment, supporting its operation, it neglects to tell of factors

that may impede this. Returning to the discussion of self-interest for instance, it may be pointed out that short-term political interests may disrupt more constructive relationships in the governance environment (e.g. Rhodes, 2000). Equally, as Pearson (2001) and Loftman & Nevin (1998) note, more fundamental changes in political priorities may also alter leadership and support for particular complementary or collaborative agendas. Others refer to the forces tending to promote inertia within authorities and hence their propensity to embrace new ways of working. Rhodes (1988:206) for example notes how competing interests internally and complex existing relationships serve to inhibit reconfiguration (see also, Boland, 1999a/b; Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Lowndes, 2005; Geddes, 2006: 90). Indeed, such complexity would also seem to produce aspects of functionality that compete with each other. For instance, the requirement to demonstrate due process and probity might conflict with functionality derived from more flexible approaches (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Stoker, 2000; Feldman & Khademian, 2001; Considine, 2002). Likewise, the advocacy of interests beyond those represented in governance arenas may forseeably increase conflict and inhibit the search for consensus (cf. Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Davies, 2005). Conversely, the desire to have something to show for the process entered into (often expressed as targets) may impose time-limits or a search for efficiency which inhibit positive inclusion (see e.g. Carley, 2000; Diamond, 2001; Mayo & Taylor, 2001). One conclusion to this line of argument is that functionality might not ever be optimal; the authority would seem to be faced in fact with a difficult juggling act.

Another nuance that can be added to this theme, improving the account of the fate of the local authority, is that functionality is not necessarily entirely within the hands of local authorities: they may not be able to secure it alone. Some factors may be out of their control. Cochrane (1993) points out that private sector interests may be too powerful to be willingly steered into any activity anything except on their own terms. Jessop (1998) suggests that problems may be caused within partnerships because the co-operation of the parent organisations of partnership members is not guaranteed. In such circumstances, the support of higher-tiers of government with more muscle

may arguably be significant, as Davies (2005, 2006) and Whitehead (2003) suggest in relation to conflict resolution. Rydin (1998) likewise refers to the limitations to local government capabilities in discussion of the division of labour with central government in her case-study. In contrast, Jessop's (2000) case-study of the Thames-side agency notes the disruptive effects of central government agendas failing to support local action. Indeed, such support may also be important in other respects. For example, Painter & Goodwin (2000) and Stoker (2000) suggest that local action alone is unable to resolve problems rooted in wider scales of action (e.g. the global economy), whilst Harding (2000) notes the continued significance of national intra-territorial fiscal transfers. Conversely, a lack of coherence at the centre and lack of convergence between central and local agendas may again be problematic (e.g. Exworthy & Powell, 2004).

The higher-level support necessary to ensure optimal governance functioning is evidently not guaranteed therefore, and this reminds us that higher tiers of government may have their own conflicting agendas in respect of the governance environment. A classic example would be how the promotion of competition in pursuit of efficiency may disrupt collaboration, even though this too is desired (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Jessop, 2002). This situation echoes wider contradictions that local authorities are left to grapple with by central government. Many authors point out the tensions between central control to secure universal standards (or a higher-order public interest) as expressed by nationalised targets and policing, and devolution or decentralisation which implies local variety in pursuit of more locally sensitive solutions (e.g. Cowell & Murdoch, 1999; Foley & Martin, 2000; MacKinnon, 2000; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001). Some also note the equivalent unresolved contradiction and resulting tensions between local authorities having to promote and support participatory democracy whilst upholding the benefits of representative democracy (e.g. Martin, 1999; Rowe, 2006; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). It may be suggested that these contradictions are the inevitable consequence of the desire to compensate for the inadequacies of all forms of co-ordination (markets, hierarchies and networks/governance) making a mix of them desirable (Jessop 2000, 2002,

2006; Rhodes, 2000). This would again seem to indicate a much more complex environment for local authorities to carve out a functional role within, in particular emphasising that it has to work within the constraints of hierarchical influences.

By now, the common basis to the deficiencies of much of the existing literature is discernible. The complexities of the environment in respect of local authorities' positioning that no one theme captures in its simplicity are increasingly clear, suggesting that many contributing accounts, and hence the overall story, are lacking. Another criticism, is of the way this theme's contribution to the picture, as in the case with the other themes'. has had to be constructed from disparate pieces. Firstly there are pieces derived from brief asides within discussions of other particular phenomena or projects, (e.g. Lawless, 1994; Edwards et al, 2001; Cowell, 2004; Williams, 2006), or limited case-study or otherwise narrow examples (e.g. Harding & Garside, 1995; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). Secondly, there are pieces derived from comparing governance deficiencies with general discussions of local authority (or local government) resources and roles they are exhorted to (e.g. Rhodes, 1988; Stewart, 1995; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001). Thirdly, ideas can be drawn from discussions of the continuing 'steering' potential of the State in general, as opposed to any particular tier of government - although these discussions are often not examined empirically (e.g. Jessop, 1997, 1998; Jackson & Stainsby, 2000; Rhodes, 2000; Stoker, 2000). The resulting amalgamation is therefore of questionable authority and somewhat vague, tending to present a collection of possibilities rather than a rounded picture of actualities. In turn, critical review of the theme as an account of the fate of the local authority may identify logical shortcomings and complementary extensions to it, but again it cannot compensate for what is not there. What is lacking is an empirical examination of the positioning of local authorities in the round, in relation to the working context described.

3.4.3 Summary: what are the contributions that can usefully be taken away from a critical review of this theme as an account of the fate of the local authority?

This theme can be seen to be complementary to the preceding one as regards the fate of the local authority. Together they contribute towards a much more nuanced and plausible account of the positioning of local authorities within the contemporary governing environment, as well as the nature of such an environment. Though starting from a position where the nature of governance is given, this theme contributes a new perspective in highlighting the inadequacies of governance suggesting local authorities' relative capacities and potential to overcome them. It thereby provides another way of considering the distinctiveness of local authorities within such an environment, and emphasises their continuing significance, or at least potential significance. However, following the pattern established in the critical reviews of the first and second themes as accounts of the fate of local authorities, an equivalent critical review of this theme suggests that the implications of this for local authorities' roles and self-positioning are not straightforward. Constraints, notably competing forms of co-ordination, seem to be particularly prominent shaping factors in respect of what the local authority can achieve. Equally, contradictions and ambiguity are indicated as prominent characteristics of the situation that the authority finds itself in.

3.5 Conclusion
3.5.1 Local authorities caught 'in-between'

The critical reviews of the above themes and triangulation between them suggests that overall taking them as standalone accounts imposes an artificial division between the types of roles discernible for local authorities, as well as between the types of working environment described (cf. Jessop, 2004; Peters & Pierre, 2004; Stoker, 2004). Therefore it is proposed here that we take a cumulative picture, using the questions posed in the introduction to structure it. The last question can also be used to forge a link with the literature in the previous chapter, paving the way for an amalgamated research agenda.

3.5.1a In the field of regeneration, what are the parameters of the working environment (including elements of continuities and change) that UK local authorities are operating in?

The key contextual contours of the local authority working environment that are indicated by the above analysis are of hierarchy and heterarchy, old and new. That is, firstly, local authorities operate within a situation of multiple-interdependencies, bringing them into contact with numerous different individuals, agencies and organisations particularly within the far-reaching field of regeneration. This provides us with a working definition of governance: the situation of multiple actors in some way working towards broadly defined public good goals, on both an independent and more formally collaborative basis. The local authority is one such actor. Others that are indicated in the regeneration field range from local residents through to the broader, more professional and large-scale voluntary sector; business interests such as chambers of commerce; arms-length public agencies such as RDAs and JobCentrePlus; and government departments.

This aspect of the working environment can be argued to be a continuity or discontinuity with the past. In the field of regeneration however, Rhodes' (1997, 2000) contention that networks and the order of fragmentation and hence interdependencies have multiplied, seems reasonable. It seems that the expansion of the accepted definition of regeneration, and policy impetuses such as privatisation and the encouragement of community involvement, have introduced 'new' interests, or a new order of diversity that local authorities have to respond to. However, the preceding analysis also hints that interests relating to the 'old' order of working, whereby local authorities were more dominant actors and their legitimacy derived through their elected members, have not been erased. Indeed, the tension between representative and participatory democracy is frequently referred to in the literature. Both old and new interests (often caricatured as internal and external interests) are thereby also indicated to be aspects of the working context with which local authorities have to contend.

The influence of hierarchy is also still evident within such an environment. It is evident that local authorities also sit within a hierarchical relationship with

higher tiers of government and certain government-sponsored agencies vested with higher authority. Such a relationship is characterised by dependency on the higher tiers for finance and authority, and more broadly by accountability requirements whereby higher tiers 'police' the lower. This subjugated position is however common to other agencies, which may likewise be affected by policies from higher levels of government with particular local impacts. In turn, this situation may create a local interest that may conflict with the centre or higher tiers of government. Yet, the preceding analysis also indicates another dimension to this hierarchy. This concerns capacity inadequacies in the wider governance environment beyond local authorities, and in contrast responsibilities vested in local authorities by the higher tiers of government. This would also seem to effect a situation whereby local authorities are in a hierarchically superior position to others in the governance environment under certain circumstances although they are more equal in others.

Therefore the context that local authorities find themselves in seems to consist of a multi-faceted hierarchy, but one that is broad in the horizontal dimension. Such a situation may in fact be captured by the concept of 'multi-level governance' that combines the ideas of multi-level government and governance, or heterarchy and hierarchy (see Franklin, 2003, Bache & Flinders, 2004a). This concept is also helpful in being able to accommodate acknowledgement of old and new, (representative democracy being associated with traditional hierarchical government for instance). In referring to 'levels' the concept can also incorporate the notion of different spatial interests, responsibilities and powers.

3.5.1b Are local authorities a distinctive actor within this environment?

In considering the distinctiveness of local authorities within this environment it is helpful to consider the ambiguity captured by Jessop (1997, 1998) in his deployment of the term 'meta-governance' to mean two things. The first is 'governance in the shadow of hierarchy' and the second is the interventions involved to secure the functioning of governance and to contain as far as possible its potential to collapse into chaos. Thus as Whitehead (2003:8) suggests, meta-governance provides a useful link between hierarchy and

governance (or heterarchy). If we apply this dual meaning to local authorities, we arrive at what seems to capture their distinctiveness within such a context. That is, local authorities would seem to be at once subject to the shadow of hierarchy and able to contribute to the functioning of governance whether in a self-interested or more disinterested way. The shadow of hierarchy is present because they are not at the top of it and higher-level government constrains their activities in certain ways. Their functionality in respect of governance is indicated by their superior capabilities and authority (related to responsibilities). As such they may be seen to be distinctive in having different audiences to play to whose interests might not necessarily converge: that is, in being caught in-between different interests and obligations and in being able to apply their capabilities to varied effect accordingly. This in some ways links to Jessop's later (2006:17) reference to meta-governance as, *'the art of balancing government and other forms of governance'* although in this piece he is discussing the EU as a form of meta-governance.

3.5.1c Do local authorities take an active or passive, functional or dysfunctional stance vis-à-vis this environment?

The question of what kind of stance the authority takes vis-à-vis this environment is less easy to answer directly from the literature. What is evident, as has been demonstrated through the critical analysis of the themes is that each of these stances is conceivable, for each is not necessarily exclusive of the others. Indeed, the balancing or juggling act implied by the variety of interests that local authorities apparently find themselves squeezed between would seem to suggest that a variety of responses is desirable. Sullivan et al's (2004) study which showed how local authorities could negotiate room for manoeuvre within central government's agenda is illustrative here: they were passive recipients of top-down instructions up to a point, beyond which they took on a more proactive and locally sensitive role. Elsewhere Foley & Martin, (2000) amongst others have noted that New Labour's (central government's) agendas may anyway be contradictory in themselves, and that local authorities would seem to have to find a way to reconcile them into a working order. Nonetheless, in so doing, and more generally given the variety of interests local authorities are trying to please, it would seem somewhat inevitable that where certain parties will see

dysfunctionality in local authority actions, others might see necessity (cf. Rhodes, 2000: 83).

Therefore, from the existing state of the literature it is only possible to answer the question with a series of possibilities. However, it seems likely that rather than one stance or relationship coming to dominate, a mixture of them will be operational in practice (cf. e.g. Clarke & Stewart, 1994: 205; Rhodes, 1997: 134; Stoker, 2004: 173). In turn therefore it would seem that any exploration of local authority stances and roles in practice needs to be sensitive to the factors that affect the mix, going beyond the notion of strings being pulled to include consideration of for instance, the extent to which an authority is aware of its functional potential (see e.g. Painter et al, 1997).

3.5.1d Does this environment confront local authorities with particular problems?

The question of whether this environment confronts the local authority with particular problems is again not easily answered from the literature. Generally it would seem that this situation presents local authorities with conundrums with the final result or aggregate response being said to be some kind of 'muddling through' (see e.g. Stoker, 2000:107). Linking this with the previous analysis, in this chapter and Chapter 2, the problematic element for local authorities would seem to be the difficulty in asserting a clear identity or role, and in being judged in an over-simplistic manner. Here it would seem that demonstrating functionality and distinctiveness (including particular constraints operated within) from a variety of perspectives would be desirable. In turn, an understanding of the needs, opportunities and constraints presented by the complex operating context would seem to be an important basis for appropriate action within it.

3.5.2 Local authorities: the missing focus

Yet it would appear that such an understanding is lacking. A holistic exploration of such 'muddling through' as enacted, and a comprehensive examination of the resultant roles and potential of local authorities is missing in the literature. This is despite the potential suggested by the concepts of multi-level- and meta- governance.

Even where the concept of multi-level governance has been invoked, it has often tended to be deployed simply to capture the multiple sites of decision-making that influence public-good action, in some cases barely differentiating it from the concept of multi-level government or shared sovereignty (see recently, Jessop, 2000; Pierre & Stoker, 2000; earlier, John, 1996). This would seem to reflect its origins in the analysis of EU Structural Funds, emphasising, contrary to convention, the integration of domestic and supranational politics, and the importance of sub-national as well as national actors (see Bache & Flinders, 2004b). This conception of multi-level governance provides only a very narrow depiction of the activities of the various actors within it. Indeed, as an extension to this depiction, some authors refer to multi-level governance as describing the collapse of hierarchies such that actors are not rigidly placed within vertical sets of relations and may freely interact with each other (see e.g. Sibeon, 2000: 301; Peters & Pierre, 2001: 132, 2004:79; Rosenau, 2004). Once again, the more rounded picture of the combination of this situation, or at least broader participation (i.e. governance) with ongoing vertical ordering or rigidities as described in Marks' early discussions of the concept (1993) has frequently been dismissed or ignored (e.g. Rosenau, 2004; see also discussion by Jessop, 2004:58).

The neglect of this more rounded picture is apparent despite evidence of the continuing relevance of hierarchy in relation to powers and resources, particularly in the British context (Franklin, 2003; Bache & Flinders, 2004a; Jessop, 2004). Indeed, Bache & Flinders' (2004a: 105) notion of meta-governance whereby such a hierarchy is the background 'backbone' to 'the broader context and structure of 'governance'' would seem to have particular resonance with the idea of the multi-dimensional (vertical and horizontal) positioning of local authorities outlined above. However, though this in turn suggests local authorities may be useful starting points in the exploration of such realities, they do not seem to have been deployed as vehicles for doing so. Instead there has been a preoccupation with the fate of the nation state with vague implications for other governmental authorities, or exploration of

the operation of multi-level governance solely at the regional, national or supranational level which blanks out the detailed experience at the local level. This is exemplified by the recent volume edited by Bache & Flinders (2004c) (see also, John, 1996; Pierre & Stoker, 2000).

Franklin (2003) comes perhaps the closest to exploring such realities at the local level, but does so from the perspective of integrated rural development policy implementation and the actors that need to be enrolled in the process. This gives only a partial view of local authorities within the multi-level governance context. Beyond this, as suggested above, various authors note that 'ahierarchical' multi-level governance does not invalidate the notion of governmental steering. However, they either do not explore the meshing of the two in practice (e.g. Sibeon, 2000) or do not refer in any detail to the particular position/role of local government (e.g. Bache & Flinders, 2004a; Jessop, 2004; Peters & Pierre, 2004). Peters & Pierre (2004:79) for example, refer briefly to such a combined positioning in terms of certain interactional constraints and yet freedoms[2] implied for local authorities, but do not explore other dimensions or the relationship between them. This is despite noting the anachronism whereby constitutional definitions of competencies have remained stable despite changes in behaviour of sub-national actors, which evokes some of the tensions embodied by local authorities described above (e.g. representative vs. participative democracy). Stoker (2004) in his discussion of local authorities in the contemporary context likewise broaches the concept as defined here, but then retreats by suggesting that one type of relationship within it will come to dominate, rather than exploring the ongoing complexity indicated in practice. Diamond & Liddle (2005) in contrast note that regeneration managers need to 'transcend' the vertical and the horizontal, but again do not explore this in practice or specifically in relation to local authority regeneration managers. Boland (1999a) in his deployment of the term suggests there is a constant struggle between levels. This again begins to evoke the positioning of local authorities indicated above, but he likewise does not specifically explore the manifestation or

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[2] Local authorities being *embedded in ...webs of rules, resources and patterns of co-ordination*' but, despite this, having the freedom to pursue *'their interests within global arenas'*

resolution of this at the local authority level, nor the implications of certain levels being bound more to hierarchy and tradition. Multi-level governance would therefore seem to be a somewhat 'hollow' or under-explored concept. Depending on the level of analysis, it would seem to have either its messy middle or bottom tier missing.

Meta-governance as outlined above, would also seem to provide a helpful entry-point to exploring the positioning of local authorities within the contemporary regeneration context. However, we are again left disappointed. Jessop, despite the promise of his ambiguous definition of meta-governance, and reference to the fact that it could be a role played by any level of government (1997:575) subsequently merges the two, the shadow of hierarchy being the injection of functionality to governance from the top down (1997, 1998, 2002, 2004). Only in his 2000 account is there a glimmer of local authorities perhaps having a slightly different type of functional meta-governance role, which is how he describes Manchester City Council's activity in respect of promotion and project management. In his other case-study (Jessop, 2000) he also gives some indication of the influence of the 'shadow of hierarchy' (without labelling it thus) at the local governance level within which the local authority operates. In both cases, however, the exploration is limited to specific project-based case-studies rather than being more rounded. Elsewhere moreover, (Jessop, 2002, 2004) echoing his earlier tendency to focus on top-down impetuses, he re-defines meta-governance as the orchestration of an appropriate mix of hierarchy, market and networking, (or governance) moving away from this helpful start. In turn, other authors in their empirical examination of the concept have also tended to take this top-down perspective (e.g. Cowell & Murdoch, 1999; Whitehead, 2003). Meta-governance therefore seems to be somewhat underdeveloped in respect of local authorities, and thus, limited in its conceptual detail.

Beyond these specific literatures it would seem that there has also been a more general reluctance to unpack the complexity of the situation of local authorities that the outline concepts of multi-level and meta-governance, a mixed or ambiguous role and muddling through, would seem to help capture.

Discussions of ongoing governmental presence within this environment are all too often too general, focusing for example on 'the state' rather than acknowledging variety within this. Other insights are also just that – narrow glimpses, focusing for instance on specific components of governance (e.g. partnerships) or particular directional impetuses (e.g. New Labour's Modernising Local Government Agenda). Feedbacks and connections beyond the boundaries of these foci have not apparently been of interest, beyond some limited exploration of the process of embedding in respect of certain practices (see e.g. Ward, 2000, Teisman & Klijn, 2000). Overall therefore, whilst having arrived at a helpful framework through which to understand the roles and potential of local authorities within the contemporary environment, it is clear that we do not really know what they do or could be doing in practice and practical terms.

3.5.3 The research agenda suggested

The importance of investigating the role of the state within the governance environment is highlighted by Pierre (2000: 242):

> *'The role of the state in governance is perhaps the most important issue in governance research, given the historical predominance of the state as the undisputed carrier of the collective interest. While there is much to suggest that this role of the state has changed, and continues to change, democratic government remains centred around the legitimacy of institutions and the channels of representation, accountability and consent between these institutions and the polity at large. As long as this remains the case, the issue of how the state transforms to accommodate emerging forms of governance remains a key issue in governance research'.*

Given this, it seems somewhat peculiar that local authorities, as the local arm of the state, have not in themselves been a specific focus for research in recent years, despite the effort put into refining the concept of governance to incorporate relevant impetuses. Equally, though there has been much debate about the future of local government and the organisation of regeneration activity, and some important policy initiatives in respect of these, the overall consequences for local authority activity and roles within the wider environment are unclear. Altogether, although a general picture can be painted of the environment within which local authorities work, within which likewise, their positioning can be understood and possibilities construed, this is no substitute for a holistic, detailed empirical study focused on a particular

local authority. Such a study would unpack its various roles, potential and limits to action, considering various drivers and interactions between them. In doing so, it would contribute a missing part of the picture of an important field of action, also being able to contribute to the development of, or 'filling in' of, the useful concepts of multi-level- and meta- governance. Concurrently it is evident that this agenda fits well with the agenda identified in the previous chapter, the link being established by the fourth question, as described above. That is, without there being a clear understanding of the basis for local authority regeneration action and the value being contributed from a variety of perspectives, evaluative assessment will be unfair and unhelpful, being insensitive to the multiple audiences local authorities necessarily play to.

The next chapters translate this agenda into realisable terms, recognising the potential of Blaenau Gwent to as an exemplar of the local authority within the contemporary working environment.

Chapter 4
Deriving research objectives and questions:
the initial research strategy

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Deriving research objectives and questions: the initial research strategy

This chapter details the process that tied together the two sets of literature and reflection on the research context to arrive at compatible research objectives and questions. It also describes how such literature came to be focused on, whereby the original CASE application and ideas were reconciled with my own interpretation of what was of interest and what was practically possible. As such, it describes an important part of the PhD process which involved initial contact with the field/fieldwork; coming to terms with the demands of a PhD; and the exploration of particular strands of literature.

This path or initial research strategy reflects the peculiarities of the CASE award set-up, insofar as I entered the field right at the beginning of the PhD for an introductory work placement that was agreed as part of the CASE application. This effectively constituted a period of unfocused observation over two days a week for three months. For the rest of the week, I was reading the literature and attending research training lectures and seminars. This iterative movement resulted in a particular thinking and conceptualisation process. The second peculiarity is that the application which was submitted prior to the student being appointed, and which therefore I had no input into, stood initially as the research proposal and strategy. These two factors shaped the trajectory discussed below, that comprised of four largely successive stages through which the research and thesis were defined as my own and as practicable. The final section of the chapter brings the picture full circle however, by demonstrating the continuing links with the original proposal.

4.1 Negotiating a focus
Although the CASE application laid out a focus, even to the extent of devising research questions and a research programme, a combination of factors prompted the search for a way of reformulating it as the research began to take on its own dynamic. [The questions associated with this are listed below – Figure 3.] Such factors were revealed through engagement with the literature, the field and the requirements of the PhD process. Engagement with the literature involved wide-ranging reading, finding subjects of

relevance and of interest, and themes that could be developed: a process supported by critical analysis through writing. Broadly, the range of material included discussions of regeneration practice; critical performance measurement and evaluation commentaries; and contextual theory spanning governance, economic geography, regeneration and spatial planning. Engagement with the field was through a period of observation referred to above. Such observation was relatively unstructured, involving a daily diary concerned with the work and workings of the Division, the authority, meetings etc. It was undertaken through shadowing officers in their daily work, and informal discussions with them. This helped me see things (about actions taken, the context etc.) that were not necessarily recorded or discussed in conventional depictions of local authority regeneration work: a type of insight described as a benefit of observation by Rossman & Rallis (2003). Lastly, engagement with the requirements of the PhD process involved trying to apply and comply with the expectations into which I was being socialised such as the concept of originality.

Figure 3: Original research questions (CASE application)

i.   How to construct a coherent conceptualisation and understanding of the nature of economic and social disadvantage in Blaenau Gwent.

ii.   What are the inter-relationships between community-led planning and statutory agencies' policies, and how can this be captured in a framework for evaluating individual agency effectiveness?

iii. What are the implications in terms of governance relations and thence policy delivery, of working in partnership and the effectiveness of working practices of local stakeholders? This will focus upon the development and delivery of public policy interventions to tackle economic and social disadvantage.

iv.   How to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of multiple policies addressing economic and social disadvantage. This involves the development of an appropriate evaluation framework and performance indicators for policy evaluation for partnerships and individual agencies.

It was also stated that:
'The uniqueness of this proposal is that it provides a framework for analysing and evaluating the effectiveness of public policy provision, which can inform the decision-making of individual agencies in a multi-agency and participative context. It examines the interactions between different policy interventions and actors involved, relations between top-down and bottom-up strategies, and the need for a more informed understanding and evaluation of their combined impact (including synergies and tradeoffs) in deprived urban areas.'

'It is expected that the outcome of the study will enable the local authority to generate a range of performance indicators for socio-economic regeneration activity; enable it to participate in the Wales Programme for Improvement, a Welsh Assembly initiative to improve the delivery of local government services to its communities; and also to be useful in assessing the impact of European,

national/regional, local and community-level initiatives on disadvantaged areas. Overall it is intended that this research would provide empirical and theoretical tools for the development and evaluation of effective policies; and inform best practice on the management of several simultaneous policy interventions, and future policy design and delivery mechanisms, with reference to local governance relations and policy implementation.'

The reflexive awareness gained as the research unfolded in this way was that firstly, that the questions were felt to be very wide-ranging, potentially each a research project in itself. Secondly, the thrust seemed to be in danger of being pushed towards a standard consultancy project, without sufficient consideration of links to theory, or the potential for a more critical stance – the dangers of the CASE award's nature in practice (see Macmillan & Scott, 2003). Thirdly, linked to this, the questions and objectives seemed to me, as someone who had not devised them and been involved in the thinking process, to be somewhat disjointed, and lacking an underlying rationale.

Moreover, as I became more familiar with the field, the idea of 'policy evaluation' seemed to be very difficult to reconcile with what I was observing. This was a working environment that was driven by various pressures and agendas, the detail of which was not captured by the local authority's policies. This in turn meant that it would be difficult to trace back effects to specific policies, if indeed effects in themselves were visible, given numerous intervening factors. A lack of authority data-collecting capacity and routines (associated with particular policy/project stages) was also problematic. Equally, various concerns raised about performance indicators by respondents and in the literature did not sit happily with research proposing to buy-into the normative ideas associated with their use. Yet, it was increasingly apparent that the Division was interested in measuring its (their) 'performance' rather than just post-hoc evaluation.

Other considerations were the need to feel confident that I was making 'an original contribution to knowledge' – that is, ensuring that it was sufficiently distinct from previous work; the need to retain links with the existing proposal upon which the funding and collaborative agreement rested; the need to produce something of use to the collaborating body (the local authority); and

the need to find something in which my interest could be sustained for 3 years. Clearly these factors had to be negotiated between.

The initial need in terms of reformulation was to provide a coherent focus that I could grasp and hold onto; one that sat more comfortably with the 'realities' being observed on the ground and of a PhD being done by me, that was more workable in my eyes, and that was something different from standard evaluation practice. Reformulation in this sense meant paying attention to the existing proposal, and in particular, the objectives expressed, whilst refining it and approaching the subject (evaluation of regeneration policy) from a different stance. This stance was more explicitly critical of standard approaches, and also particularly concerned with the positioning of the local authority as a regeneration agent, and the nature of regeneration, recognising it as an intervention process involving many different agents and involving many different activities.

In effect this meant introducing multi-level and horizontal notions of governance to the field of evaluation, something that could in fact be seen to some extent in the original research questions and broader proposal, but did not seem to be the organising principle. In addition, it was decided that the focus should be on the processes of, or work involved in, regeneration - as defined variously by the many actors involved, rather than the ultimate impact of singular policies from a particular perspective. This would again capture issues mentioned in the original research proposal (the interrelations between community planning and statutory agencies' policies and the implications of working in partnership for policy delivery) whilst taking a broader and more open approach than most conventional evaluations.

4.2 Making sense of the field

This process of reformulation and focusing was supported by the grappling with the observed 'realities' of the field that I was thrust into early on and the mismatch with those implied by the original research questions. This included the relevance of policies as objects of assessment, but also the neatness and rational benchmarking implied by a process supposed to start with deriving a

'*coherent conceptualisation of economic and social disadvantage*'. Both failed to engage with the messiness observable in the case study area that appeared to relate to resource/capacity constraints, diverse agency involvement and politics.

Such grappling was supported by critical reading of the literature, through which I was trying to find appropriate gaps where originality could be defined, and against which I could play my observations. In moving between the literature and the field I was benefiting from what Glaser & Strauss (1967) refer to as comparative analysis, which is a long-established research strategy. Though not following strictly their approach to 'grounded theory', for example, by reading as well as observing I had not suspended all prior theory and concepts from my consciousness, an important rooting in the detailed, sometimes mundane 'reality' of local authority regeneration practice was gained. This 'rootedness' facilitated a critical reading of the literature, including conventional evaluations of various regeneration projects and programmes: as Coffey & Atkinson (1996: 191) suggest, I was using '*data* [of a crude sort] *to think with*'.

Yet as well as reading the literature through the lens of this 'local knowledge', I was also using it iteratively in a search to better understand what I was observing, or as Strauss & Corbin (1990: 56) suggest, in their divergence from Glaser (1992), to enhance my sensitivity to what was going on (see also Huxham, 2003). As Sayer (1992) emphasises, I needed appropriate concepts to 'see' with, which makes Glaser's (1992) particular exhortations to suspend these very difficult. Early on, the relevance of notions of governance and multi-level government/governance that I was already familiar with was apparent. They helped to explain constraints and the presence of particular working practices such as multi-agency partnership. Otherwise however, the search was wide-ranging for there is hardly any 'natural' or specific literature on the evaluation of local authority regeneration activity, or more broadly, on the particular practical activity of local authorities in regeneration. Instead the search took in literatures concerned with evaluation and performance measurement in the public sector in general, through which I developed a

critical stance. This helped me to understand why for instance, the Division (as was emerging during the placement) was interested in my developing new performance indicators for their work in regeneration, when recently there had clearly been a proliferation of such indicators (e.g. CEDOS, 2003).

As a result of this positioning, I began the reformulation of the research focus towards evaluation of actual work and process, which seemed particularly relevant in a governance situation where the local authority would presumably not simply be working to its own agendas, but instead, those negotiated with others in a situation of multiple interdependencies. Underwood's (1980) work that sought to uncover what town planners actually 'do' was influential here, as was familiarity with the potentially more diffuse and multi-dimensional notion of 'additionality' or 'added value' proposed by some (e.g. Buisseret et al, 1995; Luukkonen, 2000; see Chapter 2). However, another key concept (again as discussed in Chapter 2) helped to cement this approach to the field, for what I had arrived at was also the idea of 'policy-action' promulgated by Barrett and Fudge's (1981) seminal work on Implementation Theory. Bringing this together with concepts of governance helped make sense of the situation whereby officers at any one time were not solely concerned with single policies, or merely internal policies, but were seemingly responding at any one time to multiple stimuli from various sources (horizontal and vertical). Such stimuli included funding availability, funding criteria, performance management frameworks, political demands, project management timetables, community input and external partner abilities. In effect, it was clear that conventional evaluations and implementation studies were not acknowledging this complexity by boking at singular programmes or policies. Or, where they did look at the wider picture, (e.g. in Audit Commission service-level inspection reports) they were skewed by particular normative perspectives that had a view of how local government should work, rather than how it actually works according to on-the-ground realities.

In addition it became clear that this was also a gap in studies concerned with governance. As discussed in Chapter 3, arguably many of these also have limited depictions of the local authority's role. Yet I was seeing how local

government officers seemed to be in some ways making governance 'work' and although it was being required to work in new ways in line with governance, local government, particularly in this local context, was alive and well. This seemed to be not least because, as is still the case everywhere in the UK, it still had important legal status, professional capacity, and democratic legitimacy. In addition, I was struck by the apparent unfairness of the situation whereby local authorities are often criticised by other regeneration actors, and in evaluations of programmes that instruct them to work in partnership, for not doing so whole-heartedly enough, ignoring the reasons for their operation otherwise.

The only discussion identified that potentially acknowledged such an in-between positioning was Jessop's discussion (1997, 2000) of 'meta-governance', though the concept of 'multi-level governance' capturing the horizontal and the vertical (e.g. Franklin, 2003) also seemed to have potential. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, coverage of both concepts in the literature did not extend to consideration of the implications of them in relation to local government in any detail. As such they could be seen as under-developed at the level of local government, whilst having the potential to help make sense of what officers in the Regeneration Division were tackling day-to-day. That is, the problems/constraints they faced (including criticisms levelled at them) and the 'added value' or particular contribution they were providing in practical as much as governmental terms.

However, I also felt somewhat uncomfortable with conflating the Division with the local authority as a whole, and indeed in assuming uniformity within the Division, not least because of clearly identifiable structural sub-divisions within them, and the apparent influence of different backgrounds and personalities within these. This situation again echoed Underwood's (1980) work, together with Stewart (2000) whilst resonating with oft-heard calls for corporatism and 'joined up government' which suggest persistent problems in achieving them, perhaps due to these divisions. Likewise, it was unclear to what extent it was appropriate to assume concordance between officers and elected members: at times it was as if elected members were another hurdle to

deal with who needed to be coaxed into line. Thus it was also evidently important, following Sayer (1992) through empirical work to critically examine or unpack the conventional concept of 'local government'.

To summarise, in the process of 'making sense' of the field, key framing concepts emerged: implementation as policy-action, justifying a focus on work or 'performative-action' and meta-governance as possibly a difficult yet functional positioning amidst both vertical and horizontal working and power relations (internal divisions and multi-level governance). Equally, a key gap in the literature was suggested: the role of (different parts of) local authorities in regeneration amidst horizontal fluidity (roles within it not clearly delimited by legislation), historical continuities, and new expectations and requirements. In the evaluation and performance measurement literature, a similar lacking was associated with evaluative assessment that is approached from the perspective of a single policy or programme or is overly summative, rather than looking more holistically at the work of officers to understand value contributed and obstructed in this in-between positioning. It followed that the two could be dealt with simultaneously: an investigation into added-value and value-obstructed being able to shed light on the local authority role/positioning or vice versa.

4.3 Inserting more structure: research objectives

This process of conceptualisation was further supported by observation of a week-long Audit Commission investigative visit to the Division, observation that was now becoming more structured. This was particularly helpful to see how the authority was regarded externally, as one of the methods I observed was a focus group with external stakeholders. It also helped hone my conception of the deficiencies of conventional evaluative assessment. Subsequently, I used two informal interviews with stakeholders from different sectors that worked with the Division to sound out possible lines of investigation. Finally, I was sufficiently confident of the relevance of the subject and what could practically be achieved to refine my ideas through further fieldwork and reading, (paralleling Glaser and Strauss' (1967) notion

of the gradual refinement of a grounded theory) to outline research objectives and thence research questions.

In the definition of these, I aimed to provide something of use locally and to make a contribution of relevance on a wider scale. This was in line with the observation made through the initial fieldwork that whilst there might be certain local specificities, broader structuring forces common to other authorities were also evident, for instance, funding levels, rules and legal responsibilities. This suggested that research of use locally due to its focus on the local picture could also derive more general conclusions if carefully designed (see Chapter 5).

In terms of practical objectives, of relevance to the local authority, the following seemed possible and pertinent:

i.   The provision of information to better enable the communication of the local authority's positionality, (its roles or value being contributed and factors that shaped them) – improving transparency;

ii.   The provision of information to better focus performance management in regeneration, differentiating this process from 'regeneration health' (an area's socio-economic condition or regeneration need) monitoring and the tracking of ultimate impact and outcomes; and,

iii. As an adjunct to this, recommendations as to where improvements in the role being played by the authority could be made, or how steps towards them could be taken.

In academic terms, it was anticipated that the thesis should be able to make a contribution in terms of:

1.

a. Bringing together ideas of (multi-level) governance and implementation theory to challenge dominant approaches to evaluative assessment of regeneration activity in a local authority context;

b. Re-focusing evaluation or evaluative assessment in this context as a process of discovery – of finding value, finding missed potential [value], and finding value obstructed;

c. Further suggesting that this type of evaluative assessment, in its modesty helps to cope with problems of data adequacy whilst being more able than conventional approaches to provide a comprehensive picture of local authority 'performance', the non-straightforward path to outcomes, and useful recommendations.

Overall this can be summarised as the objective: *to demonstrate a theoretical and practical rationale for a different approach to evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative.*

2.

a. Acknowledging the role of the *local* state – as local government through local authorities - in governance;

b. Moving beyond the government/governance dualism to acknowledge a more complex situation, in particular to reveal the problems this situation poses in being thrust upon and necessarily shaped (worked with/made workable) by a local authority, and by the authority having different interests within it;

c. Whilst contextualising the case-study in time and space to produce an idea of to what extent this may apply elsewhere.

Overall this can be summarised as the objective: *to contribute a better understanding of the positioning of local government in relation to existing concepts of governance*

For the purpose of this thesis the practical objectives, (i-iii) are shadow objectives, reflected in the research design, but largely transposed into and subsumed by objectives 1a-c.

4.4 Inserting more structure: research questions

The literature reviews and grounded analysis detailed in Chapters 2 and 3 detail some advance towards these objectives through careful argument and meta-analysis, but identify clear gaps to be filled by primary research to render such contributions more solid. In Chapter 2, the gap is the operationalisation and testing of the alternative approach to local authority evaluative assessment to see what it might reveal and to demonstrate its worth. In Chapter 3 the gap identified is of a holistic, detailed study of the positioning (roles, potential and limits to action) of the local authority within the contemporary multi-level governance arena. The next step within the research strategy was therefore to devise appropriate research questions to act as a structure on which to hang the extant research strategy or methodology through which appropriate primary data could be derived.

In order to take forward the two research foci concurrently, responding to all the different types of objectives at once, a flexible set of questions was devised. Though echoing the questions posed in Chapter 3 therefore, they are slightly different, reflecting the need to incorporate evaluative assessment objectives, including the assessment of the worth of the new approach to evaluative assessment proposed. In turn, following the logic in Chapter 2, the questions were designed to be posed to both internal and external respondents, privileging neither. This was convenient, but was also to allow for internal and external reflexivity (being able to see the situation from the eyes of others and/or to be self-critical) with the potential for added insight. Figure 4 introduces the research questions and explains their relation to the research objectives in more detail.

Figure 4: The research questions and their link to the research objectives

Research Question 1:

What is the role of the local authority in the regeneration process?

- Role was used here because it can be defined evaluatively (positively and negatively) as well as substantively (in terms of specific, perhaps relational activities). It was thereby anticipated that the question would yield a range of information, particularly through posing it to different people and in aggregate and disaggregate terms, as was required in line with the logic of the alternative approach to evaluative assessment discussed in Chapter 2 and Objectives 1c, 2b.
- It was envisaged that it might be possible to discern more or less prominent answers to the question. However, again following the logic of the alternative approach advocated,

an overall judgement of whether the local authority's role was positive or negative was not the aim, as this would involve a normative evaluation of the significance of different judgements.

- Instead it was anticipated that the question should help discern the full range and type of 'performative action', value-contributed and inhibited relevant to regeneration, which could then be compared to that portrayed by conventional evaluative assessment. It was also seen as a means to shed light on the role of the local authority amidst multi-level governance. (Objective ii, 1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b)
- Regeneration was to be left undefined, acknowledging wide ranging claims as to its content, and enabling respondents to use their own definitions, according to their own perspectives. As such it could refer to various ongoing and previous individual or aggregate activities and processes.

Research question 2:

What are the factors that shape this [regeneration] role?

- The interest here was in what influenced the work of officers and councillors, including stimuli, constraints and pressures. However the question also sought to enable the exploration of what affected the authority's substantive and evaluative roles at the strategic level.
- The question was deliberately vague so as to be open to as wide as possible interpretation. This was to allow for the acknowledgement of a wide range of influencing factors of various origins and different degrees of obviousness.
- It aimed to be able to highlight the importance of factors which conventional evaluative assessments gloss over; to enable a better understanding of the local authority's positionality (proactive and imposed) in relation to governance and government; and to contextualise the case-study to allow for judgement of its 'transferability' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 241; Yin, 1994). (Objectives i, 1a, 1b, 1c, 2b, 2c)

Research question 3:

What room is there for all-round positive improvements to the authority's regeneration role?

- This question reflected the early analysis that suggested that it might be difficult to please everyone in the course of local authority regeneration initiative, because the local authority was apparently juggling multiple expectations and constraints. However, it was anticipated that in making the shaping factors more visible, the extent to which they could be manipulated could be assessed, along with the possible consequences and potential tradeoffs of doing so.
- The question therefore aimed to provide some recommendations which could further demonstrate the usefulness of the alternative approach to evaluative assessment, whilst potentially yielding insights to help consolidate ideas of the authority's positionality in governance terms. (Objectives i, iii, 1b, 1c, 2b)
- Nonetheless it was accepted that in reality the answer to the question might lie in the political process subsequent to this 'rendering visible'.

Overall therefore, the objectives and research questions that were to structure the subsequent research aimed to be relatively open to what would be revealed in further fieldwork, whilst reflecting the influence of the earlier fieldwork, literature review and conceptualisation process.

4.5 Linking back to the CASE application

By way of consolidation, lastly, this section briefly refers back to the original research proposal to demonstrate how it was refined through the process outlined in this chapter, without losing sight of its objectives. These can be discerned in the following sections of the proposal:

'This proposal...provides a framework for analysing and evaluating the effectiveness of public policy provision, which can inform the decision-making of individual agencies in a multi-agency and participative

context. It examines the interactions between different policy interventions and actors involved, relations between top-down and bottom-up strategies, and the need for a more informed understanding and evaluation of their combined impact (including synergies and tradeoffs) in deprived urban areas.'

'It is expected that the outcome of the study will enable the local authority to generate a range of performance indicators for socio-economic regeneration activity; enable it to participate in the Wales Programme for Improvement, a Welsh Assembly initiative to improve the delivery of local government services to its communities; and also to be useful in assessing the impact of European, national/regional, local and community-level initiatives on disadvantaged areas. Overall it is intended that this research would provide empirical and theoretical tools for the development and evaluation of effective policies; and inform best practice on the management of several simultaneous policy interventions, and future policy design and delivery mechanisms, with reference to local governance relations and policy implementation.'

From the above discussion, it can be seen that public policy provision can be defined as the actual work, activity or initiative of the officers and councillors involved in regeneration both within and beyond the Regeneration Division. Taking this definition, it can be seen that the remainder of the first objective was allowed for within the research questions. Most of the second set of objectives also still stood, though the participation enabled in the Welsh Programme for Improvement would not perhaps be in line with normative expectations. In terms of assessing impact, the research questions aimed to give a better idea of where the impact (or 'value') contributed by the authority lay, which could enable a better focus to monitoring and evaluation of ultimate impacts beyond this. The assessment of the ultimate impact of policies was however set aside, for, as suggested above, it would be problematic and require a very different kind of research strategy instigated concurrently with actions. Thus the type of policies that it was envisaged the research could help to develop and evaluate were those associated with the deployment of the authority's particular resources (mainly conceived of as officer time) and communication to its stakeholders.

Overall the thrust of the refined research agenda echoes Davies' (2000) acknowledgement that qualitative data of the sort envisaged is an essential part of the drive towards evidence-based policy and practice. It also reflects Bate & Robert's (2002: 978) acknowledgement that qualitative data can have a potentially powerful and significant role in organisational development.

Both of these concerns can also be seen to underlie the original research proposal. The next chapter aims to demonstrate the mechanics of how such data may be derived.

Chapter 5: Extant methodology – responding more deliberately to the research objectives

Chapter 5: Extant methodology – responding more deliberately to the research objectives

This chapter details the methodology used to respond to the research objectives via the research questions that were defined in Chapter 4. This is described as an extant methodology because Chapter 4 has described the prior methodology used to arrive at these research objectives and questions that concurrently provided material relevant to them but in an unfocused and partial way (Chapters 2 and 3). In detailing this extant methodology the chapter aims to demonstrate that it is justifiable and appropriate (following Clough & Nutbrown, 2002). Justification involves detailing the logic of the combination of methods chosen as opposed to others, and linked to this, the appropriateness of them. Appropriateness is here defined as enabling a response to both sets of research objectives, providing detailed answers to the research questions, and attending to pragmatic and ethical considerations. In undertaking this demonstration the chapter comprises six sections. The first section explains the focus on a detailed case-study of one local authority and how the associated limitations are overcome, whilst specifying what within the case-study is of interest. The next three sections describe fieldwork methods, (main and supplementary) and their rationale. The fifth section reflects back on their implementation with a critical eye and the sixth section describes the method of analysis.

5.1 Research structure and object of inquiry

An issue foreshadowed in Chapter 4 in relation to the thesis having various sets of research objectives, was that the research had to balance the demand of making a contribution of use to the sponsoring authority, and a desire to make a contribution to more general theory. Here the mechanisms by this was seen to be achievable are outlined.

The need to provide something of use to the sponsoring authority and hence to work closely with it to provide something tailored to its circumstances did not inevitably exclude the possibility of work with/on other authorities. However, it did provide a unique access point to a particular authority's officers and members, with the added advantage of its Regeneration Division

incorporating a wide variety of activity in line with the range of regeneration programmes the area was eligible for (see Chapter 1). In turn, an intensive yet wide-reaching (inclusive) investigation was seen to be necessary on the basis of the authority's needs (Chapter 2) and the broader gaps in the literature (Chapter 3). In both cases, this was because there was an interest in missing detail or the rounded picture, whether in evaluative assessments or in relation to the local authority's positioning in the contemporary working environment (see Chapter 4). As Sayer (2000:21) suggests, an intensive design such as this is important to gain an understanding of contextualised patterns of action and experience elucidating 'substantial relations of connection' as opposed to a superficial picture and unexplained relations or 'formal relations of similarity'. This meant that a detailed case-study was justified, as a means of exploration (Yin, 1994). It also meant that it would not have been feasible to repeat the exercise elsewhere within the timescale and resources available. Indeed, there would also have been the difficulty of gaining equivalent access to another authority's officers without such an agreement in place.

However, although for these reasons the primary data was to be obtained from only one authority, an examination of the literature suggested that a certain amount of relevant piecemeal data was present within existing accounts, even though these did not explicitly or intentionally cover the questions of interest. On the basis of this, it was decided that the existing academic literature, together with the extensive 'grey' literature regarding local authority regeneration activity, could be 'mined' in an equivalent way as secondary data. This was seen to be a means to gain a clearer idea of whether similar pictures were evident elsewhere and hence provide support for the wider applicability of the conclusions to be made. Such an exercise would be supported by information sought by the second research question, which, as stated in Chapter 4, was designed to probe for shaping factors of all kinds. It was envisaged that such shaping factors would include those that could be seen to be more structural and likely to be common elsewhere, and those which were apparently more local, a division which comparison against the literature would help determine. This would help to contextualise the picture and apparent commonalities found elsewhere, with the anticipation that whilst

certain aspects of the picture revealed might be locally specific, aspects of 'transferability' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Yin, 1994) might be found, allowing for careful and more general arguments to be made. This analysis is presented in Chapter 7.

Beyond this broad structuring of the object of inquiry, there was also the issue of its more specific delimitation. This has in fact been determined and justified in Chapter 2 (though see also Chapter 4) as the authority's regeneration 'work'. This focus was seen to be a means to capture the full range of relevant 'performative action' which a focus on individual projects would miss, providing for the detail that was essential to respond to the research objectives. It was also important given the difficulty in assessing policies in any other way – the need to grasp policies in action. This focus informed the definition of the main and supplementary research methods, as is detailed in the following sections.

5.2 Main data-collection method: Qualitative interviewing

5.2.1 External and internal respondents

As discussed in Chapter 2, a key parameter of the alternative approach to evaluation proposed was that it should be inclusive of internal and external perspectives in order to access a comprehensive picture (see also, Greene, 2002). This was also important for the governance-related objectives, given the interest in multi-agency working relations and again the full picture. Indeed, various commentators on governance note the limitations of state-centric (internal) or governance-centric (external) accounts (e.g. Stoker, 2004; Jessop, 2004). As such, two sets of respondents were conceived of. Internally, these were those involved in the externally-oriented (as opposed to internal administration) regeneration work of the authority. Externally, the respondents conceived of were organisations also engaged in regeneration work in the area, with which it interacted in some way.

The internal range therefore included not just the officers based in the Regeneration Division, but also those from other divisions with an input to regeneration-related work, and elected members. This in turn was to

recognise, as discussed in Chapter 4, the broad constituency involved in regeneration activity in some way, due to its wide-ranging definition. Externally, the range included small community-based organisations, large public sector agencies, and everything in-between across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and thematically covering concerns from crime and disorder to enterprise support, social care to environmental improvement. The interest was in organised groups rather than businesses pursuing economic development grants or local people at the receiving end of projects/programmes. This was to some extent a form of sampling given that this tier was likely to be most accessible and able, along with elected members, to articulate more dispersed interests. Yet it was also because this was a key group of interest in its own right, given the objective to investigate multi-actor governance of which this was its manifestation locally, with its constituents at the receiving end of the authority's actions that might help or hinder their own regeneration effort.

In turn, this external/internal division was seen as a useful structuring device both for the fieldwork and for the analysis, serving as a check against introspection, even if the divide was not always relevant due to variation within the two or demonstrable reflexivity. In addition, it reflected a necessarily staged process, whereby relevant stakeholders beyond the authority had to be identified through discussions of officers' interactions with them, supported by subsequent snowballing. This constraint in fact provided a useful way in which to manage the fieldwork load through phasing.

5.2.2 Choice of interviewing as a method

Given the interest in detail explained above, a qualitative approach was indicated as part of an intensive research design. As discussed in Chapter 2, this was due to the limitations of statistics and the need to get 'behind' them to explore the more complex reality of multiple action-types, interactions and stimuli, differing expectations, experiences and visibilities. As such, initially consideration was given to exploring these issues indirectly through a series of focus groups that would discuss the problems with conventional evaluation

and performance measures (following the logic of Fontaine & Warin, 2001). The logic was that group discussions would induce a momentum that would yield information that might not otherwise be articulated, whilst allowing for a range of views to be captured (Morgan, 1997; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Bloor et al, 2001). However, this was rejected in favour of a more direct method of questioning, after discussion with the collaborating body supervisor suggested it was too obtuse and on reflection perhaps unlikely to get the level of basic detail required. It would also presume that respondents would see the same limitations to these conventional types of evaluative assessments as me, and would yield the kind of data missed by them.

In addition, there were concerns about group availability, and attendance and competition which could significantly influence the results obtained (Morgan, 1997; Bloor et al, 2001). As such, focus groups were not rejected entirely, but were decided to be inappropriate for the initial phase. Instead, the advantages of a more individualised and in-depth method were seen, overcoming the logistical problems of getting groups together and allowing for the exploration of key concepts in more detail, with breadth still being attainable through the range of respondents (see e.g. Morgan, 1997:10; Bloor et al, 2001). Such a method would also allow for the tailoring of questions and prompting according to respondents' revealed awareness and understanding of what was of interest to me, trying to make them feel as comfortable as possible: individual attention that would not be possible in a group setting (Morgan, 1997). The one technique that seemed to be able to meet these demands was qualitative interviewing.

Another concern however, was that respondents might overlook the detail I was interested in, particularly in an interview based on recall. As discussed in Chapter 2 much of their activity might be deemed insignificant in value terms due to convention or lack of awareness of its impacts. Yet, the desired detail was the whole range of activity or work undertaken. A possible solution to this problem seemed to be use of a diary to aid recall in an interview setting. This would have the advantage of the conversational flexibility and dynamic of an interview, allowing for probing and so on, (e.g. Kvale, 1996) whilst

overcoming the problems of unreliable recall, particularly of high frequency, low saliency events or of tacit knowledge (e.g. Johnson & Weller, 2002; Sudman, 2003 (1980)). This contrasts to the static nature of a pile of texts if diaries alone were asked for with no discussion of their contents, and would allow for a less detailed and onerous recording process, since the notes made would not necessarily have to be comprehensible by me.

It was subsequently decided that in order to secure co-operation of already hard-pressed officers, and to manage the amount of data that would be produced, a more selective recording process would be necessary. This involved the recording of types of activity rather than every single activity. For external respondents and those less centrally associated with regeneration moreover, it was decided that even a minimal recording process would be too much to ask for. This was because they had less to gain from the process and did not have the commitment to co-operate associated with being the commissioning body (which was the Regeneration Division). (For officers, in contrast, the selling point was that they would be better understood and valued, with the potential for realistic recommendations for improvement). It was decided that recall in these cases would therefore have to be supported by careful questioning, and the instigation of prior reflection through advance notification of questions and the research interests. It was also anticipated however that recall might be less of a problem because contact with the authority, or in the case of elected members and officers beyond the Regeneration Division, regeneration-related work, might be seen as more of an event rather than mundane reality.

In relation to the research objectives this method was therefore seen to be a key means to effect a different approach to evaluation of local authority regeneration initiative, testing it in terms of practicability and yield. In aiming to provide both an in-depth and wide-ranging perspective on the research questions, it also sought to be able to provide a detailed response to the substantive dimensions of the objectives, whilst being able to look beyond the particular case through the investigation of shaping factors (the second research question).

5.2.3 The initial interviewing phase: operational detail

Translating these ideas into action required the definition of several parameters. For the initial interviewing phase where officers in the Regeneration Division were the respondents, this was firstly, the length of time over which the 'search' for different activities (which might create value or inhibit it) would take place. It was decided, based on the previous observations of the variation in and cycles of activity, that one month would be an appropriate search period. The month decided on was October, which fitted with the PhD schedule but avoided peak holiday times. It was seen to be desirable to focus on the same month for all officers to enable a certain amount of triangulation between them where more than one officer was involved in an activity and logistically to make it easier to organise interviewing, reminders and so on. The next parameter to decide upon was an appropriate sample of the Regeneration Division for reasons of feasibility and in order to avoid overlap, whilst ensuring coverage of the range of roles, jobs and seniority within it. This was achieved by focusing on professional as opposed to administrative officers, given that these were more directly involved in regeneration. In turn, purposive sampling was carried out on the basis of awareness of job-titles/roles from the previous observation period, supported with advice from the collaborating body supervisors. Lastly, it was decided to interview respondents twice, once after two weeks, and once after the next two weeks, breaking the time up into manageable chunks so interviews would not be too long, and to enable the identification of any problems early on. The notes made by respondents were used as an *aide-memoire* in the interviews, which had a semi-structured format.

For the recording process officers were asked to note the different types of work they did, with whom and why. Work was defined as a particular activity in which officers make a contribution, or that helped them to make a contribution to regeneration, however indirect. So rather than 'attending meetings' or 'making telephone calls' the interest was in what they contributed or got out of such activities in relation to the regeneration process, for instance, negotiation, information exchange, co-ordination, learning,. This

was to make the data focused on the subject of interest: the types or things of 'value' being contributed or role being played, rather than to have to excavate this in the interview, thus saving time. (Value-inhibited in contrast, was instead covered by more general reflexive questions in the interviews, as was felt that to ask officers to record it could potentially antagonise them). In turn, asking respondents to record with whom they did such work was a means to draw out external stakeholders and map the governance landscape in which the authority was working. Lastly, asking officers to think about why they took particular actions aimed to be a means to unpack the factors that shaped their work as well as extending the picture of their regeneration role. Three types of 'why' were envisaged. Firstly, what they were reacting to, for example, a particular request and/or broader constraints and opportunities, and how these related to regeneration. Secondly, why them – why the action was taken by them and not others, or why external agencies looked to them rather than someone else. Thirdly, the ultimate reason why or the objective behind their action, and what was more immediately enabled or triggered by it.

A table was devised to support the recording process, prompting coverage of all these aspects. This was introduced via examples to the respondents at a briefing session, where respondents were also given sample questions to reflect on. Such advance briefing was important to explain the need for such preparatory work in relation to the rationale and aims of the research, and to ensure it was not seen as too onerous. To demonstrate its 'do-ability' in fact, a pilot exercise was undertaken with the help of two officers involved in regeneration work in other local authorities locally, which also tested the format and explanation required. The briefing session was also an opportunity to emphasise that the exercise was not in any way a form of policing and would not be passed onto managers except in an aggregated or anonymised form. This was important to reassure people, and encourage frank and open responses. Indeed, the provision of questions in advance of the interviews was also partly to reassure people, rather than make it seem like a test, whilst aiming to enable respondents to give more considered answers than if they were forced to think on their feet. Prior to this stage, managers had been briefed separately in a session emphasising the utility of the work for the

Division, in order to ensure their buy-in and support for their staff participating.

As envisaged in the design of this method, most interviews took the tables filled in by officers as the basis of a semi-structured discussion about the value they contributed, regeneration role they played and factors that shaped this. Some respondents used their existing diary records in this way instead however, whilst others had only used the table as a prompt to reflect on their work in preparation for the interview as they had not had time to fill it out. Beyond this, questions probed for non-typicality and overall patterns of significance to broaden the perspective and ensure that the delimitation of the time period and individual focus did not give an artificial picture. For instance, there was concern to consider the role of the authority as a whole - or the sum of the parts - to draw out most significant impetuses strategically, including those which might overshadow others with particular consequences.

Sample questions following this logic are presented in Figure 5 below. (Some explanatory notes are added in square brackets; additional probes/prompts are exemplified in round brackets). Interviews were semi-structured to ensure coverage of key topics and the use of question-types that the interviewees had been prepared for, demonstrating my preparedness and professionalism, whilst allowing divergence and more in-depth discussion as particular issues emerged (see e.g. Bernard, 1995; Patton, 2002). Overall, 28 Regeneration Division officers were interviewed, 20 of them twice (in a number of cases it was not possible to arrange two interviews so a consolidated version was devised).

Figure 5: Sample questions – Regeneration Division officers' interviews

1. *Could you start by taking me through the organisations and/or individuals you've had contact with through your work, (to a greater or lesser extent) in the past two weeks?*
2. *Has this two weeks been typical in this regard – are there others you would normally have contact with, or are some of those you've just listed not normally groups you'd have contact with? (Prompt – if don't normally have contact with them: Are they generally identified with regeneration work locally?)*
3. *Now could you take me through your tables - telling me about the types of work you've done in the last two weeks, with whom and why (If you've got lots, then please pick out the 5 you consider to be most significant, but still tell me what the others are)*

4. So how would you define regeneration as a process? What would you say are its key ingredients? [Necessary to contextualise the next question]

5. Reflecting on the past two weeks' work, and your definition, what are the main role/s that you think you've played in regeneration? What about the most important role? [Prompt: How does that fit with the work of others in regeneration – is it seen to be helpful/obstructive? How is it distinctive compared to what others do in regeneration?) [NB. Question 3 cf. question 5 allowed for the initial discussion not to be constrained by definition but for this to emerge; question 5 allowed them to evaluate the significance of activities within the bigger picture]

6. What are the main factors that have shaped this role – dictate what you do, how you do it, with whom? (Prompt: are there other things you'd do if you could?)

7. Has this past two weeks been fairly typical in the work you've done/not done?
[Remainder for second interview only – on the basis that in the second interview the first part was anticipated to be carried out more quickly, some activities already having been covered, leaving more time for further reflective questions; and to allow for checks in the form of more focused questions where answers to open-ended questions had missed what was of interest, whilst not wishing to constrain the viewpoint initially]

8. In the different activities that you're involved in, what are they key needs that you meet – what is your input in terms of added value to what's out there, to the raw materials?

9. How significant is it that you're based within the local authority for your work?

10. What is the thing that makes your work most difficult? If you wanted to explain to others what obstructs your work, what prevents you from achieving satisfactory outcomes, what would you say?

11. More generally from your observations of the authority at work, what role (or roles) do you think it plays overall in regeneration? (Prompt: how does it relate to the rest of the 'regeneration landscape' – or what others do in regeneration?) Would you distinguish certain parts of the authority from others in this characterisation? (Prompts: different divisions; members cf. officers; is it all good/bad?)

12. What are the main factors that have shaped this/these role(s)? Do you think this role (or roles) is peculiar to Blaenau Gwent or do other authorities locally work similarly? (Prompt: if so, why?)

13. How do you think it is regarded by other actors in the regeneration field and why? Would you distinguish certain parts of the authority from others in this characterisation? (Prompts: different divisions; members cf. officers) What about your work – is it regarded any differently? [NB sensitive question ordering] (Prompt – if yes, why?)

14. What, if anything could be changed to improve this/these perceptions? (Prompt – what are the overall constraints?)

15. That's all my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add that you haven't had the chance to say? [closing question to allow for unanticipated directions]

First stage interviews were recorded with permission on an unobtrusive micro-cassette recorder, unless the interviewee was judged to be uncomfortable with the interview (for instance, concerned that they might not have anything relevant to say). Such recording was made easier by the fact that I was provided with a dedicated base for the interviews, away from the main office cluster. This meant that it was usually quiet enough to record effectively and that it was sufficiently detached to enable interviewees to feel able to discuss some quite sensitive issues. Assurances were given once again however that any material used would be carefully anonymised, so as try to

gain as honest a picture as possible. By this stage, I was aware of a significant amount of politicking and associated sensitivity. Nonetheless, recordings were supplemented with notes in case of technological failure and to keep track of topics covered, making sure I was listening actively and maintaining control of the interview accordingly (see e.g. Patton, 2002: 383). Subsequently the recordings were selectively transcribed to minimise unnecessary labour. This involved clarifying and supplementing the notes made, drawing out the most relevant parts of the discussions, whilst taking care not to take quotations out of context.

5.2.4 Second phase interviews: operational detail

The second phase of interviews drew initially on the identification of relevant actors or organisations through the first phase. This yielded a wide range of external organisations, and a few elected members and officers in other divisions. The list of external organisations was subsequently extended through a certain amount of ongoing snowballing. A total of 26 interviews with different organisations, or relevant different departments of large organisations, were undertaken as result. The list of elected members in contrast was supplemented by a political and ward-type (geographical location and demographic) cross-section of the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. This seemed a reasonable sub-population from which to sample from, for, whilst arguably regeneration was an issue throughout the Borough, it was envisaged that not all members might identify themselves as involved in regeneration work unless they were involved in this committee. I briefed the whole Regeneration Scrutiny Committee before contacting the selected respondents, numbering 8 from the committee plus 3 others. In turn, the list of officers in other divisions/departments was supplemented by analysis of the authority's organisational structure, and knowledge of prominent recent themes in the regeneration agenda locally and in the professional press. All front-line and key strategic departments were represented in the final sample, which numbered 17.

Second phase interviews were again semi-structured, albeit without the tables as a starting point. However, they still moved from the specific to the more

general, and prior contact with sample questions aimed to prompt the recall of detail through prior reflection. For external interviewees, the questioning initially focused on specific contact with the authority, whether during recent weeks or that which was typical. It then moved on to consideration of their organisation's needs and expectations in relation to the authority, and whether or not it was meeting them. Interviewees were also asked to be reflexive, about the problems they might cause for the authority as well as vice versa. Where elected members were interviewed, the initial specific questions focused on what activities they were involved in related to regeneration or that involved contact with the Regeneration Division. Questions then moved on to what they saw to be their role in regeneration, whether it was distinct from officers' roles, what shaped it and so on. Lastly, in the case of officers from other departments, initial questions focused again on recent contact with the Regeneration Division, or activities they were involved in that they saw to be related to regeneration. In some cases, their role in specific projects was also discussed as an entry point to this (see section 5.3 below). Questions then probed what they saw to be their role in regeneration, factors that shaped it, and any unrealised potential they felt they had vis-à-vis a regeneration role. Then, in all cases, there were more summative questions, similar to those described above, about the observed overall role of the authority in regeneration, (albeit drawing distinctions within it) room for improvement and so on.

By this stage of the fieldwork, it was also possible to introduce questions that sought to 'test' the validity of certain common themes that were emerging, as indeed had been to some extent the case in the second interview with Regeneration Division officers. Such questions were introduced after interviewees had responded to more open-ended questions, and cued according to the themes raised. They were phrased so as to encourage engagement with the common themes that were emerging, allowing them to challenge and contradict them as well as develop them. In many cases, this prompted development or refinement of such points, and it was this that was of interest: simple agreement might have been just a case of trying to please the interviewer. In some cases however, interviewees did admit to not

understanding the point or not seeing its relevance, in which case it was not pursued, nor linked to their perspective. As such, the technique was associated more with building up rather than dismissing evidence.

Where it was deemed appropriate and useful, interviews were again recorded with permission, again with assurances as regards anonymity. This depended on the interview location being sufficiently quiet and private, and a judgement of whether interviewees seemed comfortable with the topic. Due to this, fewer interviews were recorded at this stage than in the first stage. Note-taking was therefore very important, even more so than before.

5.3 Supplementary Method: file note/project analysis

In order to benefit from approaching the subject somewhat differently, and from different ways of eliciting evidence, it was decided to select a small number of projects being undertaken by, or involving the authority, and to use the files held on them (containing notes, minutes, letters, funding applications and so on) as data (see e.g. Patton, 2002; Prior, 2003). It was envisaged that these could be interrogated to potentially provide more answers to the research questions. For example they might allow for more of a longitudinal view given that might still be neglected by the interviewees despite efforts to use the focus on recent work merely as an entry-point to a wider discussion. As with the detailed interviews, it was hoped that written records would help to make taken-for-granted processes and circumstances visible (Prior, 2003). It was also suggested that such data could be used to triangulate assertions made in non-project based interviewing and what was apparent through previous observations (see e.g. Patton, 2002: 306). Therefore, in relation to the research objectives, this method sought to extend the data available to answer the research questions, broadening the perspective to enable a more in-depth response, whilst contributing to methodological rigour. More specifically, in relation to the first set of objectives, it was the testing of another means of operationalising a different approach to evaluation.

Given the rationale outlined above for not focusing entirely on projects however, this was only seen to be a supplementary method. As such, it was

not a concern that the selection process should be extremely rigorous, as the validity of the thesis would not depend on it. Nonetheless, effort was made to incorporate projects involving different constituencies, themes, leadership, and funding, and at different stages of completion. Initially, on the basis of projects discussed in the interviews, 4 were selected, with the intention that more could be selected subsequently if necessary or worthwhile.

In actual fact, it was found that in most cases the files yielded no more than a few extra exemplifications of things of which I was already aware. In effect they were (albeit limited) catalogues of the kind of thing that I had been observing during the initial 3 month observation period. In a sense they provided useful corroboration to this material. However, generally, their detail was disappointing, thus this was not seen as a method worth pursuing beyond the four case-studies selected initially. Nonetheless, the files also indicated some further contacts to interview, both within the authority and beyond it, as they involved some different organisations. Indeed, this was anyway important given that it was largely only things of interest and use from the local authority perspective that were recorded and interpreted accordingly in the files available to me. This type of limitation is in fact noted by Prior, (2003) who recommends cross-referencing and exploring documents in a more dynamic and rounded way. Such interviews used the case-studies as starting points to discussions covering the wider topics of interest, whilst ensuring that there was some grounding in specific examples. In several cases, they also provided the opportunity to unpack the rather opaque meaning or significance of some of the things within the files. These included dense financial figures, why certain tasks were re-allocated to different people, and whether or not certain organisations were actually involved (a pattern reported similarly by Patton, 2002: 307).

5.4 Follow-up methods

The next stage of the research involved follow-up methods. These were designed to consolidate the data obtained from the main and supplementary methods described above, and the overall approach to evaluation advocated.

5.4.1 Officer feedback sessions

In the initial briefing to Regeneration Division officers, I had promised to feedback to them the outside view and an overall picture. I also suggested that at the same time they could inform me of things that they felt I had misconstrued, and discuss with me potential suggestions for improvements to assess their practicality and pool alternative ideas. As mentioned in Chapter 2, various authors refer to this type of technique as a means of verification or further exploration and clarification (e.g. Shadish et al, 1991; Bernard, 1995; Morgan, 1997; Patton, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003). There were also various rationales for undertaking feedback sessions in relation to making the evaluation process and product useful, again as described in Chapter 2. These rationales were derived from various schools of evaluation, the lessons from which were combined in defining an alternative approach, rather than it taking an orthodox stance. For example, from a constructivist viewpoint, it would be a mechanism to achieve what they describe as enlightenment as to how things may be seen otherwise (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1989). From the collaborative perspective, it is the type of mechanism seen to help to ensure 'buy-in' to recommendations (e.g. Smith, 1981; Sanderson, 2001; Davis et al, 2001; Lang, 2001). Indeed, it seemed that the officers who were to participate in the diary-based research found this an attractive prospect for these sorts of reasons, helping to secure their co-operation (see Patton, 2002: 325; Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003). Thus, in relation to the research objectives this method was justifiable as part and parcel of the investigation of the benefits and feasibility of doing evaluation differently, whilst also related to a concern for rigour.

Having completed the main fieldwork, I therefore proceeded to undertake an initial analysis of the data, using thematic codes (see below) and counting as a short-hand means to present the main findings. I then arranged to be present at the Regeneration Division offices for two sessions at which officers could drop in and out of. Whilst more structured focus groups would have been desirable, I was not convinced they were feasible in the timescale I was working to, if at all. I felt I had already asked a lot of such officers anyway, and that it would be difficult to negotiate any more lengthy input. Given the

anticipated 'dropping in and out' of officers, I prepared a written summary of the analysis together with some possible 'off the top of my head' suggestions as to how things might be improved. These were not exactly 'off the top of my head' as they had been ideas that I had formulated over the course of the interview period in response to common themes that I had been hearing. However, it was useful to present the suggestions as such to indicate that they were open to alteration rather than set in stone. The written summary was circulated prior to the sessions, although many had not read it in advance of the sessions. Therefore, at the sessions officers were invited to skim read whichever sections they wished and to comment or raise things for discussion as they saw fit.

In the event, the turnout was disappointing, (c.15 people cf. 28 interviewed) despite various email reminders and exhortation of participants returning to their desks to invite other colleagues to join in. I also had a virtual discussion via email with one officer who had been unable to attend either session. Generally it seemed that interest had moved on, and that perhaps, for some at least, given what had been revealed in the interviews, the next fire was being fought. Nonetheless, there was some utility in the exercise, despite the lack of time available. (I invited further discussion by email or telephone if officers wished, but no one took up this offer.)

Firstly, in terms of validation, a typical response was: "*most of it is no great surprise*". What was implied was that to some extent the knowledge of even external perspectives was already present within the Division, but for one reason or another, it was not being articulated, at least not to any great effect. On the other hand, this kind of statement also suggested that much of the summary made sense to them: they could understand the experiences and expectations articulated through it, even if they had not been aware of them. Indeed, another officer stated this directly in response to one of the suggestions I had made: it made sense to them but was not something they had considered to be an issue before. S/he went onto describe a recent scenario where my suggestion would have fitted nicely. Overall, the response of officers in these feedback sessions seemed to boost the validity of the

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conclusions being drawn. This supported the informal checking that had been undertaken during the interviews (as discussed above) through which significant impetuses were discerned.

Secondly, the feedback sessions provided the opportunity to address a slight rumbling of concern from one significant officer that, in short, was it not '*all hearsay*'? The dismissal implied by this statement did not in fact fit with the main thrust of responses in these sessions which suggested that the material was seen to be valid. The main point to emphasise though was that even if statements were based on rumour rather than direct experience, this might still be important, because rumour and perceptions could clearly affect working relationships and processes (cf. e.g. Kelly & Swindell, 2002). Nonetheless, I pointed out, as discussed in relation to epistemology in Chapter 2, that effort had been made to ensure that interviewees' points were grounded in examples, or backed up with examples from the files, and that the frequency with which themes came up in different interviews suggested they were relevant (following e.g. Krueger, 1998; Rowe, 2006). This meant that I was in a reasonable position to judge what was and was not hearsay and to construct a coherent 'true' story. This follows the realist epistemological stance explained in Chapter 2 that emphasises the need for the researcher to exercise such judgement. I also explained that accounts are often contested, with their ultimate right- or wrong-ness being a matter of political opinion which was not what was being assessed: it was the surrounding processes that were of interest. As such I was not necessarily interested in verifying the precise substance of accusations, but what caused them to be made. In turn though, a point was raised about 'sample size' to which the response, following Patton, (2002: 245) was that this is irrelevant in qualitative research. Instead, the issue was whether or not there had been careful purposive sampling given the trade-off between depth and breadth. Clearly, as described above this had indeed been a key concern in the research design.

Lastly, the comments made by officers enabled me to hone the suggestions I had to make. In some cases, they suggested details to be added to them. In one or two cases, I decided to drop suggestions as off the mark, or due to being

apprised of developments that had superseded them. It was more or less impossible however to respond to one officer's request that my final suggestions should refer to examples of good practice within the authority highlighted by external interviewees. For, whilst interviewees had been able to pinpoint how the authority was meeting their needs this might not be in a systematic, guaranteed way. Also discussions of expectations often revealed additional needs, rather than examples of how they were being met with good practice. Equally, there was a risk that to discuss specific examples would compromise anonymity.

Overall, whilst this method had some value particularly from the perspective of rounding off the alternative approach to evaluation, it was not deemed sufficiently worthwhile relative to the effort involved to repeat it with the second stage interviewees, particularly as there was not the same level of obligation to them. Other follow-up methods in respect of these respondents were considered, for example, asking for feedback individually on a summary report via email, but there was some confusion over the ownership of the data given its politically sensitive nature and concern about having already asked a lot of them time-wise (cf. e.g. Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003). Equally, as detailed above, by the time the second stage interviews were undertaken there was a sufficient idea of the emergent picture for this to be fed into the interviews themselves, allowing for a form of ongoing 'checking'. It was also felt that there were sufficient checks to ensure clarity of understanding within each interview, and that to check everything again would be to excessively privilege the respondents' views. Such a privileging would imply that full coherence could be gained without the intervention of the researcher. Yet, reiterating the point made above, I could see by this stage that this was unlikely, as suggested by realist evaluators (e.g. Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

5.4.2 'Mining' the grey literature

As suggested above, another important supplementary method was to interrogate the 'grey' literature as a source of secondary data (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The main scope of this was defined as:-

1. Audit Commission Best Value reports explicitly assessing local authority regeneration functions (2002-6: 15 in all);

2. I&DeA 'Knowledge' bulletins aimed at practitioners (emailed weekly) that indexed various reports and gave 'good practice' case-studies (2005);

3. Regeneration & Renewal, Local Government Chronicle, and New Start magazines (the professional press) covering the peak fieldwork period (October 2004-April 2005); and,

4. Evaluation reports (published between 2001 and 2006) into UK regeneration programmes and projects referring to local authority input, easily accessible on the internet or through local authority and university contacts (13 in all);

5. Reports from the Lyons Inquiry into local government, notably Lyons (2006).

[Sampling evident was based on what seemed to be reasonable timescales to ensure equivalence with the fieldwork in the case-study authority, whilst ensuring there was a manageable amount/reasonable range of examples from each source]

The technique used to interrogate this was very simple: skim-reading of the documents looking for specific examples of local authority input into regeneration-related activity and, for comparative purposes, the circumstances around them ('causes' or 'shaping factors'). Whilst clearly not ideal in the selective picture given of each authority, the material derived in this way was usable.

The other piece of relevant grey literature used at this stage was the unpublished[1] Audit Commission in Wales' 'Improvement Study' of the

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[1] This is unpublished, apparently in an attempt to distance the Commission's work from that of its English equivalent under the Best Value and Corporate Performance Assessment regime which has a punitive reputation seen to antagonise local authorities (Laffin, 2004; Beecham, 2006). A copy was however readily given to me by officers to aid my research.

Regeneration Division in Blaenau Gwent, a study that had been undertaken a few months before I commenced my interviews. This was used as a point of direct comparison with this alternative approach to evaluative assessment, to consolidate the arguments made about its adequacy and particularly the appropriateness of recommendations enabled, compared to the deficiencies of conventional approaches. It should be noted, that though it relates to the Welsh Programme for Improvement, the assessment and report format seems to bear considerable resemblance to the English versions – Best Value Inspection Reports. This suggested that it was a suitable comparative example of a conventional evaluative assessment.

5.5 Reflection/discussion

This section offers a number of avenues of discussion through which potential weaknesses of the methodology described above are examined and put into perspective. Here, Rossman & Rallis' (2003:34) depiction of *'research as learning'* appears particularly pertinent, as does their observation that *'the data-gathering process is not linear, clear or rigid'* (p. 191). As such, it is the cumulative effectiveness of the research (and analysis) process that logically should be of most concern, rather than the individual interview or particular method. Deficiencies in one area can to some extent be compensated for elsewhere through ongoing appraisal and design modification. It follows that different parts of the methodology should aim to be complementary and synergistic on a rolling basis. Indeed, this was to some extent the case, as the supplementary methods could be used to help consolidate the material derived from the interviews and earlier observations.

Yet it is true to say that interviews were conceived of as the main data source, and, given the overall sparsity of information in the files and the need to follow it up with further interviews, were all the more important. This warrants a more detailed examination. Generally, the planned format and the deviations from it (e.g. not all officer-interviewees using the tabular record sheet as anticipated) worked well, although in some cases interviewees had more to say than there was time for at the detailed stage, requiring careful deployment of summary questions. Conversely, the initial coverage of the

detail of day-to-day work/contact was a useful counterbalance to the predominance of 'power-politicking' as a topic in the later stages of many interviews. Whilst this was clearly significant within the authority, in some ways it was felt to overshadow the other things that were of interest: it was all the more important therefore that the earlier detailed and specific questions enabled insights into other shaping factors. The method also worked well in bringing out things that a number of interviewees (both internal and external) suggested were usually masked by conventional performance measurement or that were not usually sought in conventional evaluations. In addition, asking about interviewees' definitions of regeneration revealed that respondents were talking about the same kind of thing, for whilst they might focus on a particular aspect, most saw it as broad and somewhat amorphous, albeit with various foci ultimately fitting together in a jigsaw type of way. Indeed, it is perhaps fair to say that there seemed more disagreement about how to prioritise and who should have access to funding rather than the type of activity that was valid. These are debates that might occur within any field, although perhaps to a greater extent where the funding is tight compared to the problem as in the case Blaenau Gwent.

Perhaps somewhat inevitably though, on an individual level, some interviews were better than others in terms of the detail obtained and its relevance. Nonetheless, having two interviews with Regeneration Division officers helped mitigate this in allowing for a 'second chance'. Moreover, over the course of the process, my interviewing skill and confidence improved, such that I was able to deploy various techniques to encourage 'minimisers', (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2002:210) and those with a predilection for the simple, as well as to ensure that more sensitive topics were brought out. In this regard, 'phased assertion' (Bernard, 1995: 219) or letting people know that they were not the sole source of sensitive information, proved particularly useful. Indeed, this was also a technique that could be used to 'fast-forward' otherwise laboured prompting which reduced the overall coverage of the interview (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2002) as well as being a means to check or add to such prior information. Yet, to some degree, following Sayer (2000) it also had to be accepted that different people would have different levels of

awareness about the more complicated 'layers' of reality, so there was only so much probing and prompting could achieve, the rest would have to be inferred. It appeared that for quite a few respondents much of what I was interested in was part of a taken-for-granted, immoveable reality that they simply accepted rather than deconstructed.

However, arguably such techniques and probing brought with them the risk that my interpretation of the situation would be imposed, drowning out the genuine views of respondents. This made it important to ensure adequate time was given to open-ended questions, and to allowing respondents to summarise the key points of the picture they were painting. On the other hand, Foddy (1993:10) counsels any researcher to remember that '*question-answer situations are more complex than have generally been accepted*' and that interviews always result in a certain amount imposition of the researcher's ideas on the respondent's frame of reference (p. 192). To this, given the lack of viable alternative means to elicit this type of information, the only response would seem to be humility, whilst trying one's best within the time and resources available to minimise such direction (cf. Dey, 1993: 15). Nonetheless, Miller & Glassner (1997:103) suggest that interviewees in their experience, '*will tell us, given the chance, which of our interests and formulations make sense and non-sense to them*'. Given that I did make attempts of this sort to manage the problem, perhaps therefore it should not be over-stated.

Another potential issue I was warned of given the amount of time I had spent with the authority and its officers, was being inculcated with the authority perspective, such that I became '*one of them*' rather than being able to see otherwise (cf. Biott & Cook, 2000). A number of points can be made here. Firstly, when I came to the analysis, enough time had passed to enable me to step back and look at it with a critical distance compared with when I was submerged within the data-collecting phase. Secondly, following the reasoning described in Chapter 2, I deliberately planned in any case to overcome this potential problem by actively seeking out as many external stakeholder perspectives as possible. Indeed, whilst it was easy to sympathise

with the authority officers in the interviews I did with them, I felt just as much drawn the other way in many interviews with these external respondents. This seemed to achieve the balance required.

In addition, importantly, the research questions and objectives reflected a commitment to both confronting the authority with different views, and to presenting a fairer view of what good the authority was contributing under the constraints it operates. In response to this, the line of questioning in interviews (encouraging them to be reflexive and 'see the other side') sought to openly present this duality to the participants rather than confuse them or to lead them to believe all resultant recommendations would suit them alone (cf. concerns raised by Kushner, 2002). At some points in fact, I felt that both internally and externally I was playing the role of the therapist in allowing people to express their frustrations with the authority and its ways of working, whilst also encouraging them to some extent to see otherwise. It seemed that both sets of respondents accepted me as a fairly neutral party. Such a therapeutic function could indeed be seen to be another benefit of approaching the evaluation of local authority regeneration initiative differently, as long as issues identified were somehow dealt with. This would seem to echo Elsbach's (1999) observation about the potential therapeutic functionality of organisational research. As a form of mediation it could also provide some substitute for a lack of direct dialogue between the two parties: that is, the ideal described in Chapter 2.

Arguing from another stance, the concern about seduction is in a sense anyway misplaced, for it assumes that the authority has a uniform viewpoint, which it did not. Indeed, this was a basic premise reflected in the research objectives, and translated into methodological attention to 'unpacking' the different constituent parts of the authority involved in regeneration. In turn, it was evident that not only did different people not necessarily sing from the same hymn-sheet, but also that many officers and one or two members exhibited an ability to see the authority critically and from the perspective of those on the receiving end of their (individual or collective) actions. Certainly, they did not present a uniformly unproblematic view of its work, nor did they

blame everything on others. Such variation was also the case externally. Respondents, perhaps due to variations in the intensity of contact with the authority had some quite different experiences and views of its regeneration role. Overall, it was clear that the analysis would need to attend to the complexity indicated.

Beyond these concerns the main challenge was in ensuring that sufficient information was obtained to respond to both sets of research objectives. That is, although complementary, in practice it was found that both required slightly different probes, which was difficult in the time available. Nonetheless, once again having a 'second chance' interview helped, and when it came to the later stage singular interviews, the most effective variants of questions were used. Ultimately, however, perhaps if purely the governance angle had been focused on, some further insights could have been obtained and vice versa. As with more conventional evaluations, the tradeoffs in what was covered would seem to be unavoidable (see e.g. Ho, 2003, and the discussion of selectivity in Chapter 2). Nonetheless sufficient information of an appropriate quality was obtained to present a viable more general argument, (after all, coded material collated in tables amounted to 340 pages) whilst pointing to the desirability of follow-up comparative work in other authorities.

Therefore, overall, whilst acknowledging these ever-present conundrums of research, it can be concluded that the data collected presented a reasonable basis for careful analysis.

5.6 Analysis

As indicated above, analysis began early-on in the data collection period in order that questions could be modified where they were not yielding adequate data. This was mainly a question of adding supplementary probes or summary questions after more open-ended questions.

Subsequently, the analysis strategy used in order to make the data manageable with a view to higher-order analysis, (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as well as to

initiate the analysis by looking for patterns, (Bernard, 1995) was coding of common themes. In order to keep as close to the data as possible, and to minimise researcher-manipulation, such codes were largely derived from interviewees' own words. Nonetheless, it was necessary in some cases to devise a label where I saw themes hidden in less concise or incisive statements, not least through the eyes of the preceding theoretical and observation-based analysis described in Chapter 4. This is in line with the realist approach described above that suggests that the researcher will inevitably need to act as something of a mediator to get to the data that is needed, given the limited perspective of any one respondent (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Sanderson, 2000). Equally, again as discussed earlier, data were often only made meaningful through (unavoidable) conceptual/theoretical lenses (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Sayer, 1992; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Indeed, here it is worth noting that this is one reason that the analysis presented in Chapters 6 and 7 is not replete with extensive direct quotations.

Codes were devised under 9 headings, seen as categories to be saturated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or the basis of a 'coding tree' (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Krueger, 1998). These are listed in Figure 6.

Figure 6: List of coding categories

1. Activities of (or points of contact with) officers/members
2. Summary role/value contribution of officers/members
3. Summary local authority role
4. Shaping factors - individual
5. Shaping factors - authority
6. Problems experienced inhibiting value
7. Expectations
8. Conundrums faced
9. Authority-level diagnosis (as to what could be improved)

These categories reflected the way the interview questions, in response to the research objectives, had sought to probe the research questions related to the local authority's role, shaping factors and potential improvements. As such, the first question was covered by categories 1 to 3 and to some extent 6 and 7; the second by categories 4 and 5 and to some extent 6, 7, 8 and 9; the third by categories 6, 7 and 9 whilst bearing in mind 4, 5 and 8. This reflects the way

the methods sought to unpack the whole whilst also making sure to attend to overall patterns of significance at the aggregate level.

Coding proceeded iteratively, with more codes emerging as interview notes were coded with existing codes, requiring a return to interviews already coded until no more could be squeezed out. Once I had done this, I also went through the interview scripts once more, reviewing my use of codes to ensure it was justified in each case. This involved checking that there was sufficient evidence for it such as grounding in examples; that the statement was logically consistent with those elsewhere in the interview; and that the text/notes had been interpreted within their context and so on. The whole process was done by hand, partly to maximise flexibility, for example, to allow for multiple coding of certain statements and to link particular parts of statements with codes and so on. However, coding by hand was also more practicable than using CAQDAS software in light of the time it would take to wade through the complicated instructions and tutorials. Time was short because, in order to ensure that the data were still seen to be valid, it was important to produce a report of the analysis for the authority relatively quickly.

Through this coding process it became clear which codes were more prominent, which was a useful starting point for the analysis. However, other less prominent codes were also important in providing for more nuanced detail. Connections (e.g. gap-filling – Warren, 2002, confirmation - Huxham, 2003) were also made with earlier observations, the material derived from the file notes and the limited insights from the feedback sessions. Together this enabled the construction of a rich case-study picture that could be interpreted through and against the framework derived through the prior analysis of the literature and earlier observations, as described in Chapters 2 and 3. In doing so, it could also be compared and contrasted with the limited picture of the situation elsewhere discernible from the grey and academic literature. This literature was organised similarly with codes to facilitate the process.

Overall therefore, this method of analysis aimed to ensure the rigour of *'systematic interaction with data'* (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996:191) and a *'comprehensive examination of evidence'* (ibid.), whilst also extending the perspective with a view to understanding the applicability of the findings elsewhere. This is in line with the more general, rather than geographically-limited, nature of the research objectives.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has explained in detail how the different research objectives were accommodated within the research. This essential structure is of an intensive case-study design complemented by careful mining and deployment of unexploited secondary data. The use of secondary data in this way enabled the expansion of the field of vision beyond the case-study authority. The intensiveness in contrast was to achieve a detailed, comprehensive picture of the local authority's role, shaping factors and potential areas of improvement. This detail could be deployed to respond to both sets of research objectives.

In order to obtain this detail, a focus on qualitative interviewing as a method was judged to be the only viable option. Through such interviewing, a wide range of internal and external perspectives were accessed, and the research questions were interrogated on a number of levels. A supplementary method which involved analysing file notes to answer the research questions was less successful, but used as a springboard for further interviews. This was one means of ensuring, given the importance of detail, adequate recall and exemplification. In this regard, the main interviews involved the careful preparation of interviewees, and questioning that probed and checked statements.

Another supplementary method was undertaken with the Regeneration Division, as the main potential users of the research. This involved feedback sessions which 'tested' the analysis for usability in various dimensions. This testing supported the other ways in which material had been obtained to answer the research questions, whilst also being part of the response to the evaluation-oriented research objectives.

Finally, the wealth of material gained through these processes was coded to derive common themes around which to construct the picture required. Different categories were designed to reflect the various ways of answering the research questions. The next two chapters present the results of this process and the reflection needed to construct a coherent picture.

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This chapter responds to the first set of research objectives, as summarised in Chapter 4: '*to demonstrate a [theoretical and practical] rationale for a different approach to evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative*'. It seeks to do so by showing what a different approach to the evaluative assessment of such activity reveals and considering the significance of this information. As suggested in Chapter 2, it thus provides what might be considered as the missing detail to the evaluative assessment picture, both in terms of breadth and depth, and qualitative nuances. However, it does not attempt to provide a whole picture; rather it focuses on what insights can be gained and why they are important in relation to the functionality of evaluative assessment.

The three research questions outlined in Chapter 4 are used as a framework around which to organise these insights. In order to avoid inundating the reader and distraction from the key points to be made, the detail or basis to the analysis is largely confined to a series of appendices. Some such detail will also be found in Chapter 7 due to the same material being used as a basis for its analysis. Nonetheless, where possible, depending on the material used, some indicative quotations are provided at the start of subsections in order to ground the analysis. These are presented in shaded boxes.

6.1 What is the role of the local authority in the regeneration process?

In Chapter 4's explanation of the research questions it was anticipated that discussions about the authority's role in regeneration would elicit both substantive and evaluative information. That is, they would provide detail about what that the authority did that was significant and perhaps distinctive in regeneration terms, and whether this was seen to be productive or obstructive or somewhere in-between. The following section is structured around four headings referring to different types of insights which can be seen
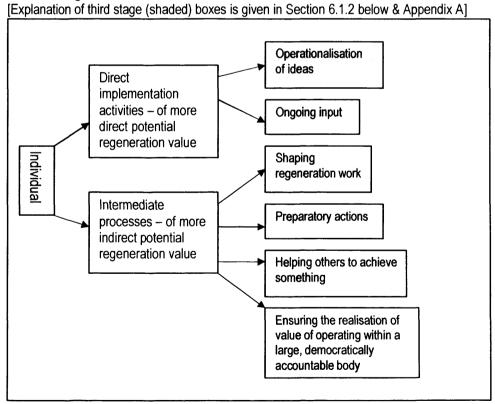
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to relate to several of the coding categories reported in Chapter 5[1]. These concern (1) the extent of regeneration activity, (2) the detail of regeneration activity, (3) pinpointed value and problems and (4) the strategic picture. Such different dimensions shed light on the limitations of various types of evaluative assessment.

6.1.1 Regeneration work in the round: the wide range of relevant 'performative action'

A key interest in undertaking the fieldwork was in ascertaining that the local authority's regeneration work, or relevant 'performative action', covered a much wider range of activity than is portrayed by the project or policy focus of many evaluations used to make judgements about the authority and its action. As a starting point therefore, Figure 7 provides a summary of the extent of regeneration-related activity undertaken by the authority, as revealed by the observations, interviews and file notes.

Figure 7: Schematic Representation of individual activity types ('performative action') related to regeneration

[Explanation of third stage (shaded) boxes is given in Section 6.1.2 below & Appendix A]

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[1] Activities of (or points of contact with) officers/members; summary role/value contribution of officers/members; summary local authority role; problems experienced inhibiting value; authority-level diagnosis

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It (Figure 7) organises such activity into categories to present the range of it and hence the range of value that may be contributed or inhibited, both directly and indirectly. The figure also shows that the regeneration role of the authority is played out by officers and members without regard for intra-organisational boundaries, as many activities are undertaken both by officers and members, and by officers within and beyond the Regeneration Division.

Additionally Figure 7 indicates a range of activities that may not be tied to particular policies, projects and programmes, and which in many cases are reliant on subsequent events and actions in order to be made worthwhile. Whilst there is the expected activity related to the direct implementation and full delivery of clear manifestations of regeneration (physical, economic, community-based) in-house, there is also a range of broader, more intermediate activities. These either relate to the early planning of schemes (internal or external to the authority) rather than to their detailed implementation or are broader contextual activities not necessarily relating to specific schemes. However, they are activities that are connected with regeneration because they relate to the achievement of particular types of regeneration outcomes by ensuring they are possible. For instance, they may help to ensure that regeneration interventions are vested with democratic legitimacy, or help to overcome hurdles in the way of the regeneration work of others. In many cases this indicates how the regeneration work of officers and members is intrinsically linked to the authority's fundamental nature as a political, democratic and publicly accountable body in a hierarchical relationship with others.

Summary and implications

Overall the findings promote a wide, multidimensional concept of the regeneration role that is being enacted, and hence what may be of value, for these activities are clearly undertaken on the basis that they are in some way important or necessary. Such a concept indicates considerable effort which clearly deserves attention. This extends far beyond that acknowledged conventionally by evaluative assessments that deploy narrow yardsticks of

value. Without such attention and resultant awareness, it is clear that decision-making could unintentionally compromise the value contributed by for instance, de-prioritising relevant activities. Alternatively, with a narrow concept of what counts as regeneration activity (or of value to regeneration), officers might also be judged to be lazy or under-deployed. As one external interviewee perceptively commented, *"it's [the authority's] driving an awful lot of things which it may not get the credit for"*.

6.1.2 Underlying detail

Beneath this simple representation lies a myriad of detail. For, each of the 6 third-stage boxes in Figure 7 summarises numerous other activities. In the cases of officers, these include research, administration, persuasion, negotiation, liaison, co-ordination, organisation, troubleshooting, engagement, thinking, and giving advice. In the case of elected members similarly, activities include negotiation, engagement, advocacy, scrutiny and giving advice. For instance, the data suggest that the operationalisation of ideas could variously involve (in the case of officers):

- the seeking of expert advice from appropriate specialists;
- meetings to decide on project targets;
- negotiations with interest groups and different departments on issues holding up project progress (members are also sometimes involved here in *"damping down the 'anti' [opposition-camp]"*);
- briefing the Executive Committee members to ensure their support; tendering for specialist aspects of necessary works;
- overseeing contract compliance;
- submitting claims;
- preparing scheme guidance; and
- organising promotional material to market a new scheme.

In turn, there was a whole range of activities undertaken by officers associated with obtaining funding. These included the researching of options/qualification criteria; bid-writing; form-filling; informal 'selling' to assessors; answering assessors' queries; negotiation of conditions; and completion of monitoring returns (ensuring the continuation of funding). Furthermore, there were various activities associated with building on ideas

already in place, for example, planning new target groups and how to access them; finding new funding; assessing buildings for new premises; organising the redeployment of staff; and liaising with staff from other divisions to tie in their objectives.

Extensive effort is also evident under the more indirect categories. For instance, preparing for action largely involved undertaking activities to enhance capacity and information dissemination, analysis and collation. Activities to enhance capacity in turn included those relating to recruitment and delegation, and activities to enhance officers' knowledge and skill-base or range of forseeably useful contacts. There was reference to, for example:

- seeking advice from Human Resources;
- short-listing interviewees;
- drawing up interview questions;
- interviewing candidates;
- briefing colleagues to handover responsibilities to them;
- organising training for staff;
- attendance at a best-practice exhibition – to gain ideas and for networking;
- seeking internal and external advice on specialist subjects;
- internet research as to new grant schemes, legislation, good practice etc.;
- attendance at a meeting of all equivalent officers in Gwent - enabling mutual learning;
- attendance of a certain forum because it provides an ear up to a particular agency;
- attendance of specialist training courses;
- attendance at a briefing re the opportunities afforded by a particular scheme; and
- staff support sessions for team members.

Information collation, analysis and dissemination likewise consisted of an extensive range of informal and formal processes on the part of officers and members. These included mechanisms of engagement, scrutiny, planning, publicity, liaison and debate.

Summary and implications

Overall even with this limited exemplification, (further detail is provided in Appendix A) this section demonstrates that in approaching evaluative assessment in this way, it is possible to see the true breadth of work and activities that are juggled by officers and members in pursuit of regeneration. It also serves to emphasise that, the substantive regeneration role of the authority is essentially much more involved than is recognised by a narrow focus on whether intended end-points are achieved. It indicates the reality of the multiple stages and activities that each aspect entails, sometimes concurrently, and sometimes in the form of a relay between different officers and between members and officers. It also suggests the need for officers in particular to be multi-skilled and versatile in order to move regeneration objectives forward. In terms of utility for the local authority itself therefore, this information points to how performance indicators that focus on outcome or outputs do them no favours in terms of acknowledgement of their hard work. Equally it suggests that to devise and measure indicators of performance that capture such activity would be rather difficult if not impossible, given its varied and qualitative nature.

6.1.3 Wading through the detail: pin-pointing significant value and problems

As well as acknowledging the importance of this detail it was also necessary to extract from it the most significant aspects, thus honing the substantive picture and moving towards a more evaluative view of what the positive and negative aspects were. This was done by asking officers and elected members what was their key or summary contribution to regeneration. In addition, the external agencies were asked what was the most significant thing that officers and members brought to the table in relation to their work. This revealed the most valuable contributions and particular problem areas which stood in the way of more positive contributions.

6.1.3a Pin-pointing significant value

"There's been advice and support from officers [that we've found valuable?" [External interviewee]

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[2] As explained in Chapter 5, not all interviews were recorded and those that were were only selectively transcribed. This means that often only short quotations are available. Square

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"We're reliant on Blaenau Gwent to deliver our aims and objectives locally" [External interviewee]

"[My key contribution is] driving, maintaining momentum, keeping the foot down" [Officer]

"[My key contribution is] I suppose to rattle cages really. I can take a problem and turn it into a concept and a project for addressing the problem" [Officer]

"[As elected members, our key contribution is that] we bring to officers the real concerns of those we represent"

On the positive side, the most significant contributions were seen to be either the conveyance of particular 'commodities' or particular 'relational services'. Such 'commodities' included imagination, expertise, delivery capacity, legitimacy/justification, consistency, transparency, support, services, permissions and funding. 'Relational services' in contrast is a term that captures upfront or behind-the-scenes (often interstitial) connection-making. Under this heading were contributions including partnership- working, making and sustaining; advocacy – carrying through agendas; facilitation – oiling the wheels or being an important part of bigger things; intermediation or sign-posting; maintaining momentum; strategic linkage of agendas/considerations; co-ordination; and outreach[3]. Members saw their contribution lying predominantly within the limited range of outreach, advocacy, intermediation, legitimation and the giving of advice. Officers in contrast, whilst outlining equivalent roles, overall described a larger range, reflecting greater variation and specialisation in their job-descriptions. However, considerable commonality was still exhibited between officers, with the majority describing their key contribution as advocacy, expertise, facilitation, intermediation, partnership and/or strategic linkage.

From an external perspective, there was some indication that this level of detail was less visible, perhaps buried under descriptions such as delivery/implementation (under this could fall advocacy, strategic linkage, ensuring momentum, co-ordination). On the other hand, the associated pattern of fewer prominent value-related themes could also be seen to indicate there

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brackets are therefore used frequently to make such short quotations make more sense, reflecting the context they were said in, as well as to ensure anonymity.

[3] Appendix B provides more detail and exemplification of these pin-pointed value contributions which correspond to summary codes, and a more detailed discussion is also the basis of Chapter 7

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being greater diversity and less overlap in what was seen to be of most value or of significance amongst this group of interviewees, reflecting the broad audience canvassed. For instance, outreach and legitimation may only be important to organisations lacking capacity in these areas which was not the case across the board. Yet such activities were observably quite labour intensive, which explains their prominence amongst officers' depictions of their key roles. Despite these differences in the observational standpoint however, it is notable that generally there was a reasonable correspondence between officers' contributions highlighted externally, and those reported internally, particularly as regards partnership, expertise, intermediation and facilitation.

6.1.3b Pinpointing problems and value-inhibited[4]

"I can never divorce the political from the mechanism at all...'I know that pressure is always brought to bear, and I think...that's a huge constraint on officers doing their job properly... you can have officers who will agree with you, will go away, will say, 'we'll arrange that', and you get a phone call saying 'can't do that" [External interviewee]
"I find it's disjointed, very disjointed at the moment, what goes on at corporate level and officer level" [Internal interviewee]
"there can always be a tendency with a bureaucratic organisation like a local authority where they will actually forget the mutual interest of other sorts of partners" [External interviewee]
"One week [we] sit down with x [funders] and say, oh yes we can do this, this and this, [but] we don't know that Corus is going to shut, or some other thing's going to come along or somebody's going to suggest x – you know ...those sort of things suck up your time don't they...and we just can't deliver" [Internal interviewee]
"Sometimes I feel that, [x-team] is indirectly responsible to a number of different people and sometimes they have different agendas and are pulling in different directions [leaving me unclear as to where I stand]" [External interviewee]

In contrast, members were seen in a much more negative light externally than could be discerned from their own observations. Many external interviewees were hard pushed to ascribe any positive contributions to members. Whilst this negativity might be seen to over-shadow the value members do contribute, it also points to what is seen to be a key source of 'value-obstruction': members misdirecting their influence or simply not being 'up to the job'. Many interviewees referred to ongoing disruption to agreed courses of action as a result of members' infighting and personal agendas. In addition,

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[4] Appendix C provides a comprehensive overview of the detail relevant to this section

many interviewees detailed constraints imposed on their work by members' generally defensive attitude, Some saw that there was a reluctance to even listen to external ideas. There was also reference to the extra work caused by members finding it difficult to balance between a corporate and ward-based or individual view, or take on board new ideas.

Indeed this situation apparently had a knock-on effect, such that many external interviewees described officers' roles to be underplayed as a consequence, which corresponds to officers' own accounts. Many officers also summarised their contributions to regeneration as being underplayed. A major difficulty they faced in making their contributions more positive was apparently unchecked politicking and its equivalent ripple effects over their work. Politics was described at best as requiring careful handling, and at worse as skewing projects and programmes and eroding policy intentions and coherence. Yet members exhibited little or no self-reflexivity in this regard.

Whilst such a lack of self-reflexivity might be seen as the root of the problem, it may also be the case that members see their actions as perfectly rational and justifiable in relation to their local commitments. This takes us back to the fundamental nature of the authority discussed in the Section 6.1.1: that it is political as well as administrative, which cause contested leadership. Nonetheless, the prominence of council-based politicking could be seen to be the flip-side of another widely reported problem. Apparently many local people were not interested in getting involved in regeneration, suggesting that there was a vacuum to be filled by elected members' activity including active scrutiny. Hence though the stance taken by elected members may be contested[5], it may still be an important and valuable part of the regeneration role being played. The problem may actually be therefore, the way that this interface is managed.

Beyond this, other problem areas can be identified by further unpacking the depiction of officers' key contribution as 'underplayed', both in their own and

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[5] Discussed further in Chapter 7

external accounts. For instance, both officers and external interviewees felt that value was obstructed in the course of their work by inadequate strategy or strategic awareness applied to their workloads. This was described in a number of ways. For officers, it was seen to be manifest in capacity problems derived from managerial short-termism, such that for example, in the light of recent pressure from the Audit Commission, reporting had become repetitive and excessive relative to use which impeded more productive work. Indeed, this also suggests that activity associated with such accountability (portrayed in Section 6.1.1) was not as valuable as it could be. Equally, many interviewees referred to a culture of money-chasing and the submission of unrealistic bids, rather than a more strategic approach. This was described as causing over-stretched capacity. As a consequence, officers were unable to give all their responsibilities the necessary attention, creating knock-on problems that then had to be rectified, distracting further from more directly productive activity. Indeed, many officers described the problem of a lack of strategic prioritisation and distribution of activities and projects forcing them to make illogical and often ad hoc choices between them. In addition, there was reference to the failure of other parts of the authority to recognise the need to buy-in to particular agendas and projects to enable their go-ahead or to enable strategic links to be made to enhance their value. This apparent lack of strategic awareness (as to the way the regeneration role is enacted across departmental boundaries) caused delays and prevented the achievement of synergies.

For external interviewees, the concern was that officers were not sufficiently aware of their 'gate-keeping' potential; a situation to some extent borne-out by officers' descriptions of lack of buy-in, and a relative lack of acknowledgement of the significance of gate-keeping as a contribution they made[6]. The described impact ranged from failure to address decision-making delays and their impacts on external-agencies' work, to the failure to see the value in reviewing existing operations or policies across the authority to

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[6] (though it is recognised that this could also reflect the fact that a relatively small range of officers were in such a position of power, or that it was dispersed to less significant levels between officers, so they might not see it as their key contribution)

enhance responsiveness to regeneration needs articulated by them. There was also concern that strategy-making was insufficiently valued, again, apparently supported by the fact that no officers saw this as their key contribution to regeneration. As a consequence of its lacking, there was felt to be unnecessary uncertainty around the responsibility for, and likely direction of, decision-making. This was in turn described to make external agencies' regeneration work more difficult and slow.

Yet, returning to what officers described as factors inhibiting their potential contribution, and the range and detail of the authority's regeneration role, it is possible to pick out another more fundamental problem. This is of officers having to juggle numerous different activities, obligations and internal and external interests. Ultimately there is only so far that finite capacity can be stretched, and competing priorities rationalised. This means that some things might inevitably fall by the wayside, particularly as officers were required to be able to react to certain unpredictable demands. This appeared to be the case with the timeliness with which agendas for meetings were sent out, and the failure to pass on information to people who had missed particular meetings. These were raised as problems by external interviewees, who explained that this undermined their productive participation in partnerships. The root problem here can be seen to be how this situation was handled by the officers concerned, who needed to devise a means to avoid hurried oversight of courtesies and to explain the tradeoffs involved in the course of their juggling act. This was a more complicated but less malign situation than was conceived of by interviewees.

Indeed, this problem of communication could also be observed in relation to the other dimension to this balancing act: certain courses of action could be considered unjustifiable. For instance, a review of activities to support one external agency's regeneration objectives might compromise, as one officer described, the obligation to the population of the Borough as a whole. Conversely, the upper hand held by national funders could make the implementation of more locally-relevant agendas difficult. Yet, though such competing rationalities might be obvious internally, externally this balancing

act was seen to be very opaque. External agencies were apparently not made aware of the factors involved in decisions, or where they stood. This made their activity-planning difficult due to uncertainty, and had led to all kinds of conspiracy theories, frustration and a general mistrust of the authority. The knock-on effect was that some agencies were beginning to question their willingness to engage in regeneration activity in partnership with the authority, even though this could ultimately be beneficial. Once again this indicates the need for careful management of the situation the authority finds itself in.

Summary and implications

Overall the insights to be gained from this analysis confirm the idea that much of the value contributed by the authority to regeneration is intangible and intermediate as well as quite diffuse. In turn, a picture also emerges of the authority providing a range of quite specialised input to the regeneration arena or process. The significance of this input lies in the ability of the authority to do particular activities, as well as the importance of them in their own right. Such specialised input is however clearly wide-ranging and relative to numerous audiences. This highlights the importance of a strategic grip on it, and associated interfaces and tradeoffs. These may not be visible problem areas, but are clearly of significance, causing frustration and potentially impacting on working relations. Indeed, it is clear that solving problems from officers' perspectives alone, whilst potentially improving things for external agencies, may still leave problems from their (the external agencies') perspective. Equally however, these insights guards against casting problems simply. They demonstrate that due to the inherent complexity of the authority's task, to be solvable, problems may have to be re-cast.

Relating these insights to the problematisation of conventional local authority evaluative assessment in Chapter 2, reiterates the problem of policy and project evaluations assessing things out of context and hence being artificial and clumsy. Providing for awareness of this broader picture, as well as identifying specific significant contributions and ascertaining the nature of problems in this way therefore should allow for more sensitive decision-

making than that based on simplistic evaluative assessments which have tested for preconceived yardsticks of value, or are based on shallow criticisms. The associated data also demonstrate that this alternative approach can be used to encourage reflexivity on the part of officers as to problems they may be causing or value they may be obstructing. Concurrently however, the analysis suggests that it is important to acknowledge that not all problems are within officers' or members' control.

6.1.4 The strategic picture

Moving beyond the disaggregate picture, the previous exercise was repeated in relation to the authority as a whole, to draw out the features that seemed to indicate its regeneration role in the big or strategic picture. This is a level of analysis that helps overcome some of the narrowness of view of certain observations in previous sections. Once again both an evaluative and substantive picture is discernible and outlined here whilst expanded on in Chapter 7 and Appendix D.

6.1.4a Positive distinctiveness

"[It's playing] a crucial role, a very crucial role, the, pivotal role" [External interviewee]
"The Borough Council is the biggest driving force for change we have, because it's got the biggest resources" [External interviewee]
"The majority of regeneration initiatives seem to come from our people, who look to exploit opportunities and funding" [Officer interviewee]
"They cover all the issues that need to be considered when you're changing an area" [External interviewee]
"[Its role is in] leadership, profile, setting the vision, clarifying the key objectives and actions" [Officer interviewee]

The insights to be gained here may be summarised as the authority having a distinctive role in various dimensions. Firstly, there is the dimension of weightiness, influence or might, in which the authority ranked highly, occupying a prominent positioning within the regeneration arena relative to all other actors. It was indicated to be an important partner, and to contribute vitality, risk-taking, leadership and an inevitable regeneration role related to its service delivery capacity and major-employer status. Secondly, there is the role-type related to a position in the horizontal dimension - the inter-agency division of labour and specialist expertise within the field of governance. The authority's notable specialisms visible at this level were leverage and 'big-

stuff', that is, the hard, physical interventions relating to infrastructure as opposed to the more social side of regeneration. Thirdly there is the role-type related to a particular positioning in the vertical dimension – the hierarchical division of labour and responsibility. Here important themes were strategic guidance, guided community leadership, local advocacy and acting as a conduit of money and ideas.

Summary and implications

Altogether this helps to consolidate a picture of the authority as an important piece within a jigsaw of regeneration activity in quite subtle ways and along multiple dimensions. Once again therefore, compared to narrower evaluative assessments, this type of insight should help to ensure that decision-making is fully informed on the sources of existing value and which aspects are most important. More broadly this might help to give the authority confidence that it continues to be a valuable and distinctive part of the regeneration arena, despite the apparent threat of increasing numbers of alternative actors as indicated in Chapter 1. This provides a more positive base from which to plan action than one that would otherwise be informed by a concept of threat.

6.1.4b Overarching negativity: the underlying dimensions of underperformance[7]

"at the moment I don't think we're having the level of impact we should be having" [Officer interviewee]
"It's a very reactive thing at the moment, and it's still funding led, as far as I can see, it hasn't come through yet that they have a clear vision for the area" [External interviewee]
"[there's been the attitude that] regeneration is their work and no one else should touch it" [External interviewee]
"Some of the towns in Blaenau Gwent shouldn't really exist – there's no reason for them to exist. And what we're doing is trying to create reasons for them to exist...and sometimes we're not actually creating the reasons for them to exist, we're just creating them" [Officer interviewee]

However, the approach also revealed that certain problems were significant enough to overshadow these positive strategic contributions: the authority as a whole's regeneration role was also summarised by many as 'underplayed'. Here we see the combined results of more individual problems conflicting with the more positive themes evident at this level such as 'strategic guidance', 'partnership', 'facilitator' and 'vital'. For instance, the negativity associated with members' actions, and the implied failure to adequately

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[7] Appendix D provides supporting detail

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manage the political/professional interface, apparently results in the authority's regeneration role being described as a base for 'power politics' rather than 'real' or professionally-rational strategically-informed regeneration. Similarly, poor communication can be seen to be conceived as arrogance on behalf of the authority in its regeneration role, whilst lack of strategic awareness was apparently manifest in what was described as defensiveness rather than the embracing of positive distinctiveness described above. In respect of these negative descriptions though, an additional factor seems to have been concern that there was a lack of open inclusion of different perspectives on an even footing in discussions where decisions were made. This was indicated in the response to questions about what would make the most improvement to the authority's regeneration role, which suggested that root problems included 'insularity' and an 'imbalanced approach' as well as 'inertia', 'superficiality/myopia' and 'disjointedness'.

However, the themes of superficiality/myopia and disjointedness were also often described in relation to the authority's tendency towards 'money-chasing' on the basis of availability rather than strategic objectives. The key issue here seems not necessarily to be a deliberate rejection of a more strategic approach with all its advantages, but rather the realities of external funding dependency and a wide-ranging regeneration task of significant magnitude. As such, it is understandable that the authority was interested in trying to access whatever money possible, being able to do so on the basis of it being relatively easy to come up with a justifiable case to access almost any regeneration-related funding pot. Indeed, an alternative explanation for 'money-chasing' is that strategies relating to local needs were in place, but external funding criteria and lack of alternative funds forced them to be compromised.

Unfortunately, this situation also seems to have been associated with the apparent ease with which politicians could manipulate the destination of such expenditure to suit their own personal agendas. Following the logic of the previous paragraph, political debate and active scrutiny would seem to be an important way of effecting necessary prioritisation given finite funding.

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Indeed, personal agendas may help further wider regeneration objectives given the breadth of these. However, visible political involvement seems to have given some the impression that 'real' regeneration objectives had been displaced (see Figure 8). Many described regeneration activity as being undertaken by the authority for the sake of it – so that the 'powers that be' were *"seen to be doing something"* – it may be an *"end in itself"* amidst power-politicking.

Figure 8: Example derived from various interviews of apparent displacement of 'real' regeneration objectives by politics, and alternative justifications suggesting otherwise

To many interviewees, an apparently sudden 'rush' of projects in one area of the authority reflected the enormous power of one of the ward councillors, who was well-known inside the council and beyond it. That the projects fell under his specialist portfolio served to exacerbate such suspicions. Several also pointed out that projects elsewhere, which seemed to be more in line with strategic priorities being promoted by the Wales Spatial Plan, had not yet been finished (or were being ignored): the 'queue' seemed to have been jumped. Moreover, the need for replacement facilities, which is what the projects in part consisted of, was questioned. Such interpretations were clearly affecting (or were symptomatic and reinforcing of) people's level of trust of and confidence in the authority. Yet subsequent interviews revealed other justification logics. The new facilities would bolster the town centre regeneration effort, by being located there as opposed to at the edge of the centre in less accessible positions. It was the 'turn' of this area having been neglected in recent years, and it needed radical change and significant investment to have any chance of regenerating. The member in question had put serious thought into the issues and the area's potential, having more time to do this than officers with multiple responsibilities. In turn he had come up with various ideas and presented then to officers who had agreed their logicality. Such radical change for this local economy happened to point to a more service-sector orientation, aspects of which fall under his portfolio. Subsequently he had sought to use his position constructively to speed things up, not deviously, but by acting as a champion, providing the drive, following things through to maintain momentum where they might otherwise come to an inexplicable halt. And so on. Significantly, those interviewees promulgating these justification logics were apparently unaware of the other accounts in circulation, just as the proponents of these were disinclined to see otherwise: a breakdown in communication was indicated with apparently corrosive effects in the field of inter-agency relations.

As Figure 8 also suggests, the situation was not helped by the lack of transparency and inclusion and a minimal interest in research and monitoring, although this was explicable by a lack of capacity (including funding) to undertake such research. Indeed, some also saw this depiction of the authority's role to be confirmed by an apparent predilection for highly visible, physical regeneration projects which were seen to have only superficial impacts, but appeared impressive. That there was ongoing regeneration need despite extensive public investment of this sort was seen to confirm such beliefs. This is despite the fact that both are explicable in other ways. Physical projects can be argued to be part of an appropriate division of labour

according to the authority's particular capacity, whilst a lack of so-called successful regeneration can be related to the depth of problems and the fact that the area's geography is not in its favour. Overall, the situation seems to be indicative of tensions relating to the exercise and uneven distribution of power in the field of regeneration. Within this, opposing sides can deploy different logics of prioritisation and justification, although such differing logics may not ultimately be mutually exclusive. Nonetheless, the net result of this convergence of circumstances seemed to be that the authority's legitimacy was being called into question. This was apparently compromising working and funding relationships, making recruitment and the maintenance of good morale more difficult, and clouding judgements. This therefore emphasises the need to manage impressions in the light of these pressures and the deep-rooted suspicion revealed.

In addition, this perspective suggests a different problem. This is that there seemed to be a muddled specification of what the ultimate objectives of regeneration activity within the area were, meaning spending priorities were unclear. Yet this seems to take us back to the conundrum briefly referred to in Chapter 1, of past failures and inter-linked problems resulting in a necessarily very wide definition of what counts as regeneration but there being limited money to spend on it. Such money requires rationing, but given the wide definition of need, this is likely to be very difficult and contested. In turn, the perspective raises important questions about the realism of regeneration objectives in the context of countervailing political, economic and geographic forces and limited overall funding. This raises the possibility that it may be politicians higher up that are playing political games and buying off potential unrest. They could perhaps be giving local politicians money to 'play with' as compensation for the failure of higher-level government to tackle broader regional inequalities reinforced by public sector spending (e.g. the M4 corridor/Cardiff focus) or for impotence in face of globalisation (e.g. cheaper manufacturing costs in China and Eastern Europe). In this view, having to take decisions relating to the disbursement of regeneration funding at least provides local politicians with some influence, supporting the functioning of

local democracy, and acknowledging local people's attachment to place (their unwillingness or inability to move to more economically viable areas).

Summary and implications

Aspects detracting from the authority's positive contribution to regeneration can therefore be seen to be constructed in a complex combination of factors. Some of these appear to be within the authority's control, but it seems that it was not necessarily aware of them, and others were beyond its control. Indeed, presenting the summary negative depictions of the authority's role to officers in the feedback sessions seemed to have a certain amount of 'shock value'. One officer summed it up by stated that, *"it's pretty damning"* reflecting in turn that they had not realised how bad things had got in aggregate. It opened their eyes to the significance of disaggregate actions when added up with other factors, particularly realities that they were aware of but others might not be. The depictions and this analysis showed that even processes that are imagined or exaggerated by others may have significant impacts. This again highlights the value of a comprehensive and open-minded approach that examines processes at different levels and from different perspectives, seeking to pin-point problems rather than accepting what is apparently problematic as an actual problem, or the root problem. This should provide a better basis to deal with criticism.

The insights gained in this way add up to a very different picture than one that criticises on the basis of simplistic managerial norms or superficial accusations, which tend to present the regeneration process as apolitical and quite straightforward. Such conventional approaches suggest that it is relatively easy for an authority to make a more positive contribution to regeneration, whereas these insights suggest it is actually quite complicated. This indicates the unfairness of judgements associated with these conventional approaches, as well as suggesting they are likely to be somewhat dead-ended in what they can resolve. In turn this unfairness helps to explain the perceived threat of local government inspection, particularly given far-reaching powers of intervention if it is seen that local authorities are not up to scratch.

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6.1.4c Mixed aspects, contestation and ambiguity

"It's only certain elements [that are problematic]" [External interviewee]

"It's not that we're not doing the right things, it's just that we're not doing as much of the right things as we could if we weren't actually being forced to do the wrong things at the same time" [Officer interviewee]

"It's pretty Stalinist, but that's not necessarily a criticism – it is to some extent effective, [and there] doesn't seem to be the community appetite for change" [External interviewee]

"You can see new ideas creeping in, new faces, people with perhaps a bit more go" [External interviewee]

Another strategic view of the authority's regeneration role that was apparent from this approach was that it was mixed rather than unambiguously positive or negative. This has already in part been indicated by the fact that both negative and positive characterisations of the authority were apparent. Unpacking the mixed characterisation further we start from the observation made above, that the authority was playing to different audiences with different views about what was most beneficial in regeneration terms. Thus, the same action could be viewed differently by different observers with different preferences. It was clear that to some people for example, bureaucracy was seen to be a necessary ingredient of valuable public accountability; to others however, it meant inflexibility in the face of changing market conditions that bring regeneration opportunities (e.g. business opportunities which can be supported by grants). Similarly, for the authority to be good at doing 'big stuff' may be an effective division of labour to some, but for others, it indicated an unhealthy, old-fashioned and short-sighted obsession with one part of regeneration rather than a more holistic approach. Likewise, for some, the depiction of the authority's regeneration role as 'working in partnership' indicated a benevolent spreading of its capabilities; for others, it seemed to be an admission of its inadequacy – that it had no regeneration role independent of others.

Equally it was possible to envisage how certain significant disaggregate contributions could clash with each other at the level of experience, competing for effect and potentially diminishing the value/positive impact of one or the other. For example, gate-keeping and advocacy might not sit comfortably with support and partnership-working. Indeed, some officers

noted that this was also the case with different dimensions of regeneration work which the authority was involved in, for instance, revitalising town centres and bringing in new businesses, including retailers, who may prefer non-town-centre locations. A slight variation on this could be seen in the trade-off, given finite resourcing, between maintaining an established project and establishing new ones: not everything could be fully provided for.

Alternatively, the clash could be in competing interpretations of a particular task or role, and hence contested leadership of such work. That is, for example, though officers and members potentially complemented each other's work through focusing on different aspects of equivalent activities, there was also potential for tension: each variously accused the other of stepping beyond their remit with detrimental effects. Some members, for instance, referred to officers' ideas needing to be 'reined in' by them as they were too far removed from 'real' local needs. More commonly, many officers referred to the problem of the unchecked influence of members' pet agendas which they saw as an unhelpful combination of disproportionate personal obsessions, unrealistic local demands and a lack of regard for the bigger picture.

Another element of ambiguity that arises therefore is that positives may not be clearly divided from negatives. This was also evident in coding for the theme describing the authority's regeneration role as 'dominant'. Some described dominance as relating to important leadership and ensuring action where there might otherwise be none, but it could equally appear as arrogance. In fact, many interviewees referred to both these positives and the negative in the same breath, making a more appropriate coding, 'dominant/arrogant'. This was similarly the case in referring to the benefits of local advocacy by members, which though an important part of democratic representation, could easily slide into excessively petty, insular parochialism or personal politicking. In both cases this seems to be a very fine line for the authority and its constituent parts to tread.

Unpacking the mixed authority's characterisation of the authority's role in another way, made visible internal variations and helped to acknowledge

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counter-trends and more effectively pin-point problems. It reveals that whilst there may be generally applicable negative characterisations of the authority's regeneration role, amidst this, in the same areas, there may be glimmers of good practice and change. Discussions with external interviewees suggested that in their experience, some areas of the authority's work were superior to that of other local authorities. In these cases there was reference to comparatively exemplary partnership-working, involvement and general collaboration, as well as attitudinal stances: responsiveness and being proactive. Clearly this contrasts to the more fundamental diagnosis discussed above. These observations reinforce the picture of what is particularly valued by external bodies. They also suggested that there was a positive base to work on in terms of further improvements, indicating that individuals can successfully fight against the institutional practices and forces that usually act to construct more negative roles. In addition, such variance seems to corroborate the evaluative distinction made between officers and members, since it was officers with whom such external agencies usually had most direct contact. Significantly, another dimension of this variance was that, perhaps inevitably, officers outside the Regeneration Division were seen to be less committed to taking a positive regeneration role, even though they could potentially have a significant influence on it. This seems to corroborate the earlier discussion of the problem of a lack of strategic awareness within the authority.

Summary and implications

Overall therefore, this section demonstrates the value of this type of open-ended approach in revealing a more nuanced picture. Such a picture can evidently help to pinpoint areas for remedial action or areas of good practice on which to build. It also emphasises the fine line that is constantly trodden in the course of carving out positive regeneration roles, reiterating the need for strategic awareness as well as the difficulty of the authority's job. To ignore certain aspects of such ambiguity would clearly involve taking a political stance asserting a preference for a particular orientation and line of action as opposed to recognising inherent complexity and contestation. This recasts conventional evaluative assessments, particularly those that make a judgement

about the overall 'path' an authority is on and recommendations to orient it further towards this path, suggesting they can only ever be of limited functionality for the local authority given its other audiences. Evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration activity is thereby shown to be inherently infused with politics – incorporating or taking a stance amidst wider debates and different viewpoints. Though such assessment can attempt to ensure that all sides are equally represented it does not necessarily reconcile them. The process is no panacea for difficult decision-making and tightrope walking.

6.2 Shaping factors affecting the local authority role in regeneration

The second research question, 'what are the factors that shape this [regeneration] role?' was designed firstly to identify the influences that shape officers' work. It aimed to move beyond a narrow view associated with the presumption of singular responsibility for implementing policy or projects. In acknowledging the work of elected members in relation to regeneration, it also sought to do the same for them, rather than taking it to be solely determined by responsiveness to constituents. Secondly, the concern was to make any evaluative judgements fairer through a better understanding of the working context. This would also be important to make appropriate suggestions to bring about positive changes. In turn, approaching the question at the more strategic levels brings a different range of factors into view, although they may partly be related to individuals' patterns of work. Much of this ground has already been covered in the analysis of how the regeneration role of the authority is constructed at the aggregate level, and in the identification of problems at the disaggregate level. The main objective here therefore is to provide a clear distillation of these factors. This is done in two parts: the individual level and the strategic level.

6.2.1 The individual working context

> "We as [elected] members, serve our communities"
>
> "The way my role develops mirrors the development of x-groups [that I work alongside]" [Officer interviewee]
>
> "[My role is primarily shaped by] the rules, regulations and processes of WEFO [Welsh European Funding Office], bidding rounds, match funding issues" [Officer interviewee]

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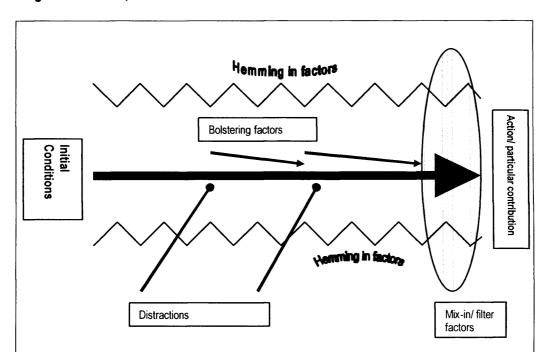
"[My work is affected by] the inability to use resources in a more flexible way – the [fact that] resources beneath you can't always be chopped and changed" [Officer interviewee]

"My job is fire-fighting in many respects" [Officer interviewee]

"The strength of individuals as politicians can be quite influential in how projects actually come out of that – a very strong influence like this will determine whether projects in a particular area are on or off" [Officer interviewee]

This section examines factors that were considered to affect the type of work done or the type of contribution made to regeneration, the nature of it (degree of ease) and its relative or distinctive value. Figure 9 presents a schematic representation of the different types of factors described by members and officers and how they can be seen to interact. This is unpacked below, though supplementary relevant supporting detail is found in Appendix E.

Figure 9: Schematic representation of the influence of shaping factors on individuals' regeneration work, and contribution.

Foundation factors or initial conditions feed into, or prompt those factors dictating the overall 'forward' trajectory or impetus, which affects what is done or the role/particular contribution made. This trajectory is sometimes pushed off course by certain distractions, but may be bolstered by other interventions; in turn it is hemmed in and constrained by various influences that affects its potential; and is 'mixed' in or 'filtered' by other factors that affect how the work is undertaken, its precise shape and value.

Firstly, there were initial conditions or foundation factors on which individuals' work were constructed and justified. These included: needs related to external capacity deficiencies; requirements of external higher-level

bodies specified in legislation and agreed work-plans; and priorities or orientation related to strategy and strategic considerations. Another basic determinant was available resources and capacity, which could impact on what was considered possible or necessary, as well as determining relative capabilities. For elected members in contrast, only the impact of external capacity was noted in this regard.

In turn, action built on such conditions seemed to be driven by related responsibility and/or responsiveness. However, responsibility and responsiveness were often only broad parameters or objectives for the activities undertaken, roles assumed and contributions made. Both members and officers felt they had a large degree of freedom as to how they interpreted and translated into action their responsibilities, except where they related to due process, although they might have to bear certain risks in doing so. From another perspective however, the scope of the action relating to individuals' responsibility was also apparently enhanced by the associated expertise, power and profile.

There was also significant reference to distractions from such action-based trajectories. In the case of members, their main trajectory seemed in fact to be essentially punctuated in that responding on a reactive basis to constituents was seen to be routine and a necessary component to their representative responsibility. For officers, in contrast, such interruption tended to be seen as annoying, disrupting the principal activity that they were concerned with, even if it often reflected their multiple responsibilities. These covered areas such as team-management, public accountability and enforcement, as well as the maintenance of earlier projects, and in the case of some officers, being the authority's expert adviser on certain issues. Conversely, various factors were viewed to 'bolster' their actions, including championing by members, support from like-minded colleagues and the legitimacy gained by working in a local authority environment.

Despite having freedoms, in the case of officers, there were references to constraints on initiative, particularly in terms of what they could actually

implement or how it had to be approached. Interestingly, members did not refer to any constraints. This seemed to reflect on the one hand their power within the authority and on the other, their work being largely one-step removed from the more challenging implementation phase. For officers, there were both externally- and internally- derived constraints. External constraints related to various forms of higher-level dependency. Internal constraints included strict budgetary allocations and procedures, skill and capacity availability and opportunities afforded by others. There was also reference to the subtle impact of low morale related to resulting feelings of impotence, to politicking, and to employment conditions such as short-term contracts. This was said to have started to affect the enthusiasm and energy with which Regeneration Division officers approached their tasks, presumably affecting their potential.

Finally, the precise shape and nature of activity and contributions were apparently affected by strategic, professional and political considerations in some cases, and in others by factors that made the work harder or easier. Taking for example, strategic considerations, these ranged from the spread of activity within the authority area (equity), to the fit with the 'big picture' in the interests of efficacy. In contrast, political considerations, for members were ward issues in the knowledge that they would be held to account at election time. For officers they were pressures relating to elected members' agendas and the need to get their (members') agreement to progress certain actions. In turn, factors that were said to make the job 'harder' or delayed the realisation of value ranged from onerous due process requirements through to poor communication, uncertainty about external agency commitment (funding decisions etc) and unexpected contingencies to be overcome. Conversely, factors that made the work easier, perhaps also enabling more beneficial outcomes, included good working relations and experience in managing the political dimension.

Summary and implications

Overall therefore, this approach shows that shaping factors at the individual level range from specified responsibilities, to the nature of the external

environment in which they sit, as well as factors that relate to the nature of the working environment and processes. The resulting picture once again emphasises the immensely complicated juggling act undertaken by officers (and to some degree, members) whilst being buffeted from numerous directions. This would seem to considerably problematise simple methods of measuring performance such as performance indicators in the field of regeneration. Even if performance is considered as work rather than ultimate impact, numerous intervening factors would seem to influence it such that is in no way a straightforward, specifiable feat. Indeed, the analysis also suggests that what might start out as being responsive to a particular need may become something considerably different due to these intervening factors. Therefore something that is justified as a response to a particular need may not be seen as such by the initial individual or agency in question. Once again this emphasises the importance of communicating these circumstances to external audiences, particularly those over which there is little control; whilst also indicating the complex task of making fair evaluative judgements and recommending improvements.

6.2.2 The strategic/comparative view: factors influencing the regeneration role/contribution of the authority as a whole

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"Because of the size of the organisation, I think that we are probably best placed to provide... strategic direction"

"There's a certain amount that has to be done by a central authority" [External interviewee]

"We haven't got much funding so we're dependent on having good relations with the WDA" [Officer interviewee]

"Borough [Council] people aren't skilled communicators" [External interviewee]

"[The Advisory Board is] causing the Borough to make knee jerk reactions" - "there's a domino effect...nothing gets done for days and days" [External interviewee]

"Because we're at the deprived end, we have to do more of the stimulating ourselves...the demand isn't there, therefore we have to stimulate the demand, and so therefore we've got to do a lot more of the work." [Officer interviewee]

"[The authority's got a hard job because] people that want jobs have jobs - the rest are on long-term incapacity benefit" [External interviewee]

At the aggregate level, we see a more comparative view of these factors. That is, answering the question 'what are the factors that shape this [regeneration] role?' at the strategic level involves unearthing comparative reference points. These are other points in time, (past/future) other local authorities or

expectations, and other agencies involved in regeneration. Again, relevant supporting material is found in Appendix E.

Taking firstly the positive strategic role, significant and distinctive contributions were evidently enabled by distinctiveness relative to other agencies working in the regeneration field, albeit in many cases enhanced by the availability of Objective One funding. This distinctiveness included the 'relative place' of the authority. This was denoted by its unique over-arching remit and dedicated local focus as opposed to broader regional or national responsibility and being by far the key service provider. It was also enhanced by a relative lack of private sector interest in the area. Moreover hierarchically the authority had distinctive responsibilities vested in it (e.g. planning) and particular leverage exerted over it through funding relationships and Audit Commission policing. Such leverage encouraged it to work in particular ways, for instance, in partnership and with community involvement. Looking at this positioning from the bottom-up again suggested the shaping factor of relative capacity compared to other organisations. Indeed, some also observed the particular distinctiveness of being in the public eye and having a high profile locally. This was regarded as being influential in the need to be seen to be doing certain things, or to act in certain ways.

Conversely, the distinctive position of the local authority within the governing hierarchy could also be seen to impact more negatively on its role at the strategic level. It resulted in limits to its freedom and extent of action by restricting what it could get funding for, and imposing procedures it had to follow. The authority was also placed within a situation of having to satisfy multiple audiences, and of contested priorities, given limited overall capacity and struggles over who has the initiative. This is a shaping factor which implies that some contestation and negativity associated with the local authority's regeneration initiative is inevitable. Nonetheless, it also seemed to be the case that there was a certain amount of ambiguity in this situation that meant image management was important. Such image management needed to be attuned to contestation, differential visibilities (or interpretations of what was visible) and expectations, but currently it was felt to be neglected. This

was seen to be a key factor impacting negatively on the authority's regeneration role. Indeed, there was some indication that external observers were more likely to observe political will as a significant malign shaping factor than officers, suggesting (as discussed in Section 6.1.3b) that they were less aware of the full circumstances to the situation. Equally, officers were less likely than external observers to see 'attitudes apparent' as a significant shaping factor and seemed to exhibit more self-belief in their relative capacities in contrast to external criticisms of their under-deployment. This appeared to suggest a tendency to leave these factors to impact negatively on working relationships rather than to take the effort to discover and manage them effectively.

There were also factors which were seen to be more peculiar to the authority. These were described in comparison to other authorities or compared to expectations related to a probably imagined ideal. As indicated above, here, key themes of negative strategic significance were firstly 'old habits' and 'old school capacity' and a poor public interface. Then there were themes that described inadequate strategy and working relations, the isolation of the Regeneration Division and general lack of co-ordination and jealous and competitive attitudes blocking collaborative effort. Prominent in members' perspectives was, in addition, insufficient internal resource prioritisation. Interestingly however, officers seemed more inclined to accept this as a fact of life. There was also reference to the unusual negative influence of the Advisory Board that had been imposed on the authority by the Audit Commission, which was said to be prompting knee-jerk reactions that were interfering with a more stable and considered regeneration role. Nonetheless, in line with depictions of the authority's role as mixed, some interviewees suggested that the authority's regeneration role was more positively affected by factors that set it aside from other authorities. These included it having *"very good staff"*, good formal and informal working relations, trust and understanding (facilitated by the smallness of the authority area), and a good level of commitment to regeneration.

Quite a number of interviewees also saw the authority as having a harder 'lot' than many authorities however, making it more difficult to have a more positive regeneration role rather than a superficial one or dominant/arrogant one. Again, as suggested in the discussion of the strategic-level negativity factors referred to here included the physical and geographical context/legacy. This was however, apparently more visible to internal interviewees, who were perhaps more aware of the implications of such factors. More widely acknowledged was the idea that the authority had particular problems similar to those of other local authorities in the Valleys, over aspects of local culture such as high levels of dependency and extremely parochial attitudes, and in turn, the influence of elected members, which was partly related to this and the relatively small size of the area.

Summary and implications

Overall, the picture that is evident at this level is almost as complex as that the individual level, with a combination of relative, relational, individual, institutional and environmental shaping factors at play. These can be seen to be partly beyond the authority's control but with which it necessarily has to work, and partly actively constructed and negotiated. The value of this approach in revealing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding is again clear. It is easy to see that any attempt to make problem-free improvements at this level is very complicated and not just a case of internally-oriented managerialism. Judgements blaming the local authority alone for negativity are also unfair. Nevertheless, the picture reinforces the idea of the authority having distinctive potential but needing to attend to substantive actions and appearances if it is to be regarded as playing a legitimate regeneration role.

6.3 Possible improvements to the local authority's regeneration role

This section considers the third research question, 'what room is there for win-win improvements to the authority's regeneration role?'. This was designed to acknowledge the difficulty in making recommendations that would result in all-round improvements rather than tradeoffs. The first section expands on this problematic to form a basis from which to make appropriate recommendations. The second section outlines examples of such

recommendations, explaining their appropriateness compared to those of a recent Wales Audit Office assessment.

6.3.1 Artificial ideals, conundrums, intractable problems and confounding factors

One of the initial critiques of conventional evaluative assessments discussed in Chapter 2 was that many were overly normative, thereby failing to engage with realities. This reminds us that simply translating an analysis of un-met expectations indicated by the themes related to the authority's fundamental diagnosis, (Section 6.1.4b above) or particular working problems, (Section 6.1.3b) into recommendations, would be inappropriate. Indeed, it seems that many such expectations are perhaps somewhat artificial, products of normative discourses circulating in the regeneration press and government documents as well as their equivalents in academic discussions of governance. Such artificial expectations would seem to include the notion of genuine, constructive partnership, openness, a co-ordinated approach (joined-up working), regularly reviewed efficiency and effective targeting based on a good information base.

As discussed in the analysis of strategic ambiguity and fundamental negativity, the obstacles that stand in the way ideals such as these appear to be numerous. Indeed, many internal and external interviewees themselves acknowledged one or more conundrums, intractable problems or confounding factors that the authority faced in its regeneration work, suggesting reflexivity could be encouraged (Appendix F lists them). To recap, firstly, it is evident that several important contributions clash with these ideals. For instance, responsibilities for certain outcomes for which the authority is held to account may clash with the expectation of the authority relinquishing control; established and desirable structures and processes may obstruct joined-up working; and the status of democratic representation and associated decision-making may inhibit openness. Indeed, whilst change and review might be expected to design processes that accommodate the established and newer desired ends, such change requires imagination, persuasion, learning and so on that take time to effect (see e.g. Sanderson, 2001; Ball et al, 2002). Equally, there was some indication that these clashes were symptomatic of the

authority being caught at the apex of wider, often implicit, debates which had not been resolved, but which it was left to manage in terms of practicalities and relationships. Such debates included the issue of how to decide on priorities in regeneration, or who should take the lead. In turn there was the question of where in a democratic body the limits to officer discretion as opposed to member involvement and supremacy should lie, or a variation on this, the relative legitimacy of representative compared to participatory democracy. Indeed, related to this was the question of in which direction policy should be aligned: with grassroots' opinion, with members' opinion, or with that set by higher-level agencies which are also major funders, when all may be at odds with each other.

Discussions with officers about their contribution to regeneration revealed that many in fact share such ideals and that the problems they described in the course of their work often produced frustration that they could not live up to them. Though some such problems may be resolvable, others were less tractable and more structural, reflecting financial constraints, restrictions on freedom to act, the juggling of priorities and balancing of interests, as well as contextual factors including local culture or apathy. Indeed, even problems described at the strategic level, such as particular attitudes, which appear relatively simple to rectify, may actually be affected by officers not having time to put them into practice, for example, in taking time to inform all stakeholders of decisions or to listen to and carefully consider all their ideas. Equally, the balancing act may imply that what is listened to cannot be translated into action due to other considerations. This may appear as insularity which would again seem to be not easily changed. Overall, several interviewees suggested that the authority found it difficult to please its critics because expectations were too high. Whilst this seemed partly indicative of this juggling and balancing act, it also seemed to reflect a lack of awareness about the extent of the authority's current regeneration role and the difficulty in making this visible. In turn it was also pointed out that the realisation of many of the objectives of the authority's work was dependent not on its effort, but on the decisions and policies of higher-level bodies and dynamics in the wider economy.

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authority regeneration initiative, and how might such information be useful?

Summary and implications

Overall, this analysis has highlighted 'bottom-line' and organisational realities, the complexity of judgement processes, and elements of messiness with which the authority has to more or less constantly grapple. Being armed an awareness of this gives a much more appropriate base on which to base recommendations compared to evaluative assessment which ignores them. Indeed, it reinforces the delimitation of solvable problems arrived at in section 6.1.3b: strategic awareness, managing the political/managerial interface and communication. It additionally highlights the need for proper open debate as to the real merits and/or place of competing oppositional preferences and for deeper questioning about the ultimate objectives of regeneration. Equally, it emphasises the importance of other (particularly higher-level government) agencies reviewing their policies in light of those of others, rather than assuming harmony.

6.3.2 The slant of recommendations made to the authority

Building on the delimitation of solvable problems and other insights about the nature of the authority's regeneration role and shaping factors, three main types of recommendations were put forward. The first type related to strategy and strategic awareness. This was defined as being clear about ultimate objectives, which agency or individual has to do what to achieve them, how the authority fits with other agencies' regeneration work, and how to manage the bottom-line realities and factors that impede change.

The second type of recommendation was linked but deserving of a separate focus. It related to communication, a vital tool in managing expectations – communicating bottom-line realities (about what cannot happen as much as what can), and in managing perceptions, which may well be incorrect due to lack of transparency. Targeted communication might indeed help to overcome some of the obstacles to change, persuading people of the role they have to play and the benefits to them in doing so.

The third type of recommendation was concerned with delineation and definition of roles and responsibilities. It emphasises the need to resolve such

issues at quite a high level of detail as well as on a broader strategic basis. As such it is a focus that is again not entirely distinctive from aspects of strategy, but was separated out in recognition of the prominence of associated issues in discussions with interviewees, and the complex impact they had on the authority's regeneration role.

These three categories might be thought to result in very similar recommendations to those found in the types of evaluative assessment criticised in this research. However, here it is useful to compare the nuances and particular orientation of the recommendations made as a result of this research with those made in the (unpublished) Audit Commission in Wales Improvement Study of regeneration in Blaenau Gwent. This was an evaluative assessment of the type feared by officers, with its recommendations taken very seriously. Yet, such a comparison indicates how the recommendations made on the basis of a limited evaluative approach of the type commonly applied to local authorities are more simplistic and as such somewhat misdirected or 'off-centre'.

6.3.2a Examples of contrasts in recommendations made relating to strategy/strategic awareness

One of the key recommendations made to the authority by the Audit Commission was that the authority needed to produce a regeneration strategy. Such a recommendation had left officers somewhat perplexed because they had numerous regeneration-related strategies, and the most recent, the economic development strategy, was just a year old. Discussions in the feedback sessions indicated that they could not see that the recommendation suggested anything different, since it outlined the usual model for strategy: that it should include targets, financial implications and so on, and be based on consultation. These were ingredients of the strategies already in existence and the only difference that it suggested was that they needed to be consolidated into one. Undoubtedly, this would be helpful and inject some clarity to the regeneration work of the authority, but it failed to engage with the other deeper and over-arching problem identified in one of the strategic

recommendations made on the basis of this research. This was the lack of systematic reference to space and place in existing strategies.

It was suggested that by identifying priorities geographically, and different spatial futures in different parts of the Borough, moving to a focus on equality of outcomes rather than inputs and outputs, this could help to rationalise spatial jealousies between the '5 towns'. Such spatial jealousies were seen to be at the root of excessive political pressure on officers and reinforcing of parochialism. In addition, such an approach could be a means to inject desirable flexibility, and provide strategic guidance of use externally as well as internally, for which un-met demand was identified. This could help to overcome criticisms of introversion and insularity, as well as 'ad-hoc-ism' (e.g. money chasing). Indeed, a spatially-aware strategy could also assist in reducing spatial contradictions between different types of regeneration initiative or between regeneration initiatives in adjoining areas, and plan more effectively for synergies and efficiency.

The Audit Commission additionally recommended that there should be a focus on key projects in any regeneration strategy. However, this would seem to ignore many of the interstitial activities unrelated to particular authority-based projects which have been demonstrated to be of value. Instead, here it was suggested that it would be more appropriate to 'map' all existing regeneration-related activity into a coherent strategy, albeit with regular reviews. This would identify the links between different activities within the Regeneration Division and regeneration activity undertaken elsewhere in the authority. It would help to overcome concerns about disjointedness, increase awareness of what is contributing to regeneration and identify new opportunities for synergies. It could also be a process through which activity-related priorities could be identified, enabling the direction and proactive development of capacity and funding bids accordingly. Indeed, it was suggested that such a 'mapping' should help to acknowledge that some capacity is needed for what are almost 'back office' functions such as maintaining transparency, due process and ensuring people are 'in the loop'. It was evident that officers were not necessarily given enough time to do these

on top of their other responsibilities in the current situation. Yet it could also help to put such activity into perspective, emphasising that it might need to be rationalised in the interests of efficiency, releasing capacity for other action.

6.3.2b Examples of contrasts in the nature of recommendations made relating to communication

In relation to communication, the Audit Commission's recommendations were that the authority should devise a proper place-marketing strategy and provide for earlier consultation. Again, these recommendations can be shown to be some way off the mark compared with those arising from this research. These emphasised, in line with the negative characterisations unpacked, the importance of reporting the invisible, internally and externally. rather than assuming that people believe in the authority's competence and integrity. Negative characterisations suggested that people did not realise that projects were progressing behind the scenes, or believe that due process operated fairly and that consultation responses were used. Attention to communication in this way could also overcome the problematic assumption in evidence that everyone who needed to know, or for whom such knowledge could be useful, was kept fully aware of what was going on, including the role of other agencies in problems such as delays. It was also suggested that such reporting could be summarised on an annual basis in a report that could also serve to remind people of the full extent of regeneration activity being undertaken and all the work involved. This could help to reinforce a message of competence, whilst also potentially being usable as a place-marketing tool.

In fact, a stand-alone place marketing strategy had in fact existed previously, and its demise had occurred on the basis of funding cuts, information which the Audit Commission seemed completely unaware of. Indeed the Commission's recommendation also made the assumption that marketing is a key mechanism of regeneration which the authority needed to undertake to attract external investment. This research does not support such a proposition. Marketing was not seen to be a missing activity on the part of the authority whereas image management was: marketing was seen to be the responsibility of the WDA. Image management of the type suggested could make use of low-cost informal lines of communication, such as officers who have contact

with the public, if they are kept updated of relevant progress and activity, through, the intranet for example. Equally, an annual report could be incorporated into the authority's existing newspaper that goes out to all households. It should therefore be much cheaper than a stand-alone marketing strategy.

On the other hand, the Audit Commission's recommendations seemed to be a response to criticisms raised by questioning by its investigators that I observed to be quite directed in line with normative ideals, and superficial. This type of questioning tended to reveal pressing issues related to particular events, in this instance, the handling of the Community Plan process, rather than uncovering arguably more fundamental underlying and ongoing issues. Indeed, rather than consulting more formally as part of narrow plan-making processes, another idea suggested to the authority as a result of this research was to have more frequent, open 'blue sky' thinking forums. These would give people the chance to air their ideas on all kinds of things at a designated time, rather than on an ad hoc basis which may be more likely to be overlooked. Moreover, it would enable them to be subject to critical review on the spot, so expectations as to whether or not the idea would be taken forward could be managed. This could also be a more efficient use of officers' time, compared with discussions occurring on an individual basis, which I had observed, often extended meetings so that they took up whole mornings or afternoons.

6.3.2c Examples of contrasts in recommendations relating to the delineation of roles and responsibility

The only recommendation made by the Audit Commission relevant to the delineation of roles and responsibility was that attention should be given to the Scrutiny Process to ensure it was adequate. This is a very narrow interpretation of members' roles, and, whilst important, it should be facilitated by attention to transparency of the sort described above, thus ensuring that decision-making process would be 'on the record'. In contrast, an example of a recommendation made on the basis of this research was that members should be explicitly encouraged to act as two-way advocates. This suggestion

acknowledges that members have a potential regeneration role that goes beyond the mechanics or official processes of democratic accountability. It would involve explaining to local people why a particular way forward has been decided upon, rather than being 'one-way' advocates that simply promote what they think is best for the community or what the community want, without listening to other considerations. This two-way advocacy would develop the stance already described by some members, whilst responding to concerns that many members held up action or limited its scope due to overly rigid stances and the articulation of parochial attitudes. It recognised that though the authority had to attend to divergent audiences and interests, they might be persuaded to converge or at least see the legitimacy of others. In turn the aim would be to ensure that the authority took people with it by attempting to alter local people's perspectives so that they would embrace changes, whilst being aware of constraints.

6.3.2d Summary and implications

Overall, whilst potentially time-consuming, the types of actions proposed seem to be absorbable by the authority, particularly if regarded as broader investments in regeneration. They can be seen to be much more sensitive to the local context and engage with more substantive issues than the recommendations made by the Audit Commission. These, in contrast, in some cases appear more like sticking-plaster or cosmetic, one-size-fits-all solutions, and in others as unnecessary distractions. This provides important evidence that this alternative approach to evaluative assessment is able to make more informed recommendations than the normative, quick-fire approach of a conventional local authority evaluative assessment. Yet, given the nature of its recommendations as well as its authority, this analysis also indicates the potential diversionary affect that such evaluative assessment and its recommendations might have.

6.4 Summary and conclusion

Overall this chapter has sought to respond to the first set of research objectives by demonstrating the benefits of an approach to the evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative which is comprehensive and open-minded. This consolidates the critique of various forms of

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conventional local authority evaluative assessment advanced in Chapter 2. Using the research questions, this is achieved by showing what useful insights can be gained from such comprehensiveness and open-mindedness that otherwise might not be made visible. Such insights in turn help to identify problems with conventional evaluative assessments that are blind to them. This awareness is then consolidated into suggestions that are shown to be more in tune with the working context than those proposed as a result of a more conventional evaluative assessment.

In following this path, the analysis has further demonstrated that such an approach is workable with minimal resources (one researcher) and may potentially have benefits in its own right. Such benefits appear to include encouraging internal and external reflexivity and potentially enabling 'creative de-stabilisation' (Learmonth & Harding, 2006:262). Such destabilisation, if not associated creativity, seemed to be indicated by the shock–value of offices being confronted by external impressions, as was apparent in feedback sessions. Indeed, the approach also arguably has the potential, to help practitioners *'to make sense of their situations and a platform from which to make considered choices'* by placing them within the bigger picture, as Huxham (2003: 247) describes in relation to equivalent descriptive grounded theory. This could help to reassure practitioners by showing them how the local authority's regeneration role is distinctive and significant though perhaps not very visible. Likewise it provides the reassurance that the authority is caught in a difficult position amidst unresolved debates and bigger questions about the real purpose of regeneration, rather than all problems being its own fault (cf. Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003:299). In turn this awareness might prompt practitioners to think more creatively about the opportunities and needs this situation presents. The approach thus clearly responds to the anxieties referred to in Chapters 1 and 2. Nonetheless, avenues of follow-up research to help consolidate these tentative conclusions are also indicated.

The insights derived from an open-minded and comprehensive approach to evaluative assessment relate to the range of work done, where and how

significant value is contributed and inhibited by the authority from internal and external perspectives, and the local authority's regeneration contribution in the bigger picture. In turn, numerous different factors that impact on performative action and shape the authority's wider positioning are revealed. Overall the picture is of variety, intangibility, specialisation, distinctiveness, complexity, contestation and ambiguity: nuances that are easily imaginable elsewhere on the basis of the tradition of implementation studies (e.g. Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Lipsky, 1980) wider discussions of regeneration management and public administration, (e.g. Underwood, 1980; Diamond & Liddle, 2005) and the politics of regeneration (e.g. Boland, 1999a/b; Rowe, 2006).

This points to the importance of full knowledge of this picture in other local authorities, not just the case-study. This is because the nuances of it help to pin-point appropriate problems to solve, moving beyond 'dead-end' criticism relating to unrealistic ideals. The detail also seems to be important to ensure that particular value is safeguarded and enhanced, where otherwise it might be compromised or ignored. The potential functionality of this type of information stands in particular contrast to that based on narrow definitions of (good and bad) performance. This is found in forms of evaluative assessment including performance indicators, project and so-called 'policy' evaluations and Audit Commission service assessments. A comprehensive and open-minded approach such as the one operationalised here is thus suggested to be a useful complement to these mainstream approaches commonly applied to local authorities.

Such information can also be seen to be particularly important in the context of the authority's operation within a multi-agency working environment (or governance). On the one hand, it is concerned with appropriately (if not precisely) assigning responsibility within such an environment to help improve the contribution made by different agencies within it. On the other hand the detailed picture acknowledges the significance of particular, often unspecified yet specialist and interstitial activities that contribute to the enactment of interventions within this environment. Ironically, such activities,

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which may be overlooked by typical local authority evaluative assessments and decision-making solely based on them, may be significant for the real-life functionality and operation of certain aspects of ideals. These ideals are often promoted by narrow normative assessments amongst other mechanisms. This situation is explored further in the next chapter.

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This chapter aims to respond to the second research objective. This concerns a contribution to *'a better understanding of the positioning of local government in relation to existing concepts of governance'*. It also develops the case for critiquing existing forms of evaluation that are routinely applied to local government by considering their place within this context. In so doing, it seeks to answer two questions. Firstly, what do the data show about the role of local authorities in the context of governance?; and secondly, what are the more problematic aspects of this positioning?. These structuring questions build on those posed and answered unsatisfactorily in the literature review in Chapter 3. They are also a governance-specific take on the three dual-purpose research questions explained in Chapter 4. The first question incorporates discussion of the authority's role and shaping factors, whilst the second builds on the analysis of the difficulties in defining appropriate improvements to the authority's role. As such the analysis falls into three main parts or mini-chapters, but for the sake of the coherence of the overall argument, they are presented within one chapter.

Importantly, the two structuring questions additionally relate to the two definitions of meta-governance proposed by Jessop (1997, 1998, 2000) and discussed in Chapter 3. These are, the 'governance of governance' or the need to manage governance to make it work, and 'governance in the shadow of hierarchy' which refers to certain constraints and the ongoing relevance of tradition. Starting from a position that local authorities operate in a multi-level governance context, this chapter therefore also seeks to explore the idea that this concept of meta-governance is indicative of the 'positioning' of the authority, but needs developing. Overall, this analysis helps to place the results of the alternative approach to evaluation within the broader context through unpacking them within a conceptual and theoretical framework.

7.1 What do the data show about the role of local authorities in the context of governance?

This section builds on two relevant threads from the literature on governance which were identified and discussed in Chapter 3. These are firstly, the notion

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of local authorities perhaps playing a particular role within governance making it 'work' locally, and secondly the indication of local authorities having distinctive responsibilities, capabilities and interests in relation to and compared to other organisations within this environment. These threads have likewise been foreshadowed in the discussion of the direct and indirect/intermediate dimensions to the authority's regeneration role and strategic shaping factors in Chapter 6.

The literature discusses this role and distinctiveness mainly in relation to formal partnership arrangements. However, the investigation presented here takes a much wider view of the governance environment and its needs, in line with the broad investigation of the authority's regeneration role. It acknowledges the numerous different types of working relationships the authority and its constituent parts have with a wide variety of other organisations working in the regeneration field. Indeed, it may be helpful here to recollect the working concept of governance derived in Chapter 3, applying it more specifically to the local context. That is, a multi-level concept where the different levels are distinguished by different responsibilities, interests and to some extent powers, but which are also broad and varied in the horizontal dimension. The levels are not however necessarily ordered in a neat hierarchical fashion where the top is always supreme. In Blaenau Gwent, the top (A) [1] at the time of the research was the Welsh Assembly Government and other public bodies such as Central Government and the EU in a funding and/or regulatory relation with lower levels. The middle or horizontal governance arena (B) comprised the local authority, government-sponsored public bodies working on a more equal footing with the authority, local development trusts and other voluntary, community, private and public sector organisations. The bottom layer, (C) was the grassroots or in other words, less established community groups, which were often closest to local communities themselves.

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[1] In the analysis that follows these labels are used to indicate the positioning of interviewees whose words are used.

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7.1.1 Functionality

A review of the data suggests that the authority was contributing to the functioning of governance in two ways. These were firstly, making it 'work better' in the round through complementary activity, and secondly making governance 'work' through [pro]active interventions within its operation. The following section unpacks the different dimensions to these two types of functionality, deploying supporting quotations where available in summary boxes or within the discussion.

7.1.1.1 Making governance work better

7.1.1.1a Making governance work better through complementary activity: 'big stuff', relative magnitude and acting as a catalyst

> "they have the skills in doing the big stuff, but it's the people stuff that's really a struggle" [Level C interviewee]
>
> "I think in the area they are fundamental to regeneration – they're the biggest employer, the biggest body, and drive regeneration forward" [Internal interviewee]

Starting with making governance 'work better', we see that the authority's role in the '*big stuff*[2] of regeneration, notably physical projects, was reported to be unrivalled. While some saw this type of activity as an old-fashioned focus, in an area with an ageing infrastructure and the physical legacy of mining and steel-making, it continued to be an important ingredient of regeneration locally in providing an adequate environmental quality. This can be seen as an essential prerequisite for much regeneration. It was suggested, particularly in the case of land reclamation, that it was important that this was done centrally and concertedly. Without such central co-ordination, given the general small scale of non-local authority initiative, a piecemeal process with limited effect might develop, which would be difficult to keep track of.

Given that the authority was more generally a big player locally in terms of the scale and range of its work, and had resources of its own, many also saw it to be functional in overall terms in being able to access large amounts of money and hence being able to commit more to regeneration than any other organisation locally. It was able to do so both through having match funding

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[2] A code used in the analysis, borrowing from one interviewee's words.

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to draw on and appropriate systems to manage it. In this way, the authority could give the regeneration efforts of the area a real boost as it was able to spread the impetus throughout the area. As one internal interviewee described it, *"[without a local authority doing a lot] you just have pockets of things – I don't think you'd get anywhere, not to regenerate the whole area, when you're dealing with the scale of things we're dealing with"*. These contributions might also make the work of others easier by demonstrating the area's natural assets, making land developable, or in encouraging people to believe that change is possible and that it is worth their while getting involved. This could usefully be described as acting *"as a catalyst for taking things forward"* (internal interviewee).

7.1.1.1b Making governance work better through complementary activity: service provision, regulation and steering

> *"[Its role is in] setting the vision, clarifying the key objectives and action"* [internal interviewee]
>
> *"They've got a massive role as overall co-ordinator, I think co-ordinator, monitor-er, persuader"* [Level B interviewee]
>
> *"[through their day-to-day work] they cover all the issues that need to be considered when you're changing an area"* [Level A interviewee]
>
> *"So many of the services we provide obviously have a regenerative element to them"* [Internal interviewee]

This catalysis may similarly be the case in respect of what was described as the authority's 'inevitable' regeneration role. That is, in the course of its service provision and regulatory functions it could influence aspects of regeneration that were beyond the reach or remit of many other organisations. This broadened the scope of regeneration locally making the overall effect of lots of different organisations working in the regeneration field a more holistic one. Again moreover, such services could support the regeneration work of others. For instance, one Level B external interviewee noted the role of the authority's provision of appropriate public transport connections (via often essential subsidy) in helping people to access opportunities offered or supported by his/her organisation. Another, (internal) interviewee similarly argued that, *"if we provide a first class service then people will want to come and live in the area"* (although it might be questioned whether the link is actually that simple).

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Other external interviewees claimed that the authority's regulatory role could be seen as complementary to their work in enabling a certain amount of overall steering, ensuring strategic links and being concerned with the greater good rather than individual interests. Indeed, another area of the authority's regeneration work that was seen to complement that of other organisations was its strategic planning. Many organisations looked to it to provide strategic guidance for their work, for instance in identifying locally relevant and legitimate priorities, for there was no other agency in a position to provide such guidance. Strategic guidance was seen to have the potential to enhance the impact of their work or spending by creating a critical mass of investment on a target, thus working with rather than against the flow. However, as noted in Chapter 6, this was also seen to be a key area of weakness in the authority's present role, suggesting that this key co-ordination need was unmet, and perhaps unrecognised. As one external interviewee stated, *"It's a very reactive thing at the moment...we're really still waiting. If they could come up with a really clear, definite, 'this is where we want to go and this is how we've worked it out', we'll jump aboard and go with it, no problem at all"*.

Nonetheless, there was some evidence that such steering was occurring on a more informal basis through networking, and the upward advocacy of local agendas. This advocacy could in fact be an important contribution in its own right, being likely to be more effective than the voice of multiple uncoordinated smaller organisations, not least, some interviewees suggested, due to 'insider' Labour Party channels. Moreover, there was some evidence of officers beginning to recognise a need for the authority to provide strategic guidance to others rather than producing it simply for internal use, picking up on more academic discourses. One stated: *"I think we're moving away from local government these days to local governance. Of course it's involving other partners and so on, but there needs to be strategic direction set by the local authority, and I think that's one of our key roles"*.

7.1.1.2 Making governance work through intervention within it

In addition to these dimensions without which the overall local regeneration effort - the work of numerous organisations, would apparently be poorer, the authority could also be taking a more proactive positive stance towards governance. That is, it could be seen to be taking the initiative to improve the functioning and functionality of the multi-organisational regeneration effort along a number of dimensions, albeit somewhat haphazardly rather than systematically.

7.1.1.2a Making governance work through intervention within it: partnership making and sustaining

> *"Initially a lot of partnerships said, 'oh we don't want to work with the Borough, we want to go off on our own'. But then, after a little while, they realised this can't be done without the local authority, because you need, in some cases their permission to do something, and in lots of cases their expertise to be able to deliver projects, so it has to link back to the local authority"* [Internal interviewee]
>
> *"It usually falls to one person [namely me] to drive it [the partnership] forward, to co-ordinate and organise"* [Internal interviewee]

A key intervention of this sort can firstly be seen in the common depiction, from external and internal perspectives, of officers' key contributions to regeneration being the making and sustaining of partnerships and forums. On one level there was reference to the importance of proactively developing and nurturing interpersonal relations to this end. Some local authority interviewees, in discussion of their activities, described always being on the 'look-out' for new partners relevant to their area of work. This made it very important that they pursued networking opportunities such as seminars and launches which might otherwise be seen as a frivolous use of their time. As a result of such events, they were able to list numerous useful contacts gained. A different local authority interviewee described his/her role as conducting the subtle process of finding common ground between partners, understanding where they were coming from in order to find a way forward that ensured buy-in and dealt with their concerns, again speaking in terms of concrete examples. The diary process further revealed that another officer interviewed had made a phone call to clarify a misunderstanding that could otherwise have soured productive working relations. Indeed, an external (Level B)

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interviewee described officers' key added value as "*keeping [x and y
organisations] from killing each other*". Several interviewees pointed out that
the continuity of personnel in the local authority and general permanence of
the authority itself helped to foster these relationships, as did individual
energy and enthusiasm.

On a more basic level, several interviewees described (and I had observed) the
huge amount of time spent in organising partnership and forum meetings.
This involved confirming the venue, inviting attendance, organising specialist
briefings where appropriate, preparing and sending out agendas and papers,
and minuting them. The importance of such activity was acknowledged
externally by members of several partnerships and forums. One stressed that
the forum would not exist without such input by the authority since its
members had little spare time, and without it, much valuable information
exchange and general networking would be lost. Others reported how the
authority had created such partnerships by opening project etc meetings up.
One external Level B interviewee reported that she was always being invited
by the authority to join in on various things, and how valuable this was to her
although it could be onerous. Nonetheless, a number of interviewees felt that
there was still work to be done by the authority on this front, with more
potential for opening things up and resentment at what was still perceived to
be unwarranted 'hogging' of activity.

Others noted that an important regeneration role taken on by the authority was
through it being prepared to work in partnership itself. In relation to the
functioning of governance, this was seen to be about making the authority's
resources available in pursuit of shared objectives, bending ways of working
and expenditure as appropriate and working as a team. In effect it was
perceived that more could be achieved in respect of complex problems by a
variety of agencies working together, and without the authority participating
in this there would be a large gap in capacity and influence. As one external
Level B interviewee described, "*they can bring...the whole wider strategic
influence to bear, whereas with [my agency] I can only bring part of that*".
Another suggested that elected members in partnerships provided an

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important *"chain of accountability"*, whilst others emphasised that without the authority they were, in effect, just *"a bunch of amateurs"*, lacking expertise in various dimensions. Officers themselves described how they brought not only professional expertise, but *"an awareness of what's worked and what hasn't"* due to the long history of regeneration intervention by the authority, whilst also being attuned to local political realities which others had to be made aware of. Another officer pointed out that s/he brought to partnership-working an eye to the bigger picture as compared with the narrow specialist focus of other agencies, acting as something of a 'correction factor'. From an external perspective, this was again the bringing of broader expertise to the table creating a better summed end-value.

Even where the authority's partnership participation consisted of only one or two officers, interviewees described how they were able to act as conduits to expertise and resources in other parts of the authority, and in doing so, were able to effect the strategic linkage of agendas. This was seen bring efficiency and effectiveness to partnership working. One officer described it as being a case of knowing exactly who to contact within the authority to get something done, rather than an outsider being faced with a chain of phone calls to find the right person, and even then having a harder job to get the necessary co-operation. I was told how unclear it was from the outside as to who had the responsibility, resources and know-how that could help, and how being on the inside helped open doors. This suggests the relative ease of effecting joined-up cross-cutting agendas through the participation of one multi-disciplinary organisation rather than having to enrol others. In some cases, such co-ordination was facilitated by officers having worked in different parts of the authority and hence having contacts beyond their immediate team. However, more broadly, this role seemed to be related to officers being charged with general responsibilities to help get things done.

7.1.1.2b Making governance work through intervention within it: local delivery capacity and presence

> *"We're at the implementation stage of things - what we do is really bring on what's effectively the product"* [Internal interviewee]

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"It's doing as it's told [by higher-level authorities] at the moment [delivering a particular agenda]" [Level B interviewee]

"We do get a lot of people wanting to do things, who know that it's working with the Council that gets you into quite a lot of areas – whether it's because we're a major landowner, there's so much council housing, the council's one of the major employers, things like that" [Internal interviewee]

"They have the local grasp of needs" [Level A interviewee]

"If you haven't got the local authority on board, then who else have you got to run regeneration" [Internal interviewee]

The authority could also offer opportunities to realise the regeneration-related objectives of specialist agencies, a capacity linked to its significance as one of the biggest property owners, spenders or commissioners and employers locally. There was reference to it providing various organisations with office and meeting space. It had also afforded landscaping maintenance practice and employment opportunities for people excluded from the labour market because of learning disabilities or mental health problems in a scheme organised by a community-based organisation. Indeed, there was a planned scheme for the authority to commission recycling services of a local social enterprise. This was again to provide sheltered labour market opportunities, whilst also hopefully enabling it to make sufficient profit to fund other community-based regeneration activity. However, such organisations frequently complained during interviews that there was a failure to systematically identify the potential for similar arrangements within the authority and that this was a huge missed opportunity in regeneration terms. As one put it, *"there's no strategic direction of how they can use us for their aims [so that we can benefit too]"*.

There were also examples of agencies which had little or no direct delivery capacity themselves which were to a large extent reliant on the authority to achieve their ends on the basis that they were mutually desirable and that the authority had significant regeneration *"manpower"* which they were lacking. This was particularly the case with specialist arms-length, but publicly-sponsored bodies, with remits covering employability, education and training, and countryside viability, but also certain departments of the Welsh Assembly itself and more independent bodies. One described the situation thus: *"we're*

reliant on Blaenau Gwent [County Borough Council] to deliver out aims and objectives locally [as they] have the local knowledge and mechanisms to work and implement on the ground".

In some cases the authority was obliged to fulfil these needs, including project development, implementation, plus match funding, as it was bound into contractual delivery arrangements and relations of funding dependency. In other cases, its co-operation was more voluntary, dependent on the deployment of its regulatory powers to secure relevant planning conditions for instance, or the planning of its services or physical projects. The authority in this respect seemed to act as a type of 'gatekeeper' to opportunities to further their agendas; indeed one interviewee described their role as *"using the position I have to open doors and avenues"*. Often though, this role was linked to the more arduous activity of advocacy described by many officers, whereby they had to continually be alert to opportunities to promote or safeguard a particular agenda. One officer stated that: *"I see my role as reminding people there's a big role for [x national agenda] in their work"*. That such advocacy was generally described as an uphill task however, possibly involving the officer not being a *"popular person"*, suggests that whilst there was much effort put into realising such goals, their achievement was not guaranteed in every case. Nonetheless, where the translation of such agendas into practice was achieved, the authority could act as a prominent demonstrator of them. Again however, again such a quality was usually described as more potential than realised.

The authority also compensated for other agencies' lack of physical presence locally by providing appropriate systems and structures to safeguard accountability in respect of funding distributed by them. Local knowledge to help sensitise programmes to local circumstances was also a valued contribution made by the authority where agencies or departments were based elsewhere or were new to the area. Similarly, connecting with the particular groups of people that were the targets of an agency's spending plan could be seen to significantly rely on outreach, engagement, sign-posting and intermediation by officers and to some extent, elected members. As one

internal interviewee described, *"they [the authority] are the first line of contact "*. One example was in respect of high-level education and training targets, which in Blaenau Gwent seem to require significant 'soft-end' personalised intervention to encourage people to get back into learning. Indeed, one elected member described his role as reminding people that they had responsibility to play *their* part in regeneration, in addition to the part played by others.

Such connection with beneficiaries or clients was also particularly important in respect of the myriad of funding schemes offered by a diverse range of organisations to businesses or aspiring entrepreneurs. Here officers had come to be involved in 'one-stop shop' publicity events, business site-visits and meetings, assessment and report-writing. In some cases they were in fact required to make recommendations as to eligibility to the funding body rather than just the business itself. One officer in relation to this, said his/her role was *"very much [acting as] a broker "*. Further down the line officers could also be seen to be involved in monitoring visits and reporting, and aftercare support. Importantly, elected members might in fact be the first port of call for local businesses, being known points of contact within the community. Several councillors described how, *"we're in the community, listening to people, and we talk to people who are actually doing the job "*. This suggests that they act as a vital connecting outpost: indeed other councillors reported how they made sure that such businesses knew that they could approach them for help in this way by proactively visiting them.

7.1.1.2c Making governance work through intervention within it: ad hoc, informal support

'*People come in with a blinkered view*' [Internal interviewee]

'*People on my committee were absolutely terrified at these amounts [of money that we accessed for our project]*' [Level C interviewee]

'*It's handling liability, monitoring and control – you think of these people going to be elected chair, secretary, treasurer, and what do they know about systems and procedures?*' [Internal interviewee]

'*They are the experts*' [Level B interviewee]

'*[x-group] haven't got the expertise there to carry a lot of the schemes they want to do*' [Internal interviewee]

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'[To get round various problems we had] they came up with all sorts of things' [Level C Interviewee]

'some people you know, are happy to go and do it for themselves, some others don't fully understand the process and need a lot of guidance and help [which we give]' [Internal interviewee]

'There's been advice and support from officers' [Level C interviewee]

Also in evidence both in interviewees' descriptions and according to my observations, were more informal ways in which the authority's resources were deployed to smooth over weaknesses in the capacities of other organisations in the regeneration governance environment. This involved giving expert advice and practical support on an ad hoc basis often, but not exclusively to community-based organisations. Usually this was in response to direct or indirect enquiries by them, perhaps prompted by contact with the outreach points (e.g. informal discussions with a local councillor) described above. Examples of such advice and support were in respect of use of statistics; funding applications; project development or overcoming problems within projects; practical implementation; managing politics; and getting over regulatory hurdles such as obtaining planning permission or fulfilling monitoring requirements. Indeed, one community group leader described an ongoing working relationship of this sort in respect of the continuing development of a project. They had received wide-ranging help from both officers and members.

Another dimension to this type of functionality was the notion of 'guided community leadership' described by some interviewees. Here the authority was said to be helping communities to take on a more active role in regeneration, something which they could not do without support. It might involve trying to encourage them to think more strategically – beyond "park benches" or tweaking ideas articulated in consultation to represent "needs rather than wants". As one interviewee described: "there are some things that communities are never going to come up with (e.g. speech therapy) [but for which there is a clear need]". Others referred to encouraging people to think for themselves rather than be dictated to, and to consider what their own responsibilities in relation to regeneration might be. However, that this type of role was mainly described by internal interviewees, suggests that it was not

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seen as positive by all: for some it seemed to sit instead with depictions of dominance and arrogance.

7.1.1.2d Making governance work through intervention within it: a more strategic, proactive, conscious approach

"The majority of regeneration initiatives seem to come from our people, who look to exploit opportunities and funding [however they can]" [Internal interviewee]

"In the last two years, Blaenau Gwent have been more proactive than any local authority I've worked with in wanting to do things" [Level A interviewee]

"[The value I bring is in] giving the opportunity [through the scheme we devised] to people with ideas more than anything'" [Internal interviewee]

In contrast to these ad hoc inputs, there were also indications that the authority was beginning to take a strategic approach to the governance environment by filling in gaps more systematically in certain areas. For example, a new employability initiative deliberately aimed to pick up the loose ends left by other agencies, which meant that *"the left hand didn't know what the right was doing "* [internal interviewee] and interventions were likely to fail due to issues such as a lack follow-through of individual support. Another officer described how his/her team had stepped into a position whereby they were *"the link really, not only between [x-group] and the [County] Borough [Council], but also between the Borough and the Assembly "*. Similarly, a close working relationship with other business support agencies was suggested by various internal and external interviewees to enable a tight division of labour to avoid such gaps, instead adding to available capacity. In respect of this the authority also co-ordinated a 'listening' forum to identify changes in local business needs and to initiate appropriate agency-responses. In addition, the creation of a new specialised 'third sector' funding and support programme run by the authority could likewise be seen to be filling a gap in this way, a justification that had brought in money from Objective One and the Assembly.

The role of 'ensuring momentum[3]' taken on by certain officers, or to paraphrase one external agency (Level B) interviewee, *"smoothing things out "*, also seemed to be an emergent response to a situation where otherwise

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[3] This refers to a code used in the analysis

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things might fall through due to gaps in co-ordination and commitment. Indeed, the lack of organisations able or willing to take risks or to take the initiative in regeneration locally meant that the authority was seen by many (internally and externally) to play a "*vital*[4]" regeneration role in many senses. As one external Level B interviewee described: "*it's driving an awful lot of things*". In fact, the dominance and arrogance associated with the authority's pre-eminence and leadership were seen by several internal and external interviewees to be almost necessary evils. Otherwise, as implied by their link to descriptions of the authority's positive regeneration role in Chapter 6, it was considered unlikely that anything would happen.

From a slightly different perspective, the authority had in fact been instrumental in creating three development trusts, (although one had since collapsed) to ensure that there was sufficient regeneration presence or activity within local communities. Indeed, a more recent twist to this noted by one or two interviewees, was that the authority was increasingly concerned to mobilise community-level enthusiasm by helping to formally constitute community groups because they could then access pots of money beyond the reach of the authority itself. In this sense we see the authority acting to shape the local governance environment to be more like that envisaged by normative ideals. This can be seen to be important in terms of functionality to meet expectations and respond to associated managerial realities: that is, the way funding is now disbursed and how official policy direction is captured by the popular imagination. Nonetheless, this was not without its problems, with groups helped in this way described as being very vulnerable due to their lack of experience in regeneration, in turn pointing to the likelihood of failure or at least the need for continued support as described above.

7.1.1.2e Making governance work through intervention within it: inevitable functionality through necessary contact

> "It's [the authority's] the nucleus really, it controls the purse strings, is able to access grant" [Internal interviewee]
>
> "As the landowners, [the Council] would do the planning and all that [on schemes we're involved in]" [Level C interviewee]

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[4] Again, a code used in the analysis, derived from an interviewee's words

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> "[Our role is in] enabling regeneration by providing suitable premises, land etc, and the planning" [Internal interviewee]
>
> "To perform our role properly, we need the Council ['s due process]" [Level B interviewee]
>
> "The political angle's got to be involved in certain decisions, you've got to go through the political hurdle" [internal interviewee]

Lastly, there was again an element of inevitable functionality described, this time in the requirement for other agencies to have direct contact with the authority in order to get the go-ahead for what they were planning, rather than its activities being separate and complementary. This was most obvious in respect of planning permission, whether for a new development or change of use. However, in Blaenau Gwent, due to the authority's high level of land ownership relative to that of private landlords, it was also often the case in respect of gaining appropriate leases and licences for sites and premises to operate from. There were complaints externally that this influence apparently went unrecognised by the authority, causing unfortunate delays for external agencies that had to cross such hurdles.

A slightly different view of this theme of inevitable functionality through necessary contact, was indicated by reports from inside and outside the authority that interaction with it was necessary to get political support for externally-initiated projects and schemes. As one interviewee stated: "for a community project, getting them the political support is far more important than finding them money'. Without this, many suggested that due to the influence of local politicians on a number of levels, a project could be doomed to fail; indeed several examples were given of projects that had apparently been "scuppered" at the hands of councillors. This was felt to be due to the malign influence members could have over the permissions-process, the backing of funding bids or the deployment of officer time in support of a project. There was also reference to the detrimental effect of councillors not sufficiently "talking up" a project within a community. More positively, in working with the authority, several interviewees referred to the legitimacy that could be gained for external agencies' activities, by their consequent association with a democratically elected body and due process. This was particularly the case in respect of agencies that were otherwise

suggested to suffer from a democratic deficit due to their quango status, or through not having a local base and direct local input to their decision-making that affected the area.

7.1.1.3 Summary & Discussion

Overall, recalling the multi-level regeneration governance arena schematised above[5], the authority seemed to be facilitating interaction and contributing to workable working relations between each of the three levels, A, B and C as well as within levels B and C. Re-arranging the above analysis in this fashion, we can see the following. Firstly, in terms of the top-down relation between A and B, the local authority was delivering and helping to monitor higher level programmes and agendas. Secondly, in the other direction from B to A, the authority was levering funding from higher-level bodies potentially of benefit to others; was a bureaucratic (accountable) channel for more direct funding; was sign-posting others to the appropriate higher-level body, perhaps supporting access to it; and was an advocate for local issues and attempts to shape attention accordingly. Thirdly, from A to C and B to C the authority was facilitating engagement with local communities through outreach. Fourthly, from C to A and C to B its sign-posting and intermediation roles were important in enabling access to funding and other resources. Fifthly, from C to A, the authority could act as an advocate on behalf of local communities. Sixthly, from B to C guided community leadership might be important to encourage the community-based activity (within C) that was being pushed by government and which such agencies were being required to work with. Seventhly, within C, the authority could help to resolve competing priorities and manage conflicting interests. Lastly, within B, or the horizontal governance arena, it was helping to promote partnership working and networking, plus facilitating others' (perhaps more independent) work through direct support and through undertaking complementary activities.

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[5] A= the Welsh Assembly Government and other public bodies such as Central Government and the EU in a funding and/or regulatory relation with lower levels

B = the local authority, government-sponsored public bodies working on a more equal footing with the authority, local development trusts and other voluntary, community, private and public sector organisations

C = the grassroots or less established community groups

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Within the partnership arena, a subset of B, the authority was also making both practical and relational contributions.

This suggests that the local authority had, and had taken on, a fairly essential role within the governance environment, that encompassed both traditional and newer functions, albeit recasting the traditional in relation to this context. Without it, it would seem that the governance environment would not work as smoothly or as effectively. This demonstrates a significant resonance with the side of Jessop's definition of meta-governance (1997, 1998, 2000) that refers to the 'governance of governance' or the 'organisation of self-organisation' (i.e. governance) to make it work. Clearly however, the analysis here has revealed a breadth of activities important to the functioning of governance that are much more interstitial and responsive than those purely related to a (top-down) organising impetus. In turn this analysis develops the oft-described problems within governance, of fragmentation (Rhodes, 1997) and 'congestion' (Skelcher, 2000; Cowell, 2004). It suggests that a more accurate, all-encompassing conception of the weakness of governance may be its disjunctures or connection failures. That is, the problem is not simply one of dispersal of interested parties or confusion, but also due to differences in capabilities, capacities, responsibilities and powers. In turn, whilst some have noted a situation of contested governance that may result from this (e.g. Boland, 1999a) the situation can be made to work rather than being left in a complete mess as such depictions tend to imply. Making it work is not just a case of various forms of co-ordination and joining-hands as suggested by more limited analyses however, (e.g. Ansell, 2000; Jessop, 2002; Cowell, 2004) but also requires a more active, time-consuming gap-filling and orchestration. Overall we arrive at a multi-faceted and multi-layered picture that encompasses a wide variety of activity and thus gives the local authority no lack of things to do. This sits uncomfortably with the neglect of local authorities in relevant studies.

Indeed, the limited data available from the grey literature defined in Chapter 5, together with from the academic literature in Chapter 3, suggests that similar functionality is being displayed by a wide-range of local authorities

elsewhere. Thus, although Blaenau Gwent arguably provides an unusual yet helpful laboratory for studying the local authority's role in regeneration-related governance because of its small size and generality of its regeneration activity, (due to the area's eligibility for a range of regeneration programmes) the indication is that the findings there are relevant beyond it. This evidence is collated in a table in Appendix G, and although only limited information is available for each authority as opposed to the rounded picture investigated through this research, the sum of such parts would seem to indicate that an equivalent rounded picture would not be unimaginable elsewhere. In fact, the study of 'facilitation' in the context of rural development by Rural Innovation and Insight Ltd (RI&I, 2004) gives examples of several interpretations of it for many of the authorities discussed, suggesting that this type of role is not a narrow and minor one to them. Moreover, there are several clear examples of authorities taking a proactive and strategic stance, stepping in to fill capacity gaps within the regeneration arena with structures, actions and processes. These include the provision of land and buildings for other bodies pursuing regeneration ends; acting as an intermediary between local people and non-local landowners; making links between new development and employment needs; and various community and voluntary sector support services.

However, it is also evident from the data for Blaenau Gwent that supporting the functioning of governance was by no means an exact science or perfected practice, and that the authority's stance towards it appeared somewhat ambivalent. Indeed, at various points the examination of it above has suggested it might be contested, a point that is likewise exemplified in the grey and academic literature. This corresponds with the more complex view of the authority presented in Chapter 6, and Section 7.2 will seek to explore this further from a governance perspective. Firstly however, it is important to understand why the local authority as opposed to any other actor was able to, or looked to, to contribute to the functioning of governance in these ways, and to assess the extent to which this is likely to be a more general and persistent phenomenon. This should help consolidate the links implied between the case study of Blaenau Gwent and the examples found elsewhere, situating the case-study amongst others and demonstrating the significance of its findings.

7.1.2 Being able to make a distinctive contribution to the regeneration arena: the local authority compared to other agencies

Several of the shaping factors discussed in Chapter 6 point to the distinctiveness of the authority as an actor within the local regeneration arena, giving it particular capacities, responsibilities and interests. Indeed, the description of functionality also implies this in many cases, with some aspects apparently denoted by the authority's very nature. Here, the object is to analyse this distinctiveness in more detail, unpacking what made the authority a largely unrivalled actor in the local regeneration arena, to which it was thus able to make a contribution that others could not. In turn the analysis seeks to draw out which factors may be seen to be locally specific and which may be applicable to other authorities. This will enable an understanding of the commonalities that seem to have resulted in other local authorities taking on similar roles, as Appendix G suggests. An extension to this is to take a more dynamic perspective, considering whether this situation is likely to be pervasive over time in light of possible changes.

7.1.2.1 Unrivalled local authority distinctiveness: the implications of particular responsibilities and powers

> *"The authority is best placed to administer it* [regeneration funding] *from a government point of view"* [Internal interviewee]
>
> *"It's important that they're* [elected members] *involved as they are the interface between local communities and local authorities [whom we then work with]"* [Level A interviewee]
>
> *"Because we are the biggest employer, I think that things like the health board and that...have looked at the Council really for guidance, and the voluntary sector as well [they've also looked to us]"* [Internal interviewee]
>
> *"In order to give the support we give, we need to be locally based, we need to be quite impartial, we need to have the local knowledge, which I don't see any other organisation apart from the Council being placed to accommodate"* [Internal interviewee]
>
> *"[Unlike the local authority] most of the stuff that will make a difference [to our objectives] is not in the control of [our organisation]"* [Level B organisation]
>
> *"The Borough Council is the biggest driving force for change we have because it's got the biggest resource"* [Level B interviewee]
>
> *"You've got to link up things like educational provision, social services provision, housing provision, streets, highways, environment – you can't take regeneration in isolation, it's got to link into everything else, and obviously the local authority is in the best place to make sure those links are there, and that everybody works together"* [Internal interviewee]
>
> *"Everything revolves around the Council"* [Level C interviewee]
>
> *"It's quite a fluid role really"* [Internal interviewee]

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"[Unlike me,] they're volunteers and only have so much time" [Internal interviewee]

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of unrivalled distinctiveness was the authority's particular remit and responsibilities, denoted, in common with other local authorities, by national legislation and tradition. It had the responsibility to deliver certain statutory services and enact certain higher-level policies and programmes, bearing in mind its power to secure community well-being. It also had to provide for local democratic accountability and representation and behave to certain standards of financial accounting, tendering and contracting. Together this had evidently required the authority to equip itself with appropriate, often professional, expertise, knowledge and information and maintain certain structures and procedures. These included strict systems of accounting, development control, a network of elected representatives covering the whole Borough and processes of political debate and scrutiny. It also had to undertake certain activities, notably the production of a unitary development plan, and subsequently, a community plan, and the provision of facilities for education, leisure, housing and social care. Lastly, relatively large sums of money were clearly at the authority's disposal to carry out such tasks. Together these could be seen to confer upon the authority quite a unique combination of distinctive nodal positioning, leverage power, primacy and flexibility within the multi-level governance environment.

Nodal positioning refers to the authority's particular place within the governing hierarchy. It was by and large the one agency that had cross-cutting responsibility for the territorial administration of the whole county borough area. This meant that it has to have good local knowledge, utilising its comprehensive outreach network and contact points, whilst also being very aware of what lies beyond it (other authorities, other non-governmental agencies) or 'above' it, (the work of other government agencies/departments). It also evidently had to have an idea of how to balance the interests of the diverse localities and populations within it since it was accountable to all. Equally, given that the authority had responsibility for many agendas rather than one, and had to join things up, it could be seen to be an important

convergence point for many agendas. Together this means that arguably the authority was 'best placed' to take on various functional roles because it had an overarching view and authority both upwards, downwards and horizontally, and people saw it as an access point to such a complex mass. Such roles can be seen to include steering, being a local advocate, leadership and management, providing strategic guidance, partnership-making, sign-posting and brokerage. This unrivalled distinctiveness would seem likely to apply elsewhere moreover, given its roots in the organisation of government and the realities of governance (e.g. the limitations of what local authorities can achieve alone). Indeed, this analysis fits with references in the wider literature to the importance of a local point of administration within a governmental hierarchy and vague allusions to local authorities being well placed to play an 'interface' or 'convening' role as well as to provide the democratic link to governance (e.g. Clarke & Stewart, 1994; Harding & Garside, 1995; Stoker, 1996; Bennett & Payne, 2000; DTLR, 2001; Sullivan, 2003; RI&I, 2004; Lyons, 2006).

In turn, the distinctive capacity of an unusual degree influence over the regeneration environment could be seen in a number of dimensions. These were firstly in the way services were provided and regulation was enacted and in its approach to procurement and employment. This was because the local authority was a major service provider, and in some cases the only provider of certain services, a major employer and purchaser, and due to its regulatory responsibilities, others had to interact with it for much activity to go ahead locally. One external Level B interviewee described it thus: *"there's no other organisation that comes anywhere near [its influence] – when you look at the remit of the local authority, it's quite huge, it's almost all-embracing, and it impacts on every individual's life, on every aspect of life within the Borough".* Importantly, it was also the case that the authority would have had the fairly unique public interest or community well-being justification in exercising such leverage for regeneration benefit, which other big-players might not. In many cases therefore, as several external interviewees pointed out, other agencies working in the regeneration field were reliant on the authority to further their own objectives. This again indicates how the authority's

functionality in respect of its activities being complementary to others' and in providing for delivery capacity and the crossing of regulatory hurdles would be distinctive. Through the literature, this picture can also be seen to be applicable elsewhere, with such unrivalled leverage increasingly noted as an important tool in the field of regeneration (e.g. Bennett & Payne, 2000; CPC, 2001; DTLR, 2002; IDeA, 2005a; Thorp, 2005). There is also some reference to it in discussions of the continuing significance of local authorities (e.g. Stewart, 1995; Painter et al, 1997; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001).

The other dimension of distinctive leverage discernible was in the realm of political power, conferred through the local authority being a unique base for local democratic representation. This meant it could convey unique democratic legitimacy and wield significant influence – in some cases, the final say in crucial decisions. Both of these were important to regeneration initiative, not only when it was in-house but also when it was undertaken by others. Therefore this can be seen to be the unparalleled root of some of the authority's 'inevitable' functionality - that related to others having to liaise with it. Looking elsewhere, the local authority as an important source of democratic legitimacy is again frequently noted (e.g. Painter et al, 1997; Rydin, 1998; Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Williams, 2006). This may be particularly understandable in light of reported difficulties of other forms of organisation in building representativeness (e.g. CPC, 2001; Sullivan, 2001, 2003; Geddes, 2006). However the need for interaction with the local authority to gain political support is a theme not discussed elsewhere, perhaps because it is a bit taboo and somewhat hidden. It nonetheless seems unlikely that all authorities attain the 'best practice' position described by RI&I (2004) of politicians agreeing about the needs of the area and taking a pragmatic stance towards proposals. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that this distinctiveness is also likely to be paralleled elsewhere.

Moving onto primacy, which is by definition a form of distinctiveness, we again see its origins in the authority's responsibilities and powers. Having to carry out a full range of activities over a small administrative area had made the authority a large player locally, for it had had to equip itself fully. In

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contrast, other organisations only provided a reduced range of activities or in some cases were not be present at all (e.g. universities, alternative training providers). In turn, having to provide a full range of services had apparently created an economy of scale for the authority, whereby for example, because it had an interest across various functions in accessing external funding it had developed a team of funding experts as well as appropriate management systems. This is one explanation for the authority being able to carry out the activity of 'big stuff' and of this being complementary to the work of others. That is, the authority, exhibiting such primacy, was one of the only players locally able to draw down the large sums of money needed to undertake large scale physical regeneration. Indeed, this was also helped by its unique access to public finances as match funding and distinctive on-the-ground delivery capacity and structures associated with it being the bottom governmental/administrative tier. Looking elsewhere, the primacy of local authorities has been noted more generally by Leach and Percy-Smith (2001) on the basis of the relative size of local authorities as organisations within an area (also Cole & John, 2001). It is also suggested by the fact that across the West-Wales and the Valleys Objective One area, local authorities account for a high proportion of funds drawn down (Boland, 2004[6]). Again therefore, a wider applicability of this relative capability within governance seems plausible.

This distinctive range of expertise was also evidently available to be lent to others for free, justified in relation to the pursuit of the public interest and community well-being. Some pointed out that this situation meant that the private sector had not seen it worth their while to develop equivalent expertise on Objective One funding to deploy on a consultancy basis, thus further enhancing the authority's relative primacy in this regard. The one possible challenge to such primacy that was conceivable was from the local voluntary sector support organisation. Yet, though such an organisation existed in Blaenau Gwent, there was no reference to its functionality being in the same

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[6] See also Bristow & Blewitt, 2001 for reference to local authorities' virtual monopoly over match funding, and Brooksbank et al (2001) for figures that demonstrate the significance of public sector employment, a large proportion of which would be found in local authorities.

league as the authority's. Importantly, the breadth of the authority's expertise (reflecting its functions) was unlikely to be found within a voluntary sector support agency, and the authority was also clearly lending its expertise to a wide range of organisations not just the voluntary sector. Indeed, it was evident that such expertise included insider-knowledge that would not necessarily be apparent to an outside advisor, concerning the authority's own politics, policies and procedures and how to negotiate them. One interviewee in fact made this point in relation to the blunders made by an external agency lacking such insider knowledge. In turn moreover, the authority could contribute significant amounts of funding directly to such organisations, another type of primacy that could be seen to encourage others to look to it for help. Together this situation seems to explain the authority's functionality in respect of partnership and the provision of informal support to others, suggesting that it would be unrivalled. Once again this distinctiveness seems likely to be mirrored elsewhere. Indeed, the literature portrays the apparent monopoly of local authorities over funding expertise (e.g. Boland, 1999a/b; Mayo & Taylor, 2001) and the significance of local authority contributions to partnerships (e.g. R.Tym et al, 2002; Bristow et al, 2003; Franklin, 2003; Fuller et al, 2004; RI&I, 2004).

Finally, many officers reported that despite local authority structures and official processes, they had a significant amount of freedom in how they interpreted their roles. It was also evident that the authority was a large enough organisation to afford some 'slack' in their deployment. This enabled them to be both responsive and reactive to needs and circumstances. Indeed for many, there was a duty to be so, such that even if they were required to deliver on particular projects they had funding for, they were still expected to undertake other work. As one described: *"it's not as if we're backroom boys and we can beaver away at all these projects and get on with it – we're still very much a frontline service"*. Although often seen in problematic terms – being *"dragged"* or *"pulled"* away and *"bombarded"*, such freedom and slack also evidently provided a certain amount of distinctive flexibility and fluidity compared to other more specialist or smaller-staffed organisations.

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This flexibility apparently enabled *"wheeler-dealing"* and problem-solving which can be seen to be relate to various forms of functionality such as ad hoc informal support and ensuring momentum. Indeed, elected members could also be seen to have equivalent freedom to use their initiative and mobilise their position as they saw fit, only being called to account at election time. This was evident in the different roles different members saw themselves playing. In turn, such freedom and slack also seems to have been what was enabling the authority, as opposed to other agencies, to take a more proactive and strategic approach to the governance environment, responding to emergent needs through the creation of new posts and schemes. Whilst the wider literature does not seem to discuss this element of distinctiveness directly, it would again seem likely to apply elsewhere. This is not least due to the enabling stance of the Local Government Act 2000 which confers upon local authorities the very broad power of well-being (Bennett et al, 2004). Indeed, studies of partnerships at least imply that local authorities have relative freedom and slack in finding that they are the main and apparently willing providers of secretariats and other staff, with other partners in contrast, hard pressed (e.g. Carley, 2000; R.Tym et al, 2002; Bristow et al, 2003; Franklin, 2003; ODPM, 2004).

7.1.2.2 Unrivalled local authority distinctiveness: the significance of history and the institutional context

> "Because we're at the deprived end, we have to do more of the stimulating ourselves - the demand isn't there - you're trying to get people involved when they haven't got the financial incentive to do so" [Internal interviewee]

> "There's a certain amount that's just had to be done by a central authority [before other things can happen]" [Level B interviewee]

> "Because historically the area's been dependent on intervention or things like that, we don't have the entrepreneurial or kind of self-help ethos; it's all, 'ok we have a problem, what's the Council going to do about it?" [Internal interviewee]

> "[Without the Council] there wouldn't have been anything done, as generally speaking, the capacity for people to do something for themselves is limited" [Level B interviewee]

> "Certainly in the public sector, the one thing you have more readily available probably is rapport with colleagues because they tend to be in a position longer, they're there, therefore you have certain advantages of understanding and influence" [Internal interviewee]

> "There's very little consensus work or collaborative work that's ever been done in the Valleys" [Level B interviewee]

> "It [the authority] has status, has clout, leadership, profile" [internal interviewee]

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The next way in which to look at how the authority's distinctiveness was unrivalled is to consider the history of its intervention in regeneration and the external institutional context. A useful starting point is that many interviewees, particularly those from the voluntary and community sectors, described the authority as *"the professionals"* contrasting this to their *"amateur"* status. This seems in part to refer to the experience embedded in the authority. Indeed, many officers referred to having been in 'the job' for a long time or having colleagues who had, whose experience could be tapped into. One characterised it as having learnt a *"bag of tricks"*. This can be seen to relate to the long history of local authority intervention in regeneration issues in the area. Other organisations in contrast were more recent arrivals on the scene. This seems to contribute a further explanation for the authority's ability to provide certain types of advice to various organisations as well as its ability to keep projects moving, suggesting distinctive capabilities in this regard. Looking elsewhere, this again seems likely to be replicated. A long history in intervention in regeneration is noted in many authorities, (Bennett et al, 2004; Fuller et al, 2004). Equally, descriptions of the rise of governance, or at least a more heavily populated governance arena, as a recent phenomenon, suggest that there are many new organisations working in regeneration without equivalent experience (e.g. Rhodes, 1997, 2000)

In Blaenau Gwent it was also noted that until very recently there had been a lack of private sector investment interest in the area because it was not profitable or too risky. This had evidently required public sector intervention, justified on the basis of public interest, to act as a catalyst to draw others in, again explaining this distinctive functionality. Moreover, this 'front-end' intervention had apparently equipped the authority particularly well on the physical side and in relation to land ownership. These are again factors which can be seen to relate to various dimensions of the authority's functionality in the governance environment. In contrast, other agencies had apparently emerged subsequently to compensate for its inadequacies in relation to softer, community-based regeneration. This seems to be a division of labour that made sense on an ongoing basis because the physical side is more capital

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intensive, and the authority as suggested above, had the systems and extensive delivery capacity to cope with this, which others did not. Here we see a form of path-dependency that explains the ongoing significance and complementarity of the authority's role in 'big stuff', suggesting why it would be unrivalled. Looking elsewhere, the private sector's role in high risk, initial physical regeneration can be seen to be similarly lacking at least in some parts of local authorities' territories, as illustrated by Lyons' (2006) discussions of various city authority's actions. Equally, that newer (usually voluntary and community sector) entrants on the regeneration scene tend to focus on the social side to regeneration can be seen to be in line with the evolution of the definition of regeneration on the basis of criticisms of an overly physical focus (see e.g. Carley & Kirk, 1998). There are numerous examples of non-local authority activity in this regard (see e.g. the volume edited by Haughton, 1999).

Returning to the issue of the authority's relative expertise, some suggested that this was also related to the *"dependency culture"* locally. It was argued that this had resulted in initiative beyond the authority, particularly amongst the grassroots, being somewhat stymied, inhibiting the development of alternative capacity. As one officer described, *"a lot of people [in local communities] still see the authority as very paternalistic, providing everything from cradle to crave"*, just as large employers once had. Another interviewee involved in regeneration work at this level noted that generally there was a lot of negativity associated with long-term deprivation, meaning, *"they [local people] would rather grizzle about things [than seek to try to do something positive]"*. This situation would seem to reinforce the primacy of the authority's capacities relevant to regeneration, creating an inherent need for it to step in to enable the regeneration arena to function. Again the literature indicates that this may also be the case elsewhere, with various observers suggesting that communities may have little interest in taking up the regeneration mantle, or at least of having insufficient skills to do so unaided (Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Davies, 2004; Geddes, 2006). Moreover, some have suggested that the complex funding environment and demands of associated compliance regimes are inherently dis-empowering, further

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reinforcing the advantage of those already 'up to speed' as opposed to newcomers (e.g. Boland, 1999a/b; Diamond, 2001; Mayo & Taylor, 2001; Franklin, 2003).

In the already-existing voluntary and community sector, lack of expertise could also be related tales of funding uncertainty which seemed to indicate the relative instability of employment, meaning that expertise might frequently be lost as employees had to get new jobs. What was also evident was that lack of funding and yet multiple demands on their time required voluntary sector staff to be 'Jacks of all trades'. This apparently brought with it the reality that they were 'master of none', not least due to lack of time to dedicate to particular tasks. Once again the authority could be seen to come out well in comparison due to its size and stability, being uniquely able to compensate for these deficiencies. Looking beyond Blaenau Gwent moreover, the problems for the voluntary and community sector of short-term and overall limited funding are widely reported (e.g. Thake, 2001; Donaldson, 2003; NCVO, 2004; WAO, 2005). This seems to indicate that this amateur/professional divide would also be present elsewhere, with the local authority tending to provide unrivalled professional capacity.

Another problem for agencies other than the authority was the counterpart to its relative slack, that is, their lack of slack. As one external Level B interviewee reported, *"they [the authority] do try hard, they have all these meetings...and in all fairness people don't turn up"* which followed on from a comment about there being too many things to get involved with and not enough time to do so. This would seem to reinforce the authority's capabilities derived from its own freedoms and flexibilities described above, both in terms of external need and the authority being the one agency most likely to be able to respond to it. From the literature it is again evident that this problem is not confined to Blaenau Gwent, suggesting the local authority is also likely to be important in these regards elsewhere. In the voluntary and community sector, it is related to the lack of core funding available (Alcock et al, 1999; LGHC, 2002; Donaldson, 2003). This is observed to put pressure on their attendance at partnership meetings, suggesting they would be unlikely to

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be able to organise or otherwise support them (Bristow et al, 2003; Boland, 2004; Armstrong & Wells, 2006; Royles, 2006). Likewise, a lack of slack and/or perceived interest or advantage is seen to explain an equivalent tendency in the private sector (e.g. Morgan & Mungham, 2000; Bristow et al, 2003; Boland, 2004; Davis, 2004).

Another feature of the external institutional environment in which the authority was operating was that beyond it, there were many small, specialist organisations. In the voluntary and community sector this was apparently due to competition, rivalries which made collaboration difficult, and in some cases a desire to remain linked to particular local communities rather than grow-up to become large-scale and more remote. In the public sector such specialisation seemed to reflect rationalisation, limiting on-the-ground delivery capacity or points of public access. This external situation seemed to reinforce the primacy of the authority within the multi-level governance environment. It once again provides an explanation for why the authority and not other agencies undertook certain functionality-linked tasks, as well as the need for interventions such as co-ordination/leadership, delivery, local knowledge and access to a broader range of expertise. One officer captured it thus, *"sometimes there are so many agencies involved that things fall through – the more stakeholders there are the more opportunity there is [for us] to lead something"*. Looking elsewhere, this seems to mirror broader trends of specialisation and fragmentation (Rhodes, 1997; Skelcher, 2000; Rosenau, 2004). Equally, there are many reports of competition and rivalries in the voluntary and community sector (e.g. Boland, 1999b; Miller, 1999; SINGOCOM Network, u.d; Lawless, 2004; WAO, 2005). Once again therefore, the contrast between the local authority and other agencies is likely to hold beyond Blaenau Gwent.

Another point of contrast observable between the authority and other organisations within its working environment was that it was a prominent point of constancy. Many councillors had for instance been continuous representatives of their communities for many years despite local government reorganisation in 1996. This seems to be particularly significant in light of the

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treatment of the non-local 2005 Labour candidate in run-up to the parliamentary elections. The way her credentials were questioned suggests that outsiders or newcomers might find it difficult to built the bridges necessary for certain elements of functionality described (e.g. engagement, brokerage, sign-posting). As indicated above, other organisations in contrast to the local authority were often newer or more subject to personnel change. As such the authority could apparently compensate for this by being able to keep track of changes, build-up long-term relationships, and provide a familiar point of contact for local people. This once again would seem to confer distinctive functionality in relation to governance. In the literature it is noted similarly that organisations other than the local authority may be relatively transient due to policy change or funding problems (e.g. Lawless, 2004; WAO, 2005). Rydin (1998) and RI&I (2004) note in contrast, the permanence and constancy provided by local authorities. Therefore, while trust of outsiders may be less of an issue elsewhere, the more general benefits of constancy might be seen to confer equivalent distinctiveness on most local authorities.

7.1.2.3 Unrivalled local authority distinctiveness: vested interests

"Ultimately I think we'll all be judged on whether we get the money in for projects" [Internal interviewee]

"The Council has been very fond of saying, 'no you can't do [that]' – [they're] still locked into 'I know best, I represent the community' " [Level B interviewee]

"Involving communities from the beginning members have never allowed to happen" [Internal interviewee]

"[Officers] will openly say to us, Communities First is not an agenda that elected members in Blaenau Gwent want – that it is seen as a threat to their local democratic right to be elected members" [Level B interviewee]

"[with Communities First and the development trusts] there's the suspicion that they're trying to take over the role of the local authority" [internal interviewee]

"There's a tendency for them [the authority] to take over the agenda" [Level B interviewee]

"They always ask [themselves], 'what's in it for me?'" [Level A interviewee]

"[Traditionally there's been the attitude that] regeneration is their work and no-one else should touch it" [Level A interviewee]

The last way in which to consider the authority's unrivalled distinctiveness is to consider its particular self- or vested-interests that seemed to be apparent,

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connecting to the instrumentalist theme in Chapter 3. This is to take a step beyond the interest seen to be derived from the authority's responsibility – to further the public good (or community well-being), to recognise that it may also have an interest in maintaining its own legitimacy and securing its own future and capacity to act. The complicating factor is that these can be defined variously. On the one hand, it might mean the authority would have an interest in adapting itself to suit changing circumstances, so that it continued to play an observably distinctive role. This seemed to be one explanation for some of the newer, more strategic and proactive activities it was taking a lead with in relation to the multi-level governance working environment. Other agencies in contrast did not seem to be exhibiting equivalent initiative. On the other, it seemed that the authority had an interest in ensuring that there were sufficient flows of money to support a reasonable degree of regeneration activity in the area. This could be seen to be a unique pressure on it to work in partnership and foster or support otherwise inadequate external capacity, due to funding criteria. These were increasingly designed to foster the normative ideal of policy action being undertaken by those more appropriate capacities than local authorities (Boland, 1999a/b; Bristow et al, 2003; Lawless, 2004).

Here we see the authority in a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the wider governance environment, with the authority apparently needing it arguably as much as vice versa. Indeed, this stance could also be seen to be driven by Audit Commission policing and stipulation of good practice, which local authorities have to comply with. Such an ambiguity was in fact noted by several external Level B interviewees, who saw their own organisations bringing added-value to the authority's regeneration rather than the opposite, or at least as one put it, "*they use us because we can access money they can't*". Some officers were very candid about the pursuit of partnership for this reason. One suggested, "*if there's a funding opportunity, we're in there – and we call it partnership*", whilst another noted "*nobody is just going to give you funding these days*". The development trusts likewise, were apparently seen by the authority as a means to bring its regeneration work closer to local people, the first having been set up by it in the face of unrest: this would explain its continued interest in supporting them.

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Yet such an attitude was undoubtedly a source of resentment for such organisations however, suggesting it could be counterproductive in terms of the negative impact on working relations and broader legitimacy. Indeed, one external Level B interviewee took this further, describing a more negative outcome: *"it's all about pressure – they know there's a funding avenue that they cannot get their hands on, but, 'how do we do this? Oh I know, we'll set up a group, they'll be all right' – that to me...is the whole point, you're setting up something to fail – because it will fail, because people don't know what they're letting themselves in for".* Yet this situation could also be envisaged to be likely to create an ongoing dependency relation, with such groups coming to depend on the authority's superior capacity to 'bail them out' of difficulties. This would again seem to be a means to help make the authority's future more secure by creating a need for it. Indeed, such a scenario could be seen once again with the development trusts which had been set up with, and continued to be largely sustained by significant local authority support.

However, some also saw vested interests to lead to a more obstructive stance, suggesting that dependency was not inevitable but a result of defensiveness. It was suggested that the authority deliberately prevented the development of capacity in other sectors because it saw it as a threat to its own continued existence, power and hence legitimacy, thereby maintaining its distinctiveness by contributing to compensatory functionality. Indeed, it could be argued that this stance was a justifiable response to the authority being undervalued by regimes such Compulsory Competitive Tendering and Best Value (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3) with their undertones of local authority redundancy and failure to acknowledge distinctiveness. One officer described the situation thus: *"to a certain extent we facilitate too much, we take too much on, we like to stick out oar in. To a certain extent it is needed, however the Council seems to sometimes get carried away with its role in doing this, it sees itself as central, and if any other methods or things do come up, they're often seen as a problem – you know, it's development trusts, things like that, they're buzzing around, getting in the way of us doing it properly".* Other

internal and external interviewees likewise gave numerous examples of how they saw this defensiveness at work. These ranged from an unwillingness to open up its activities to alternative providers depriving them of income-generating opportunities and associated benefits to excessive control of certain community-based organisations restricting their self-development.

Such a stance however also seemed to be putting strain on the authority's legitimacy amidst groups affected by it, suggesting it was not necessarily sustainable. Yet there was also some suggestion that these accusations could reflect a generally contested and emergent situation, which those on the receiving end perceived to be more malignly negative than it was in practice. That is, the authority could have been being over-protective of newer organisations because it did not want them to be exposed to catastrophic risk. Indeed one officer explained: *"there are significant risks involved which could expose groups [inappropriately]. It has to be done in a structured manner [which is why we play a significant role]"*. The authority could also arguably be keeping things in-house because it was uncertain of external capacity and did not want to expose the public to this, feeling its own capacity to be under-acknowledged. Equally it might be being cautious in lending out some aspects of its expertise because it did not wish to drag itself into complicated situations of accountability which might compromise other areas of its work. This then suggests that whilst particular vested interests were perhaps at work, they might not be as selfish and monolithic as they appear and might ultimately wither away. Indeed, one officer suggested that a lot of apparent resistance was simply a case of *"[such a way of working being] new to the Council - they've never worked in partnership before"* and *"they don't know [how best to work in this new way] and what's the best way to work if you don't know? The way you always have worked"*. Once again however, the alleged effect of these interests for the time-being would seem to provide another explanation for the authority's functionality as a provider of complementary activity and of such functionality being unrivalled because others cannot undertake it.

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Looking beyond Blaenau Gwent, various authors discuss the articulation of local authority self-interest in equivalent ways, painting a similar complex picture. Most simply, discussions of partnership suggest that local authority participation may be financially driven, although in turn they often contribute to the functioning of such partnerships in necessary ways (Bailey, 1995; Bristow et al, 2003:23). In the Welsh context, Morgan & Mungham (2000:15, 210) describe the dominance of the Welsh Labour Party and associated vested interests as being associated with a 'monist' political culture that discourages dissent. A logical extension of this would be that it discourages innovation and the development of alternatives (see also SINGOCOM Network, u.d.). Yet this kind of situation has also been described elsewhere, suggesting a more generic problem apparently related to defensive group-think or pervasive 'old-school' culture and vested interests within at least some parts of local authorities (e.g. Boland, 1999a/b; Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Lowndes, 2005; Geddes, 2006: 90). Boland (1999a/b) describes what seemed to be a tactical gate-keeping process relating to match-funding and information in Knowsley, where the authority was also accused of stealing certain ideas and making them their own, rather than supporting them externally (see also Davies, 2004: 580). However, he also suggests (1999a: 654) that the situation was perhaps seen to be more malignly negative than was actually the case. Indeed, there is some broader acknowledgement that local authorities, more than other bodies, may tend to shy away from certain activities supportive of new dimensions to governance, because of self-interested considerations such as accountability and risk (Pearce & Mawson, 2003: 62; WAO, 2005: 26-7). Overall, once again it seems reasonable to suppose that a range of vested interests may contribute to various elements of distinctive functionality on the part of local authorities elsewhere in the UK as well as in the case-study.

7.1.2.4 Summary and discussion

This section has sought to provide a comprehensive view of the local authority's distinctiveness in relation to governance. This is to explain why it and not other agencies had taken on the functional roles described, how this may likewise be the case elsewhere, and why therefore the local authority is a

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key actor to study within the governance environment in order to understand it. As such the analysis enables important connections to be made that have not been made elsewhere in the literature. The following discussion summarises the arguments whilst taking them forward.

It is evident that a range of factors interweaved to create within the authority not only marked distinctiveness, but also related capacities and influences relative to and in respect of other agencies in the regeneration governance arena. These enabled it to enact complementary and directly functional roles within this environment. Indeed this meant the authority was often looked to to do so, due to weaknesses that not only inhibited alternative actors' abilities to take on an equivalent role, but also required rectifying. This therefore consolidates the picture of a multi-level governance environment that may not work without the interventions of such a body. Reflecting aspects of both the instrumentalist and functionalist themes in Chapter 3, to a large extent this distinctiveness seems to relate to the historic and continued institutionalisation of capabilities required of such a territorial unit of government, and associated interests. The implications of this institutionalisation have in turn apparently overshadowed subsequent developments, reining in the extremes of divergent possibilities.

This seems to echo Jessop's (1997, 1998, 2000) notion of governance occurring in the 'shadow of hierarchy'. However, this situation seems to have occurred as much by default as deliberate design, and it does not mean that the authority's role was merely hierarchical because its functionality was clearly much more complex than this. Nonetheless, the significance of the 'shadow of hierarchy' means that it makes sense that other local authorities in other contexts demonstrate equivalent functionality. That is because, this institutionalisation, though it has local dimensions, is largely structured by similar national legislation, tradition and funding arrangements, as well as common patterns of regeneration need. This is contrary to suggestions made by some interviewees that Blaenau Gwent CBC is, or Valleys' authorities are, entirely peculiar and a law unto themselves.

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Thus, whilst the exact same set of shaping factors may not apply elsewhere, any variation in them would largely seem to affect the particular combination and extent of functional tasks that the authority undertakes, rather than it being likely to play no role within governance at all. That is, in any (UK) locality the local authority, whatever the power of politicians or its stance towards external initiative, would seem to have a range of distinctive capabilities that can be marshalled to denote unrivalled functionality as regards the local (as opposed to regional, national etc) operation of the multi-level governance regeneration arena. Even in Northern Ireland where traditionally, local government has had less power, the tide seems to be turning, with this potential apparently being recognised: local councillors for instance have been enrolled into new partnership structures as the important democratic link (Sullivan & Stewart, 2002). The one nuance that needs to be added is in relation to two-tier local government, as continues to be the case in much of England. Here, the model would still seem to apply, but with a division of labour according to the slightly different hierarchical position each has, and associated differences in capacities and needs. Thus for example, the Best Value report for Easington District Council shows how it has seen the need to create integrated geographical partnerships that co-ordinate the work of different authorities, including the County Council and itself, with different territorial remits locally (Audit Commission, 2002). Nonetheless, as Sullivan & Sweeting (2006) point out, such a division of labour may not be amicable.

This situation could also be indicative of the future. That is, even if certain aspects of the local authority's unrivalled distinctiveness and the ability to translate them into functional action (e.g. due to availability of Objective One funding) are challenged and diluted, it seems likely that its distinctive functionality will be reconfigured rather than disbanded. The logic that supports this proposition is that firstly in the vertical dimension, the territorial division of labour seems likely to continue to require a body of a certain size (giving economies of scale) to provide local delivery capacity, a range of expertise, local strategic planning and collective representation and mediation of interests. Secondly, horizontally, it would also seem that the authority's resultant overarching and central nodality and primacy of expertise may

continue to be important, and perhaps increasingly so, even if direct leverage powers are diluted. Thirdly, the capacity of flexibility and slack would seem to allow the authority to respond to change.

Take for example, the educational reforms being enacted in England (DfES, 2005). In promoting the independence of schools, these would seem to imply a certain reduction of the local authority's leverage in this sector. However, in further increasing fragmentation, the White Paper emphasises the importance of the local authority taking on more over-arching roles such as strategic guidance and regulation, which as an overarching body, it is well-placed to do (DfES, 2005). Indeed, this might likewise be expected to be the case with the contracting-out of services to other providers, as continues to be promoted by Central Government (cf. the discussion by Clarke and Stewart, 1994). Moreover, even if the availability of such contracts makes some organisations more stable and self-reliant, the apparent likelihood of ongoing fragmentation, localisation and competition within the voluntary and community sector may continue to provide a role for the local authority as a centralised source of expertise and other support. Equally, it appears that even if new tiers of representative and participatory democracy are created on a more widespread basis, the authority may still be required to take on an important co-ordination, back-up and compensation role (see e.g. Sullivan, 2003:366). Indeed, this may also be seen with the evolution of a stronger private sector: risk-bearing may still be necessary in some areas of the Borough given varied geographies and general patterns of shifting uneven development. As one officer noted, *"what you put into one area will naturally instigate the decline of another...and that's the nature of markets that we're dealing with...it's not stable"*.

The clearest evidence for the likely pervasiveness of the authority's distinctive functionality lies however in the configuration of that functionality already observable. It can be seen to combine both 'old school' and newer, more positive elements. Yet, embracing the new had not involved total dissipation of its distinctiveness, it had reconfigured it: both of these elements contributed to the authority's distinctive functionality. It follows that if the

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balance of interests were altered, one form of functional distinctiveness or another could be expected to be maintained. Meanwhile, interviewees clearly articulated the idea that they continued to respect for instance, the authority's distinctive expertise, though as the working environment was changing, they expected it to be deployed differently. One external Level B interviewee stated: *"they're the experts, I'm not saying they're not – but they need to listen to people that live here "*. Equally, however, many external interviewees recognised the continued need for the authority's traditional activities such as development control and representative input to strategic planning. This suggests that the authority's future and pervasiveness as a distinctive actor within the multi-level governance environment lies in its ability to enact various types of functionality at once.

Overall, it may be argued that the organisation of the governance environment in this way, that is, the positioning of the local authority within it in relation to other agencies, effects a reduction in the tradeoffs between different extremes through standing at the 'half-way' point between them. Such extremes include localisation, centralisation and specialisation. Echoing the age-old dilemmas discussed by for instance, fiscal federalists, (e.g. Buchanan, 1950; Oates, 1999; Fossati & Panella, 1999) this can perhaps be seen to be a more pervasive understanding of the earlier conception of its functionality as 'gap-filling'. Indeed, this further suggests that the contemporary role of the local authority is a variation on a theme in the history of local government, as can also be deduced from the way in which the role is clearly built on many long-standing capacities (see e.g. Gray & Jenkins, 2000; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001; Wilson & Game, 2006).

In turn however, it is important to understand the implications of this 'in-betweeness', or concurrent functionality in multiple dimensions. We see amidst the above analysis once again, the glimmer of contestation within this environment, and the somewhat contradictory position the authority is placed in when the picture is looked at in the round. This provides an important link to the complicated picture presented by the analysis in Chapter 6, a link that will now be explored in more detail.

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7.2 What are the more problematic aspects of this positioning?

This section seeks to deploy an understanding of the authority's governance positioning derived from the analysis in Section 7.1, to revisit the analysis in Chapter 6, consolidating the picture of the authority's difficulties in achieving a regeneration role which is seen to be generally positive. Through this process the notion of meta-governance as governance in the shadow of hierarchy is explored further and refined in relation to the multi-level governance environment and the position of the local authority within it. Subsequently, there is critical reflection on the place of conventional evaluative assessment within this environment, bringing the analysis back full circle to the critique advanced in Chapters 2 and 6.

7.2.1 The local authority as caught 'in-between'

The above analysis provides us with the crucial conceptualisation of the authority's governance positioning as 'in-between', confirming but expanding on the similar supposition made through piecing together different strands of the literature in Chapter 3. The basic picture of in-betweeness that is discernible on the basis of this analysis is that the authority is subject to demands, or is responding to needs, from multiple directions within the governance arena and its different levels - the A, B and C described above. Ultimately, this situation requires the authority to take a stance in their midst, i.e. in-between them. This may be (1) a relatively independent stance, albeit one that enacts complementarity, or (2) one that actively intervenes between them, acting as an intermediary or connector. However, both of these apparently involve (3) concurrently juggling and mediating between different demands made at the same time. Thus the local authority must be different things to different audiences.

The first two of these dimensions of in-betweeness have been expanded on at length in Section 7. 1, building on the analysis in Chapter 6 which showed the authority to have make both direct, standalone and many intermediate contributions to regeneration. Here, the object is to consider in more detail the third dimension of in-betweeness, and in particular, the problematic aspects of

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the mediation involved. This provides a more schematic understanding, tying into the conceptualisation of multi-level governance, of negative aspects of the authority's regeneration role, the tradeoffs and conundrums described in Chapter 6, and the less than perfect picture of functionality suggested above. It also demonstrates the implications of the different and possibly conflicting elements of distinctiveness described above, being enacted simultaneously. A number of examples help capture the ongoing mediation and juggling involved.

7.2.1.1a Making visible problematic 'in-betweeness': the Catch 22 of 'alignment with whom'

"There's going to be different agendas... because regeneration is serving a whole multitude of people in the population" [Internal interviewee]

"To some extent [their regeneration role is determined by] the role they're allowed to play [by the Welsh Assembly]" [Level B interviewee]

"We've got the calibre...but it will always revolve around the commitment of other agencies" [Internal interviewee]

"[In effect] there are two regeneration systems – there is another regeneration system which is actually below and above them, [the authority] which doesn't necessarily include them" [Internal interviewee]

"I don't see a great degree of understanding of what the wider issues are, what the strategic issues are" [Level A interviewee]

"You couldn't afford to go off in one direction that is led from any agency, because it would all fall down, because you'd end up not keeping another part going" [internal interviewee]

"We try and influence their business plan...the ongoing argument is that we define locally what the priorities are and they should then fund according to those, whereas, they're saying, 'ok, but we have a business plan' - there tends to be a lot of fighting over who's driving what.. between our members and [x-agency]" [Internal interviewee]

Firstly, there is the Catch 22 situation whereby recently, the authority had been refused funding for town-centre improvements on the basis that its funding bid did not pay any attention to the strategic guidance from the funding body. This was because, as several internal interviewees pointed out, local politics and reasoned policy (the need to spread relevant activity given a lack of natural centre) dictated a different approach. As a consequence, the authority was accused of being unprofessional and the objectives of the higher-level agency providing the funding were not to be implemented locally. Equally however, the authority had insufficient funding to continue its local strategic agenda and demonstrate its competence, officers felt their time

on the bid has been wasted and external agencies were left feeling excluded, their agendas frustrated, as they had not been involved in the bid.

Drawing on the analysis in Section 7.1.2, we can see that higher-level government policy-statements have raised expectations of local determinism and ownership beyond the local authority (heterarchy). Yet, higher-level policy also continues to promote hierarchy by an emphasis on upward accountability and vital local representative democracy. Hence, much funding continues to be channelled through the local authority as a centre of decision-making and because it has, and is subject to, appropriate control systems. In turn, higher-level government desires to see its agendas implemented, and therefore seeks to control local initiative via funding eligibility guidelines to secure such implementation, in this case trying to secure regional spatial coherence, reducing local discretion. Yet, higher-level government is also dependent on local co-operation and delivery capacity. This has tended to be developed within the local authority which therefore has a competitive advantage over others, notably newcomers, in the field beyond it, particularly in relation to specialist physical activity.

Overall we see the local authority at once being a part of and having to mediate between old and new, hierarchy and heterarchy, the local and regional, political and professional. The negative impact of the failure to compromise or achieve reconciliation is also apparent. In housing within itself, and interacting with, different elements of multi-level governance, the local authority appears to be inevitably caught within a broader situation of 'contested governance' (Lloyd & Meegan, 1996; Boland, 1999a/b; see also Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006). It is also evident that the local level, as the level of delivery, is the key level at which the realities of a limited funding pot and yet a wide-ranging definition of regeneration (Donaldson, 2003) have to meet. This is a related situation of contestation that the authority is again inescapably caught up in.

7.2.1.1b Making visible problematic 'in-betweeness': the (il)logicality of the continued existence of the so-called 'People's Republic of Blaenau Gwent'

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> "If you get a downturn in the local economy, it starts impacting on local things – similarly with the national situation economically, that will impact on it locally, and those are factors outside your control" [Internal interviewee]
>
> "I think a lot of agencies, because they don't have to work to the same guidelines as the authority, they do see us as a dinosaur" [Internal interviewee]
>
> "I'm not sure whether the officer class aren't racing ahead of the political class" [Level B interviewee]
>
> "Looking from the politicians' viewpoint, they want the best for their community, and they will put every case they possibly can to achieve what they can for that community. That has to be balanced against available resources" [Internal interviewee]
>
> "Certainly the Welsh Assembly wants community-led, community, bottom up, community involvement, so that you work with the community to achieve what they see as their needs and wants and their desires. That's difficult with the role of politicians who don't always see eye to eye with their own community, have their own agenda" [Internal interviewee]

A second example can be seen in the concurrent logicality and illogicality of the continued existence of what one interviewee referred to directly[7] as the 'People's Republic of Blaenau Gwent'. This was defined by interviewees in relation to the reluctance to out-source local service provision or divert funding from in-house strategies to community groups (which could imply a loss of control) and more broadly in terms of a suspicion of such groups by members and some managers. It was also described in relation to decisions such as one prioritising the creation of jobs locally over the continued existence of a nationally important lapwing (rare bird) site. The reported and to some extent observable consequences of this were, at one level, derision and lack of respect for the authority's officers amongst other agencies and frustration for officers who wanted to embrace new ideas and saw their value inhibited. Equally, such a stance had implications for the development of voluntary and community sector capacity (and hence, some would argue, more locally sensitive provision) and the local implementation of the sustainable development and community development agendas. Many of these, as suggested above were also impacting on the authority's legitimacy.

Yet, a popular sentiment locally was that the authority had been abandoned by higher-level government and its agencies, a sentiment illustrated most recently in the June 2006 by-election campaign that saw the area continuing to reject Labour candidates in favour of Independents. Higher-level

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[7] Many others referred to such an idea without naming it thus

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government and its agencies were said to be were more interested in easier tasks (e.g. the M4 corridor) or too wedded to a general neo-liberal agenda rather than pro-active public-sector intervention. Equally, as discussed above, the authority had responsibility for the whole Borough, not just parts of it. In response powerful groups, notably certain politicians, in many instances appeared to conceive of the authority as the one thing standing between the vulnerable local population and footloose global capital, or between narrow-minded community groups or private sector cherry-picking and the wider public good. As such, defensiveness appears to be a locally-possible way of inserting some control over this situation, whilst also enabling councillors to maintain some degree of power and influence in a changing environment. In these circumstances, the logic of the priorities described seems reasonable and locally justifiable.

Once again, we see the authority mediating between higher-level policy and local circumstances, local politics and broader considerations, old and new, heterarchy and hierarchy. Such mediation in some shape or form is apparently unavoidable and likely to be contested from some perspective. Indeed, it seems that the local authority, through its territorial responsibilities, is at the unenviable crux of the pattern of 'glocalisation' (Swyngedouw, 2004). Here, footloose global capital has to ground itself with concrete effects, in so doing bringing it into contact with the local authority. Yet upon its equally inevitable withdrawal from the area, it leaves the authority to deal with the territorial aftermath, as had recently been the case with the closure of the Corus steelworks. Some described this situation and associated 'fire-fighting' as tending to reinforce the local authority's overall inertia by leaving less surplus capacity to deal with more imaginative and challenging agendas. It could also mean that the authority was fighting a losing battle in its regeneration efforts, leaving it to look like it was merely playing at regeneration for the benefit of a local political elite (as discussed in Chapter 6). In turn, it was evident that it was the local authority as the level of delivery, that was having to deal with the operational realities of messy, ambiguous policy concepts such as 'sustainable development' and 'quality of

life'. As such it had to reconcile things that other levels of government did

bother to reconcile.

7.2.1.1c Making visible problematic 'in-betweeness': daily dilemmas and frustrations for officers

> "I work with officers from within the authority on certain things and...I think great, but unfortunately they have their own political masters don't they? It's difficult" [Level B interviewee]
>
> "[there's difficulties because] x [higher level manager] thinks [my specialist area] is one thing, councillors think it's totally different, probably [my line manager] thinks it's something different, and even the Welsh Assembly then think it's something different again" [Internal interviewee]
>
> "[Community groups tend to think mainly about benches and officers need to get them past this] but they've [officers] got a hell of a job because technically...they're not there to lead...they can only...influence and persuade, and that's very difficult, particularly if you've got such powerful local councillors sitting on these boards who have their own agenda...they're in a very very difficult position I think" [Level A interviewee]
>
> "we do work with the development trusts, but we've still got this political problem with development trusts, in that the members are very wary about them...as an officer it's very difficult really" [internal interviewee]
>
> "Perhaps the most frustrating thing is, other people outside the organisation...will expect you to take that decision, are looking to you for guidance, and you can't deliver immediately" [internal interviewee]
>
> "[A difficulty in my work is] people not being aware of the guidelines we have to follow – they think, there's money there [why can't we have it]...they don't understand the process" [internal interviewee]
>
> "[In my job] it's a case of trying to resolve all the issues that are going on in that big melting pot - [In the course of our work] we've got to rationalise all the different opinions, and all the different ideas, to come up with one idea for projects" [internal interviewee]

Thirdly there are telling examples of problematic in-betweeness at the more

individual level or micro-scale. Many described on a day-to-day level tending

"to get pulled in different directions" and having no *"one master and*

commander" that they were answerable to. Often moreover, they were put in

difficult multi-way situations, where for instance, *'you get a member being*

pestered by the residents to counter the industrial developer, who needs to

just, you know, keep his business going'. Others described equivalent

examples where they had to mediate between external expectations of

flexibility, internal managerial and political controls and higher-level policy

ideals. In the extreme, were examples of having to mediate between local

communities and different opinions in those communities, elected members,

the development trusts and local association of voluntary organisations, a

strategic view of the Borough, and higher-level policy agendas or funding

compliance. Once again, what is evident is the active mediation between

different positions within multi-level governance that is necessitated by the authority being part of it in an in-between position.

7.2.1.2 Summary and discussion

Overall we see the local authority and individuals within it as in-between not only in the sense of being in a half-way, nodal or gap-filling positioning between agencies, but also in having to actively mediate between and bridge, different and often contrasting positions in other dimensions. Each of these contrasting positions relate to the actual existing nature of multi-level governance. They include different modes of achieving public good outcomes, (competition, hierarchy and heterarchy); different geographical impetuses, (global and local, local and regional); tradition and traditional structures and new and emergent activities, actors, norms and expectations; and normative ideals and on-the-ground realities. Such mediation may in fact include the required stitching together of contradictory higher-level agendas, an observation that is associated in particular with aspects of the 'modernising local government' agenda (see e.g. Sullivan, 2001; Davis & Martin, 2002; Pearce & Mawson, 2003). Indeed, related to this, it is clear that rather than simple internal 'joining up' being required, the authority itself embodies certain contradictory elements or constituent parts which have to be somehow reconciled within it. In turn, the authority is revealed as being caught at the apex of much wider debates concerning priorities within regeneration, the distribution of power, how to operationalise popular but elusive concepts such as sustainable development, or how to cope with the spatial impacts of globalisation.

In enacting such a positioning it should be no surprise that the authority's actions were observably contested. Externally, people did not necessarily understand the competing pressures at play and that the authority was to some extent caught up within broader contestations through no fault of its own. Internally and externally, people appeared to find the situation difficult to cope with. One internal interviewee reflected that, *"I keep thinking, this is what the corporate view should be, but then you get varying political agendas that again influence it, and don't play ball"* - a source of obvious frustration.

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Similarly, an external (Level A) interview admitted, "*there seem to be
conflicting demands and pressures within the authority [which to me, don't
make sense]*". This again describes a source of frustration, but also indicates a
seeming lack of awareness at this higher-level of its part in the messiness.
Such contestation could however perhaps be a significant source of
dynamism, as well as pertaining to variety in how in-betweeness is played out
in practice, both within any one local authority and in different local
authorities.

Nor should it be any surprise that the authority and its constituent parts were
seen to be generally under-performing, or at least to have an ambiguous
strategic role in regeneration. This echoes Gray and Jenkins' (2000)
observation that failure to prioritise one side of an orientation in the
localisation/centralisation equation will result in inevitably imperfect
'fudging'. What these authors do not make clear is that such fudging is in
reality unavoidable. This is a situation closer perhaps to Davies' (2005) notion
of the 'governance dialectic' whereby governance needs intervention within
it, but that this may have dysfunctional consequences. The implication is that
each local authority has to make some unspecified and almost impossible
decision as to what is for the best. Indeed, this is implied even by official
reports which touch on such in-betweeness. For instance, a Wales-wide report
into the Communities First Programme, (Lewis, 2003) despite acknowledging
the important capacities of local authorities, reported the widely-articulated
view that they should be facilitators, not leaders, of community regeneration.
The unasked and unanswered question is, where does one end and the other
begin? It seems though perhaps for some authorities, the answer may be
simply to avoid the issue through minimal engagement beyond what is
necessary. This is suggested by observations of the varied extent of local
authority immersion in partnerships (see e.g. NRU, 2003).

Whatever the decision made in practice, what is clear is that 'in-betweeness'
is a significant fact of life for the authority and individuals within it, that has
to be made to work. It is not just something of interest worth commenting on
in passing, as seems to be implied by those authors that have merely touched

on it elsewhere (e.g. Foley & Martin, 2000; Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Peters & Pierre, 2004; Stoker, 2004). Indeed, it is also a more fundamental and structural problem than suggested by those that point it out indirectly in relation to the Government's conflicting agendas for local government. Certain aspects of such in-betweeness seem in conformity with the notion of governance occurring 'in the shadow of hierarchy', (subject to top-down constraints and associated structures) where local authorities are part of governance. However, overall this analysis also shows that the situation experienced and enacted by the local authority studied, and conceivably, other local authorities is more complicated than this. A concept of the local authority as 'in-between' in a situation of multi-level governance picks up on the active mediation and bridging, and general vitality identified. This is a positioning that is not merely imposed from the top-down but also involves choice (see e.g. MacKinnon, 2000; Uitermark, 2004). Such choice, though somewhat constrained by external funding dependency, includes response to bottom-up and horizontal and its own agendas (cf. e.g. Sullivan et al, 2004; Lowndes, 2005). Therefore this is a multi-dimensional positioning, in line with a multi-dimensional concept of multi-level governance. It will also be one that is likely to played out in slightly different ways in different places, and given that the authority's own agendas may not be uniformly aligned, played out in slightly different ways within an authority.

Lastly, given the territorial influence of local authorities in the UK (as described in Section 7.1.2) it would seem that the interaction of the constituent-agencies of governance with local authorities is more or less inevitable. As such, this mediation process would seem to be an essential component of the governance environment. This suggests that not only is Central Government influence inescapable in the UK operation of governance, as has been suggested by much discussion of governance occurring in the shadow of hierarchy (MacLeod & Goodwin, 1999b; Bache, 2000; Stoker, 2000; Davies, 2002, 2004) but also that local government needs to inserted into the picture. In turn, such insertion needs to go beyond the discussion of the 'State' in general terms (cf. Jessop, 1997, 1998; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Swyngedouw, 2005) to recognise that local authorities are a

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distinctive actor and essential structuring component of the picture in their own right. This clearly extends the critique made by these authors of the neglect of the state in governance-centric literature. It also reinforces the relevance, as suggested by Franklin, (2003) of downward and horizontal extensions to the multi-level governance concept which has tended to be deployed restrictively.

7.2.2 The place of evaluative assessment within this picture

> *'People cannot distinguish between elected members and council employees* '[internal interviewee]
>
> *'[Performance indicators] paint a picture, an artist's picture'* [internal interviewee]
>
> *'[With the increase in targets] sometimes the emphasis is too much on quantity rather than quality'* [internal interviewee]
>
> *'The Advisory Board is causing the Borough to make knee-jerk reactions'* [Level B interviewee]

The other conclusion to be drawn from this discussion of inherent contestedness and conundrums, in line with Chapter 6, is that the local authority appears to be in a position where it is very difficult for it to produce an all-round improvement in its 'performance'. Whilst it might be argued that it should be more single-minded in its approach, perhaps focusing on the edicts of higher-level authorities, this would seem to be difficult to justify, for its legitimacy is not solely dependent on higher-approval. Instead, an evaluative assessment that is sensitive to this situation is clearly demanded if it is to help the authority cope with these implications. This was the underlying objective of the evaluative assessment discussed in Chapter 6. Not only did it reveal the importance of actively managing contestedness and inevitable fudging, it was also an attempt to intervene in the uneven and somewhat dysfunctional power relations promulgated by the current regime by making the invisible visible. That is, in attempting to be open-minded and comprehensive it was seeking to some extent to overcome or discredit the 'shadow of hierarchy' which the current regime, in promoting conformity, or unidirectional compliance can be seen to be part of. It was attempting instead to provide a form of evaluative assessment more appropriate to the in-between positioning of the authority.

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This manifestation of the shadow of hierarchy is dysfunctional in a number of ways. Firstly, in failing to acknowledge that the authority's performance in regeneration terms is not entirely in its own hands, and the extent of its actual performance, it results in unfair blaming, excessive negativity and fear. The latter was observable in the panicked reaction to the intense scrutiny of the Advisory Board and Wales Audit Office's Regeneration Improvement Study. This brought with it the threat of direct sanctions, but also seemed to be important in relation to the competition for resources and influence within the authority as well as ongoing criticism by external partners. Observations suggested that the view amongst some officers was that a good external assessment/assessment based on external parameters might have a positive impact on whether projects long in the planning could be realised. On the other hand, a certain desperation to find solutions to ongoing external criticism was apparent, in relation to which the recommendations of authoritative external assessors were seen to some by some as, without a doubt, 'the answer'.

Altogether such pressure was producing change at too fast a rate to allow for it to mesh with existing practices, instead displacing valuable activity. Sudden requirements for information or immediate responses to the recommendations of such bodies were felt by a number of internal and external interviewees to be a significant constraint on the authority's effectiveness within the regeneration arena. This echoes observations made in the literature (see Chapter 2) that note how compliance with performance management requirements may displace activity that is actually productive in the sense of more directly contributing to desired outcomes or outputs (e.g. Davis et al, 2001, 2004; Cutler & Waine, 2001; Humphrey, 2001; Newman, 2001a). The more holistic view suggested here, however, takes us back to the main argument of Chapter 6 and the grounded analysis of Chapter 2. This is that it is important to know the 'full story' before changes are made to it, for otherwise unacknowledged value added may subsequently be inhibited. In relation to multi-level governance, it is clear that this 'full-story' refers to important aspects of functionality contributed by the authority, and in turn its

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contemporary raison d'être. Failing to acknowledge this has apparently contributed to the authority feeling threatened and being defensive.

Secondly, the managerial perspective promulgated through these conventional evaluative assessment regimes seemed to have produced the view within the authority that the Audit Commission and other official assessors were effectively in 'cloud cuckoo land' in ignoring the realities of local authority politics. In turn, informal observations and interviews suggested that many officers had decided to go through the motions of conforming to such regimes, but without in fact letting them significantly impinge on their work. The opinion seemed to be that in so doing you could at least 'buy time' to do as you liked. In some cases this might provide a less excusable form of inertia: business plans and performance indicators could be devised to maintain or justify the status quo. However, for others, holding off the Audit Commission or Advisory Board meant they could get on with more locally-oriented activity and innovation. In this respect the dysfunctional aspect was the amount of time wasted in going through the motions of conformity, which seemed to have become pointless bureaucracy, rather than addressing impediments to a positive regeneration role for the authority. This reflects studies (discussed in Chapter 2) of performance management regimes elsewhere which have found tendencies to 'play the system' rather than engage with it more meaningfully (e.g. Biott & Cook, 2000; de Lancer-Julnes & Holzer, 2001; Davis et al, 2001). That is, such time could arguably be put to more productive use. Indeed, some beneficial change might arise without this kind of regime due to officers' (and perhaps members') immersion and constant engagement with the problems and potential of the local context.

Thirdly, shining the spotlight solely on the local authority seems to have contributed to the perpetuation of top-down contradictory agendas. These can be seen in the imposition of funding constraints in the face of costly new demands and the encouragement of participation and yet ongoing status of elected representatives. Indeed, it was clear that generally funding bodies and higher-level government departments or agencies were not being held to account for activities that impacted on the local level. Related to this, there

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appeared to be a lack of recognition of the need to debate more widely the fundamental dilemmas indicated. These include what the overall objectives of regeneration initiative should be or are, and whether different forms of democracy (participatory v. representative) can be superior or inferior to each other, or whether they are essentially complementary. Leaving such dilemmas unspoken of does not help deal with them.

Despite these elements of dysfunction and lack of usefulness, conventional evaluative assessment processes appeared to be absorbed as a fact of life within the local authority. Indeed, given that such processes are largely a response to, or are imposed in line with top-down agendas, they can be seen to form part of the authority's governance positioning described in the previous section. Sometimes they may contribute to positive change, undoubtedly serving the purposes of such higher-level government bodies, but which may in fact be desirable from other quarters as well. In other respects conventional forms of evaluative assessment may be obstructive to value-creating activity, yet this can be worked around and contested to an extent, again demonstrating local authority initiative. Thus it can be said, despite the critique of such evaluative assessment, there is perhaps a role for it within the existing multi-level governance environment.

However, it may be worth bearing in mind that observations and discussions about shaping factors with interviewees suggested that in many cases, greater pressures to conform were associated with the more immediate need to draw down funding and therefore to comply with funding criteria. Such a need would seem to bring quicker compliance, but in both cases questions remain over the genuineness of the buy-in and the extent of the transformation, as well as its appropriateness in the face of consideration of other audiences. In contrast, the principle presented here is that a more appropriate way to go about inducing change requires knowledge about where value is currently created and inhibited, (in relation to multiple audiences) and the factors that shape what is already done, including the vested interests involved.

Regarding actual regeneration impact, the issue that has arisen several times in this analysis is that too much focus on process may detract or distract from the supposed overall objective of such processes, for example, creating a positive regeneration impact in terms of economic and social well-being. However, the basic premise of the evaluative side to this thesis is that unless careful tracking of interventions is undertaken, this kind of evaluation is an inappropriate basis on which to gauge local authority performance, not that it is unimportant. Here, it might be re-called from Chapter 2 that the reason that this kind of evaluation was not undertaken was that the data available did not allow for it, rather than because it was seen to be unnecessary. Indeed, Chapter 6 revealed that to overlook monitoring and evaluation was not necessarily a good saving for it was contributing to people's suspicions that regeneration activity was just a sham, as well as making it difficult to ascertain what actually had a desirable end regeneration impact. As Sanderson et al (2001) suggest in relation to UK local authorities in general, the place of this type of evaluative assessment capacity, as well as that which monitors baseline regeneration 'health' or 'need' (socio-economic-environmental conditions) has apparently been seriously undervalued. It appears to have been overshadowed by more directly productive activities and hence not considered as an important part of performance (see also LAEDC, 2002). This analysis supports a re-think of this situation.

7.3 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has deployed the outline concepts of multi-level governance and meta-governance discussed in Chapter 3 as an organising framework around which to explore the positioning of the UK local authority (the most local tier of government) within its working environment. It has done so through examining the evidence from an intensive case-study of a particular local authority, whilst relating this to the picture discernible elsewhere through consideration of common structuring factors. This allows us to take forward the discussion of the UK local authority in general terms, explaining that local variation and changes over time seem likely to result in the reconfiguration of the detail of the positioning, rather than the broad nature of it.

This positioning has been demonstrated to be both functional and dysfunctional, and part imposed, part negotiated, part chosen and proactive. That is, the local authority has a distinctive in-between positioning, providing an important middle or point of intersection within multi-level governance, bridging otherwise unworkable but equally desirable extremes. As such, the analysis develops an understanding of multi-level governance in the context of UK regeneration activity to be a working environment characterised by power, interest and capacity differentials. It is partly hierarchical and traditional, and partly hetearchical, with the local authority providing for important gap-filling and mediation within it.

This takes us beyond more basic conceptions of governance as simply suffering from fragmentation and congestion (Rhodes, 1997; Skelcher, 2000; Cowell, 2004). It also takes us beyond conceptions of multi-level governance that ignore the continued significance of power and authority differentials (e.g. Sibeon, 2000; Peters & Pierre, 2004; Rosenau, 2004). The local authority is thus shown to be a vital and distinctive component of this environment, demonstrating unrivalled capacity and interests in making it function. However, the counterpart to such functionality and related distinctiveness is that its actions are inevitably contested and imperfect, and to some extent constrained.

In turn, whilst this situation resonates with that portrayed by Jessop's dual definition of meta-governance, as referring to 'governance in the shadow of hierarchy' and the 'governance of governance', it also suggests some significant departures and developments. Firstly, the shadow of hierarchy is clearly present in how the authority is constituted, contributing to constraints and potential, but it is not the only force at work. The nature of multi-level governance and the local authority's in-between position is such that the authority has varied interests and capacities which may be deployed against the hierarchical impetus as well as in line with it. Secondly, the functionality contributed by the local authority to the multi-level governance environment goes beyond top-down organisation, and includes more interstitial and

proactive, strategic gap-filling and mediation activities as well as direct complementary activity.

Overall, the argument is that local authorities need to be considered as part of the multi-level governance environment in their own right, rather than dismissed as just another agency amongst equals or subsumed under a more general analysis of the continuing relevance of the 'state' or 'government'. Equally however, these insights also take us some way beyond the more basic conceptions of the contemporary role of the local authority, such as 'enabling' (e.g. Harding & Garside, 1995; Sullivan, forthcoming) 'facilitation' (e.g. RI&I, 2004) and even 'interface support' (e.g. Bennett & Payne, 2000). By also taking forward and expanding on reference to limited paradoxes and contradictions, (e.g. Foley & Martin, 2000) the analysis provides a more rounded, fundamentally less-straightforward, multi-dimensional picture.

Lastly, this chapter has completed the circle of the thesis by showing how the analysis of the local authority's position within multi-level governance can be developed to understand the problematic, yet worked-with, influence of conventional evaluative assessment within the picture. It once again proposes the importance of an alternative approach that in this perspective, takes the implications of the authority's positioning on board. However, the analysis re-iterates the importance of adequate research capacity to assess ultimate impact and monitor regeneration 'health' or 'need' as part of the range of evaluative assessments deployed in this context, whilst explaining the lack of priority given to funding such capacity currently.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This chapter aims to round off the thesis by summarising the response to the objectives and associated findings, drawing together the conclusions to be found elsewhere within it. The chapter also takes the opportunity to reflect beyond the thesis, both outwards and onwards.

8.1 Responding to the objectives: summary of the story so far and potential future avenues of research

8.1.1 The response to the objectives: an overview of the thesis structure

Chapter 4 listed firstly, practical objectives of relevance to the local authority. These related to better information about the value being contributed to regeneration, and also constraints. On the basis of this information, the idea was to be able to make realistic recommendations for improvement to the regeneration role as conceived thus, and if appropriate, improvement to the focus to performance measurement and monitoring. In addition, the aim was to be able to use the information to help improve transparency and communication. These objectives were responded to in three ways. Firstly, analytically, by defining the information that was lacking in most conventional assessment modes, examining the dysfunctional consequences which alternative designs needed to attend to, and considering practical constraints to doing so (Chapter 2). Secondly, methodologically, by devising a practicable means to elicit this neglected information: that is, the true extent and detail of the authority's performance, factors that affected it, important interactions and tradeoffs. This involved incorporating both depth and breadth, and also unpicking simplistic characterisations and explanations (Chapters 2, 4, 5). Thirdly, by operationalising the methods and analysing the data, the results of which can be seen in Chapter 6. These were also presented to the authority in feedback sessions and in a separate report of their own[1].

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[1] As explained in Chapter 4, given that these objectives were primarily oriented at the authority, they were considered as shadow-objectives for the purposes of this thesis and are hence not referred to directly within the analysis. Nonetheless, it can be seen that the academic objectives relating to evaluation substitute for them in their overlap.

The other objectives were more academic and are the main focus of this thesis. The first set, echoing the practical objectives discussed above, was summarised as *to demonstrate a theoretical and practical rationale for a different approach to evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative.* The response to this is therefore documented in the previous paragraph, with the complex picture generated as well as the foregoing analysis being an important part of the demonstration process. There is also reflection on the value of the process in itself. In addition, comparing the resultant recommendations with those derived from a recent conventional evaluative assessment rounded off the process, illustrating their greater sensitivity to the actual nature of the authority's problems. Another response was to reflect on the place of evaluative assessment in respect of the findings associated with the second academic objective in Chapter 7 to analyse what this added to arguments about adequacy and inadequacy. This extended and consolidated the argument for supplementing existing modes of evaluative assessment.

The second set of academic objectives was summarised as *to contribute a better understanding of the positioning of local government in relation to existing concepts of governance.* Again the response to this objective began with analysis of the deficiencies of the existing literature, (Chapter 3) identifying various possibilities to be investigated empirically. This was translated into an appropriate methodology based largely on an intensive case-study of a local authority's regeneration role, with research questions configured to concurrently provide information of more practical use to the local authority (Chapters 4, 5). The methodological response also attended to the potential limitations of this case-study approach by using examples from elsewhere, extractable from the literature, to examine commonalities. This was supported by an investigation of the contextual influences on the authority's role in order to assess what might apply elsewhere as opposed to being locally specific. In these ways, the response to the objectives examined local government positioning in terms of what is imposed upon the local authority; how, and in what ways it shapes these 'givens'; and the different capabilities and interests the local authority has within this environment,

relative and in relation to others in the regeneration field. The resulting data and analysis is presented in Chapter 7. This uses the concepts of multi-level and meta-governance as an organising framework whilst concurrently developing them.

8.1.2 Possible future lines of enquiry to develop the thesis

As suggested in Chapter 5, the two most obvious means to extend this research would be to follow it up either with work on other local authorities, or, given the contested nature of the existing situation and ongoing signals of change, on a longitudinal basis. This would enable a better judgement of the general applicability of the thesis beyond the current state of affairs and the particular case-study. It is emphasised however, that care has been taken within the thesis to investigate the broader picture as far as possible; moreover, the arguments of general relevance relate mainly to the structurally robust dimensions of the picture as opposed to local specifics or temporary circumstances. Perhaps of greater relevance therefore is that extending the picture further may yield new insights to the subjects of interest. Indeed, an international comparative dimension would also be interesting, given that discussion of the state's role in governance extends beyond the British context (e.g. Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Ansell, 2000; Hendriks & Tops, 2005; SINGOCOM network, u.d.). Despite the promise indicated by forays, a comprehensive investigation of the role of local tiers of government in non-UK contexts is not immediately evident.

Another possible follow-up line of enquiry would be to examine the utilisation of this alternative evaluation by the authority, to see whether the information provided was seen to be more useable in practice, whether on a formal or informal level (see Weiss, 1998). This could investigate whether individual officers had indeed benefited from the 'creative destabilisation' that seemed to be indicated, as discussed in the conclusion to Chapter 6. On a more formal level it could assess whether the power associated with other forms of 'official' evaluative assessment was more effective in pushing for change. A year after submitting the report to Blaenau Gwent there had still not been a formal response to it. This suggested to me that despite criticism of

councillors being shown to reflect the authority's difficult positioning and the need for communication to manage this, many of the key issues raised were seen to be too politically sensitive. An investigation of the actual use of the material would therefore seem likely to provide further information about factors shaping the authority's work, and as to the type of recommendation seen to be most helpful, which might help refine the approach. A particularly insightful view of this might be gained from further observation work. Indeed, this could attempt to support change by taking a more active action-research position, in line with the broader ethos of the research (see e.g. Bate & Robert, 2002).

8.2 The research findings/contributions

The conclusions that can be gathered from elsewhere in this thesis fall into two categories: methodological and substantive. The methodological conclusions relate to the approach to evaluative assessment, or how and why to do an evaluation so that it contributes to understanding rather than simply partial judgement, paying attention to the hidden as well as the obvious. The substantive conclusions are aligned with the research questions. They are concerned with information about the untold fate (part imposed, part created) of the local authority amidst and in relation to more widely documented trends associated with the proliferation of actors in the regeneration field. Lastly, some further substantive conclusions relevant to evaluation can be made. These concern local authority regeneration initiative as an object of assessment and the place of externally-imposed conventional evaluative assessment within the working environment discussed.

8.2.1 The methodological contributions of the thesis: conclusions relating to the approach to the evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration initiative

An initial problematic (raised in Chapter 1) that proved to be particularly significant for this thesis was the implications of governance and indeed, multi-level government/governance, for local authority evaluative assessment. As can be seen in Chapter 2, this was framed was through the politics of evaluation: fear, non-acknowledgement and blaming. It was already

acknowledged in the literature that evaluation is an inherently political exercise and can be manipulated accordingly. Viewed through the lens of multi-level governance it followed that there was the potential for different levels to pass on blame to each other, and for there to be competition over credit where there was success. This prompted two key conclusions (re-iterated in Chapter 7) in relation to the definition of adequate evaluative assessment of local authority regeneration activity. Firstly, that an authority needed to be able to demonstrate in as broad terms as possible, its specific contribution to regeneration, and secondly, that acknowledgement of shaping factors, including constraints imposed from above, was another essential component. What was identified was the need to attend to a crisis of credibility and identity being imposed in part by inadequate evaluative assessment, particularly in the face of change to the governing environment. This required a better, more comprehensive and open-minded, understanding of what was actually going on.

More broadly, a key conclusion found in Chapter 2 is that whilst selectivity and associated unsustainable conclusions are apparently inevitable counterparts to many forms of local authority evaluative assessment, a way round this is to broaden the perspective whilst lowering the horizon of assessment. This argument initially suggests that policy, projects, and the absence or presence of normative attributes are all unhelpful starting points to the gauging of value or performance, as they are too narrow and hence tend to miss a large part of the picture. Indeed, an additional problem with policy-evaluation or with assessments that define particular policies as local authority regeneration initiative, (i.e. as the object of assessment) would seem to be how to delimit them in order to assess them. This is because the form of policy in practice may be very different from that on paper, and numerous policies may be at work at once in a tangled mess.

Instead it is concluded that it makes more sense to consider the object of assessment as the whole complex of the local authority's work amidst a multiple-stepped, multi-agency regeneration process. Thus what needs to be investigated as a starting point is what value is produced or inhibited by the

authority amidst this process, from a variety of perspectives. Such an approach may be likened to a process of discovery, as the value contributed or inhibited may not be obvious or imaginable to those not on the receiving end; indeed much work may also be quite invisible. Methods that can cope with the in-depth exploration of processes and activities, as well as expectations, relative capabilities and so on, are required, and here, semi-structured interviews supported by recall/focusing devices were found to be most useful. By this process, a better idea can be gained of what the authority's 'performance' actually constitutes, what its policies mean in practice, and what it contributes to projects and how these sit with others. This should enable more informed judgements of worth in contrast to those based on a more selective view, for instance, one that misses out this 'messy middle' or 'black box' and assumes particular patterns of attribution. Following on from above, it also has the advantage of specifying the authority's regeneration contribution, distinguishing it from that of any other agency.

The other dimension to this argument is that there needs to be greater clarity about the meaning of the term 'performance', or the object of assessment. Thus it is argued that ultimate impact, as differentiated from immediate impact or performance in action terms, requires a different kind of assessment (Chapters 2 & end of 7). It necessitates careful data-collection set-up in parallel with the actions taken, to track them, and their interaction with the target. Careful tracking is necessary to eliminate the possibility of intervening factors distorting the picture. Beyond this, another type of assessment that is also suggested to be helpful is defined as overall 'regeneration health' monitoring. This may in fact go some way towards providing a less-resource intensive substitute for such tracking. Regeneration health monitoring necessitates looking at changes in a range of economic, social and environmental indicators, attempting to control for national economic trends, to keep track of 'needs' and to see whether the sum of action being taken locally seems to be having the desired effects. Differentiating this from performance assessment, acknowledges the difficulty of attributing particular outcomes to specific actions or agencies, whilst responding to the need to

have some idea of how the 'problem' is evolving, and whether the focus of efforts seems to be appropriate.

Another methodological conclusion to be found within the thesis concerns the importance of approaching the local authority as a much more complex subject of assessment, rather than of assuming homogeneity in its actions or the possibility of being able to make clear-cut judgements of it. That is, a local authority can be disaggregated along various facets: distinguishing between the political and professional and between different political factions and different professional allegiances. However, all too often, evaluative assessments of local authorities implicitly assume complete managerial control with no political interference, and unified corporatism. As such, the thesis suggests an approach to local authority evaluative assessment that goes some way towards, (using the most obvious divides) as far as is practicable unpacking the different dimensions to the authority to examine the contribution they make to regeneration through their work. This allows a clearer specification of the authority's functionality and problems in relation to regeneration, although having the strategic level of analysis also enables these to be placed in the bigger picture. In turn it is recognised that the authority has multiple different audiences to play to, and that this pertains to sub-optimality and narrow assessments from any one perspective. In order to provide a balanced picture therefore, it is also important to incorporate different perspectives value or problems.

The thesis also provides for the conclusion that this alternative approach to evaluative assessment is worthwhile, leading to significant insights and more sensitively focused recommendations than those derived from a more conventional assessment. Whilst many of the findings are perhaps already known subconsciously within the authority, bringing them together and to the surface and formalising the external perspective, is arguably a significant step towards bringing about positive change. It may also help to prevent unintentionally negative change, by promoting greater self-awareness. This greater self-awareness can in turn be communicated outwards to manage relationships and promote an idea of the local authority continuing to be an

important actor in the regeneration arena. The substantive findings or insights are discussed in the following section.

8.2.2 The substantive contributions of the thesis: the role of the local authority in regeneration; the problems with which the evaluation of regeneration has to contend; and the realities of government and governance

This section seeks to draw together the answers to the research questions which can be found in Chapters 6 and 7. This incorporates information relevant to both sets of academic objectives. These are then reflected on separately, firstly drawing out what has been learnt in relation to local authority regeneration initiative as an object of assessment, providing further justification for approaching it differently. Secondly, what has been learnt in respect of the positioning of the authority in relation to existing concepts of governance is set out, leading to their refinement.

8.2.2a Answering the research questions

The research has shown that the first research question, *'What is the role of the local authority in the regeneration process?'* yields several answers. In other words, the local authority's regeneration role is multi-faceted, with different insights about it, and in relation to relevant *shaping factors* (research question 2) derived by viewing it along different dimensions. Firstly what was evident was a direct, 'doing' role, rooted in the detail of regeneration practice, from preparation to implementation and ongoing maintenance work. It comprised, project, service and strategic planning and co-ordination; advocacy; bidding for funding; community outreach; project and service management, monitoring and reporting; trouble-shooting; and physical skills deployment. This is indicative of the range of capabilities held and maintained within the organisation itself such that it can hold its own as a regeneration agent. As such this role might also be termed its absolute or independent, stand-alone regeneration role. These capabilities relate to the significance of regeneration locally, the relative size of the authority as an organisation locally, and the history of governmental intervention in regeneration: factors which allow for the positive development of this role. However, there are also constraints that limit it or shape it in a particular way at the day-to-day and

more strategic levels. These include the availability of financial resources and conditions tied to them, other (less directly productive) calls on officers' time, the need to persuade many people to co-operate, particular political and professional agendas, and the often ad-hoc nature of decision-making. Nonetheless, some of these constraints point to additional details of this role in terms of the mobilisation of the authority's resources and the integration of multiple agendas.

Beyond this, though to some extent overlapping with it, there is a relational regeneration role. This is defined in contrast and/or in relation to the regeneration activity of other agents locally, contributing to regeneration as a whole. On the one hand, this role comprises actions that, at least in theory, make the whole complex of regeneration work better. This is through such activities being part of a division of labour and complementing those undertaken by others, in scale/focus, risk-taking, and through regulation, democratic input and strategic guidance. On the other hand the role comprises activities that make the whole or its constituent parts work by intervening more directly to support the work of others. In so doing, such activities compensate for skills and other capacity deficiencies on an individual agency basis or in relation to the way they work together. This aspect of the role ranged from giving advice and providing information, to providing leadership and strategic linkage. It also involved organising partnerships and creating new agencies and gap-filling structures as well as more delicate smoothing and intermediation, and more clearly cut delivery and permission-granting. In both these sides to the role, distinctiveness is exhibited, relating to the relative size or might, stability and responsibilities of the local authority, which create need and relative capacity. However, once again, more negative shaping factors are also evident, limiting the positive aspects of this role. These include inertia or more determined rigidity on the part of the authority, its poor management of relationships and power inequalities, and competing agendas that have not been subject to clear prioritisation. Together these lead to conflict, uncertainty and confusion, and a failure to follow through some aspects of potential. In addition, the capacity and resource constraints referred to in relation to the previously described role also apply here.

Another way in which the authority's role can be regarded is relatively: that is, relative to expectations or anticipated potential, to previously held or future roles, to the roles of other local authorities, and to the roles of other agents. Relative to expectations and perceived potential, the picture is of widespread sub-optimality, so that at the very least, the overall evaluative picture of the authority is mixed. This sub-optimality appears to originate from a number of problems. Firstly, that the authority plays to multiple audiences making it difficult to please all, given limited overall capacity, different logics of prioritisation and legitimation, and different activities sitting uneasily with each other. Secondly, the authority contains competing interests so that its constituent parts may act in ways which conflict with each other. This is notably the case between officers and members especially where roles overlap, but can also be seen between other departments which may act territorially, or find it difficult to resource regeneration-related activities. Thirdly, there is always the risk that what starts out as positive may in some cases easily become something negative. However, in Blaenau Gwent there were also apparently problems with strategic awareness and communication which meant that the implications of this difficult situation were poorly managed.

Temporally and spatially, the conclusion is that overall, the significance of structural, institutionalised shaping factors pertaining to local authority distinctiveness is over-riding. This means that whilst there may be variation in the detail, the previously stated dimensions to the authority's role are likely to be pervasive temporally and echoed elsewhere, as indeed seemed to be indicated by the examples found beyond it. Drawing together the elements of such distinctiveness, the authority has particular capacities in terms of its hierarchical and public interest responsibilities (or relative place, skills, profile and might) but also suffers from particular hierarchical constraints and competing impetuses within itself. Therefore, compared to other agencies, the authority contributes to regeneration in quite a specialist fashion, through either competitive advantage or unique remit. In this manner the authority fills in gaps and makes valuable connections: an important 'in-between' role. This is largely captured by the relational role described.

Looking back in time, we also see that this role combines aspects of old (such as representative democracy, service provision, advocacy and articulation of local visions) with newer developments (such as helping others in their work) in what appears to be a logical step in its evolution. That is, it develops many of the capacities that have long been associated with local government (see e.g. Gray & Jenkins, 2000; Wilson & Game, 2006) and gives new meaning to the 'civic tradition' with its concern for ensuring the means to ends such as welfare and cohesion (see e.g. Stewart, 2000). As such, the local authority is by no means undermined and in need of radical change to rejuvenate it (cf. Stoker & Wilson, 2004).

Moving onto the third research question, concerning *potential all-round positive improvements*, the conclusion to be made first, is that many of the constraints described make radical transformation impossible. That is, they are part of the ongoing realities that are woven into the authority's response to regeneration need. This response or role in turn appears to be inevitably imperfect. Beyond this the main areas that appear manipulable without unduly compromising any interests, and with potentially significant impact, are those related to the management of this situation. In Blaenau Gwent these were: strategy and strategic awareness; at the more detailed level, the delineation of roles and responsibilities; and on a strategic and day to day basis, communication. Suggestions under these themes could affect substantive activities and administrative details, as well as the management of relationships, expectations and perceptions. The research indicates that a focus on such process-managements can play as significant a part in shaping the nature of the authority's regeneration role as the substantive dimensions.

8.2.2b Further insights relating to the different research objectives

Some further conclusions can be made by analysing these answers to the research questions from the perspective of the different academic objectives.

i) Further insights relating to the objectives concerned with the approach to evaluative assessment

Firstly, these observations reinforce the methodological arguments made above by demonstrating what can be found by a different approach to evaluative assessment, and in emphasising the fundamental complexity of the picture. That is, it is evident that the regeneration role of the local authority, or in evaluative assessment terms, its performance, would be considerably misconstrued by methods that did not grasp such detail and extent, the strategic view beyond any specific point of interest, and the complex shaping factors involved. It is clear that the object of assessment - regeneration initiative and value created – is multi-faceted, and is derived and comes together in complex ways at the micro and macro level. The relevant object of assessment includes aggregate individual action, individuals having strategic purchase or capacity, and individuals with different skills and capacities acting in relay-type chains or in teams. Equally, such value can be disrupted or obstructed in numerous different ways; overall, it is shaped internally, externally and strategically or relatively, in ways that are not all of the local authority's own making. In turn, the presence of absence of, or positive or negative view of any one component, does not necessarily lead to any conclusive evaluative outcome (i.e. 'success', 'failure', 'good' or 'poor'). Indeed, these may anyway be highly ambiguous assessments in respect of the numerous different audiences played to or possible logics of justification, and the balancing acts involved. This again indicates the value of an approach to evaluation that is about understanding and broad discovery rather than simply assessment against fixed standards.

In this respect, the highly involved nature of the regeneration task in terms of the multitude of components involved in bringing about any substantive action, is also clear. To a large extent this relates to the way that funding is controlled, and the division of resources and capabilities amongst diverse agencies and local authority departments: in other words, the working environment of multi-level governance. It also follows that the nature of ultimate regeneration impacts will relate to the aggregate and cumulative impact of the actions of numerous agencies, as well as contextual factors such

as the economic climate, geography and so on. Bigger questions of what is possible given limited funding are also raised. These are further dimensions of complexity that need to be addressed by particular types of evaluation concerned with regeneration. However, they also indicate the importance of defining the evaluative-assessment of local authority regeneration performance as a separate activity, for it only has control over a small dimension of this picture.

Indeed, what is also evident is the inevitable politicisation and contestation of regeneration activity, as there is not enough funding to deal with every facet of regeneration need. This complicates the process and injects conflict to it, even though there seems otherwise to be a broad consensus about how regeneration might be defined. As such, politics becomes part and parcel of the process and something that needs to be viewed accordingly rather than as entirely negative. In turn however, it is also possible to see how the process of evaluative assessment can easily become part of this politics without due care to unpack the competing logics of justification, differing perspectives and so on.

This leads us on to consider the place of conventional forms of local authority evaluative assessment amidst this picture. As discussed in Chapter 7, it appears that amongst the external shaping factors is top-down imposed evaluative assessment, which promotes certain norms through the mechanisms of fear/authority and financial dependency and associated internal competition. This reflects the positioning of local authorities as in-between points in a situation of multi-level governance. That is, though they have their deficiencies, conventional narrow forms of evaluative assessment, particularly inspection and performance measurement have their place. They assert the will of higher tiers of government on lower tiers and are an important aspect of the continuing significance of government. However, there is also room for initiative at the local authority level, which would seem in part to relate this sort of dependency in reverse. Local authorities have the delivery capacity which higher-level government does not, but are also organs of democratic representation, and have the relative capacity to respond to

needs articulated by other agencies in the horizontal arena or at the grassroots. This means that they may undertake many activities not conceived of within higher-level agendas. Once again therefore, this means it makes sense for the remit of evaluative assessment to be broadened to find alternative conceptions of value, beyond those being promoted as part of such agendas. Assessment against higher-level government agendas alone would in contrast seem to be inappropriate and unhelpful in this environment. Equally, it is clear that there is a need to shine the examination light in other directions, given the difficulties for the local authority created by others, particularly higher-level government.

ii) Further insights relating to the objectives concerned with the positioning of local government in relation to existing concepts of governance

In relation to the second group of academic objectives, the different roles indicated, potential improvements to them and the shaping factors all provide useful information. The stand-alone role and the relational role suggest that UK local government in the form of local authorities is alive and well as a feature of the working environment, rather than displaced and marginalised as early commentators in particular, who suggested that governance was the new government, implied (e.g. Rhodes, 1997; Stoker, 1998; though see also Stoker & Wilson, 2004). In turn, the shaping factors and the different aspects of the relational role described, suggest that the local authority embodies and enacts things related to both the conventionally-conceived traditional and new states of play. This positioning points to a complex hybrid situation that certain commentators hint of in various ways. These include more nuanced notions of governance as 'multi-level governance' (albeit only certain definitions of this e.g. Franklin, 2003; Bache & Flinders, 2004a) and 'meta-governance' – or 'governance in the shadow of hierarchy' (e.g. Jessop, 1997, 1998; Davies, 2002, 2004; Whitehead, 2003). In addition there is the idea that governance requires some kind of management to make it work or keep it functioning, which some also refer to in meta-governance terms (e.g. Jessop, 1997, 1998; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). However, though these have been useful concepts for this research, providing hints of where local government may stand in

relation to the contemporary context, this thesis provides material to develop them.

This first development is that multi-level governance within the national context has an important 'middle' to it: the local authority. The importance of multi-level governance within the nation state, with levels stretching downwards beyond the regional level in the UK, was a major contribution of Franklin (2003). The importance of this thesis is that it develops this concept from the local authority perspective. The local authority as the middle to this 'within state' multi-level governance, is caught 'in-between', intersecting and straddling both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. On the one hand it is part of an important spine or continuing situation of administrative hierarchy. This contrasts to the more amorphous concept of multi-level governance suggested by for instance Sibeon (2000) Peters & Pierre (2004) and Rosenau (2004). Yet, as the middle point within this multi-level and horizontally-broad concept, the local authority is in a position that demands response not only to top-down agendas, but also to other interests also, both 'below' it at the grassroots, and around it in the horizontal governance arena. Thus, rather than being in a position of to merely acquiesce to top-down commands, (the meta-governance shadow of hierarchy) the local authority has to constantly mediate, even internally, between inevitable conflicts of interest, interpretations of ideas and so on. This is clearly no easy position to be in, for mediation rarely achieves a perfect balancing act, and hence may be seen to introduce an element of dys-functionality. Nonetheless, the local authority can be seen to help enable the articulation of a variety of local visions as held by different interests, rather than these being suppressed by the shadow of hierarchy.

Other concepts of governance that this thesis develops concern the problems of governance and how they might be solved. It demonstrates that the parameters of, and problems of, multi-level governance are differences in power and capabilities. Rather than this resulting in dead-end contestation as implied by for instance (Boland, 1999a/b) the local authority, as suggested by the relational role and relative distinctiveness discussed above, is able to help

make the situation workable. It does so not only through mediation, but also more active gap-filling and orchestration in relation to needs in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. The breadth of this functional intervention in turn goes beyond the top-down co-ordination and regulation emphasised by Jessop in his concept of meta-governance, and those that describe governance as mainly suffering from problems of fragmentation and congestion (e.g. Rhodes, 2000; Skelcher, 2000). It also demands the reinterpretation of those accounts that depict the local authority's role within governance as merely problematic, domineering or interfering (e.g. Miller, 1999; Carter, 2000; Taylor, 2003; Rowe, 2004).

Drawing these contributions together, the overall picture of systemic, structural concurrent functionality and dysfunctionality additionally expands on ideas found elsewhere, suggesting their broader relevance. Reference to concurrent functionality and dysfunctionality is found for instance in the discussion of the compromises involved in the operation of a multi-level system of government (Gray & Jenkins, 2000 following Mackenzie, 1961/1975). Davies (2005) similarly describes what he calls the 'governance dialectic' whereby state intervention in partnerships is necessary but has contradictory effects. This contrasts to the more limited depictions of contemporary local authorities having 'enabling', 'facilitation' or 'interface support' roles (e.g. Harding & Garside, 1995; Bennett & Payne 2000; RI&I, 2004; Sullivan, forthcoming). Though the roles denoted by these flexible concepts may be wide-ranging, the whole story of the local authority is not told by them due to their overly positive connotations: they do not concurrently engage with the complexity of the regeneration task and multi-organisational environment. The whole story of local authorities within the contemporary working environment is therefore a key contribution made here.

Lastly, the thesis proposes that it is important to recognise local government as an actor within governance within its own right. This argument follows from the analysis which shows that the positioning of local government within multi-level governance is not merely imposed, but also reflects a certain amount of freedom of initiative. This clearly goes beyond those accounts that

seek to put government or the state back into the discussion of governance, but do so in a monolithic fashion, or only referring to central government and its agencies (e.g. Jessop, 1997, 1998; MacLeod & Goodwin, 1999b; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Bache, 2000; Stoker, 2000; Davies, 2002, 2004). Thus the thesis also contributes to a much fuller account of the contemporary realities of governance and government.

8.3 The implications of the thesis

Taking forward the different objectives of the thesis, this thesis can be seen to have implications for evaluation and research practice, evaluation theory, governance concepts and how local authorities conceive themselves and their essential tasks.

Firstly, whilst the thesis is largely based on a case-study of one local authority, the methodological conclusions would seem to be generally applicable rather than tied to the specific context observed. Indeed, this was suggested by the integration of the grounded analysis with broader literature in Chapter 2. Moreover, the nuances revealed, resonate, as suggested in Chapter 6, with the complexity indicated by implementation studies (e.g. Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Lipsky, 1980) wider discussions of the subtleties of regeneration management and public administration, (e.g. Underwood, 1980; Diamond & Liddle, 2005) and the inevitable politics of regeneration (e.g. Boland, 1999a/b; Rowe, 2006). They also foreshadowed by certain depictions of multi-level and meta-governance, as described in Chapter 3 and 7. This suggests sensitivity to these nuances, as achieved by the deployment of an alternative approach to evaluative assessment of this kind, is likely to be important on a wider scale.

The implication is that this alternative approach provides a useful complement to the defects of commonly-deployed conventional forms of local authority evaluative assessment which in their partiality are insensitive. Indeed, it is a potential means of defence against such partiality, by revealing the fairer, fuller picture, which can also be used to improve transparency about the authority's actions. Nonetheless, the work involved in the approach is quite

intensive, and it may not be feasible for every authority to undertake, particularly given common problems with research capacity (Sanderson et al, 2001). In this scenario, the ideas at least provide food for thought in respect of the design of performance indicators and evaluations. They encourage the critical review of what is being evaluated and measured through existing mechanisms, who is to blame or deserves credit, and what underlies opinions and judgements. Interestingly a similar conclusion has recently been reached by Beecham (2006:66) in his discussion of performance accountability in public services; he in fact further suggests that the public needs to be educated about this comprehensive view. However, this thesis takes the point further. It also encourages, in line with Sanderson et al, (2001) reconsideration of the importance of local authority research and monitoring capacity, whilst emphasising the need for clarity about object (and subject) of assessment and how to adequately capture it.

In working from a grounded-standpoint, sensitive to the realities of multi-level governance, this thesis has also developed a fresh perspective on the well-trodden academic ground of concern with the deficiencies of conventional evaluative assessment of local authorities and regeneration activity, notably performance measurement and evaluation centred on the limits of policies and projects. This moves it beyond the existing somewhat moribund condition where debates have tended to go round in circles with only limited change due to fashion, as evidenced by the density of references within Chapter 2 (see e.g. Shadish et al, 1991; Ho, 2003). Indeed, the article by Midwinter (1994) notes the failure to take on board criticism of performance indicators which dated from the 1970s, criticism which he re-iterated, and which has been similarly re-iterated since by others (e.g. Boyne, 2002). Likewise, the article by Smith (1981) which encourages the incorporation of practitioner or user perspectives can be seen to be reconstituted in the 25 years since. In one area however, the literature was 'turned off': the field of implementation theory went quiet during the 1990s (Barrett, 2004). This thesis resurrects its importance, particularly in light of the complex environment in which the local authority enacts its policies.

In the case of the substantive conclusions, much effort has been made to look for pointers as to their applicability elsewhere. Indeed, the evidence presented in terms of the shaping factors and limited picture available of other local authorities suggests that they are generalisable beyond the case-study, particularly in broad terms as opposed to specific detail. Whilst as discussed above, additional comparative case-studies may help to cement the robustness of the conclusions, it seems likely that they would apply elsewhere in the UK. This is because the most significant conclusions are concerned with the positioning of the local authority rather than the detailed interpretation of this locally in relation to particular regeneration programmes. This positioning, it seems, is heavily structured from the top-down at a national level through the distribution of funding and of competencies, a pattern from which the devolved governments have apparently not significantly diverged. From this, local authorities in general would seem to derive relative strategic significance and a certain (limited) freedom of manoeuvre. Moreover, due to the continued significance in law and in administrative terms of the democratically-elected local authority body that has responsibility for a range of functions over a reasonably-sized area, this broad positioning seems likely to be temporally pervasive. Indeed, the recent Lyons and Beecham reports (both 2006) which relate to local government in England and Wales respectively, both seem to envisage a future consolidation of various roles[2] for local authorities which can be seen to echo the in-between ones described here (see also DETR, 1998; DTLR, 2001). Even in the more centralised administration of Northern Ireland it seems that local government may have potential to play catch-up in a similar fashion[3] (Sullivan & Stewart, 2002:23-4).

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[2] Lyons (2006) refers to local authorities taking on a 'place-shaping' role variously comprising physical regeneration, regulation, leadership (including advocacy, building coalitions and consensus), vision and engagement, including a concern for cohesion. Beecham (2006) refers to local authorities providing services 'where they are best placed to do so, or where public service provision needs to tackle a private monopoly or gap in service' (§ 6.56). He also refers to the 'strategic leadership role' of local authorities in relation to partnerships etc (§6.63-4).

[3] Sullivan & Stewart (2002) following Greer (2001) refer to local authorities having the potential to take on a strategic leadership role, as well as providing important democratic input to partnerships

In academic terms, the implications of these generalisable substantive conclusions are that this study has succeeded in filling in a significant gap in the governance literature by describing the fate of UK local government, as well as elaborating on various underdeveloped ideas and concepts within it. It thereby responds to Stoker (1998a) who saw the concept of governance as needing to evolve from a simplistic starting point. The thesis takes forward a range of themes in the literature associated with the fate of local government in respect of governance to show that they are not mutually incompatible, as hinted by the underdeveloped and ambiguously defined concept of meta-governance, (Jessop, 1997, 1998, 2000). In so doing, the thesis develops in concrete terms a detailed understanding of the weaknesses and needs of different agencies in the governance environment in the context of still-existent government, thus going beyond more basic existing depictions of problems. It also demonstrates the relevance of a concept of governance that not only incorporates multiple levels, but also a middle point relative to them. This middle point can in turn be of use to the different actors within this environment, contributing to broader regeneration aims, rather than it being simply another contester for power and influence (cf. e.g. Boland, 1999a/b). Overall therefore, the thesis proposes the usefulness of studying the local authority as a new window on governance and how it works in practice. It also extends the bid by authors such as Davies (2002, 2005) and Lowndes (2005) to move beyond the simplistic dualisms (government v. governance) associated with the initial desire to establish the significance of the idea of governance. Indeed, the thesis can additionally be seen to pick up on a research agenda identified by Rhodes back in 2000 and otherwise neglected: the responses of public sector staff to changes in the governing environment.

More practically what has been shown is that armed with this type of knowledge, local authorities have less cause to suffer a crisis of identity and legitimacy. The local authority clearly has much to contribute, and should be able to demonstrate this through research of this kind, whilst making others aware of the constraints under which it operates. Interestingly this would seem to fit with Lyons' recent (2006) conclusion that there needs to be greater recognition of local government's role, by it and by others, and Lowndes'

(2000) point that there local authorities have been portrayed in an excessively negative manner. Indeed, in many ways it would seem that local authorities are well-equipped to play this type of role as it clearly builds on long-standing capacities and values (see e.g. Lowndes, 2000; Wilson & Game, 2006) in a blend of old and new. This develops the observations made about the continuing potential of local authorities from the early 1990s onwards (e.g. Clarke & Stewart, 1994; Harding & Garside, 1995; Stoker, 1996; Leach & Percy-Smith, 2001).

However, in contrast to an underlying theme to Lyons' conclusions, that there is a need for something of a 'tidy-up' of the status quo, (a need for *'clarity'* and *'formal recognition'* (Lyons, 2006:13, 75)) this thesis proposes that the difficult and inevitably messy in-between position taken on by local government is a necessary one in the contemporary governing context. That is, given the development of multi-level governance but the ongoing presence and role of government, there would seem to be a need for something to straddle government, governance and the multiple levels, particularly in fields such as regeneration where the remit is wide-ranging. In turn it would appear that local authorities manage to make this role work, allowing for the promotion of bold national agendas and a certain amount of local sensitivity and variety, albeit both within overall financial constraints. Nonetheless, the difficulties that this presents for them in respect of tensions over choices that inevitably result in sub-optimality from one perspective or another need to be acknowledged to have wider ownership rather than being of their own making, and therefore not used to blame, but rather worked with. However, this does not mean local authorities are beyond criticism: how they respond to the situation and debates resulting from such tensions as to how to improve things remains a key component to maintaining legitimacy. Whether this has been grasped in Blaenau Gwent, or other authorities, remains an open question.

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Appendix A: further information on the detail of regeneration activity (categories refer to the 3ʳᵈ-stage categories in Figure 7).

On-going input to make a scheme happen

Variously included (mainly on the part of officers):

- A range of methods of community engagement/consultation;
- Answering telephone enquiries and sending out information about schemes;
- Organising assessment (on site and written) and notification of eligibility [for support by a scheme];
- Collating information about particular opportunities and requirements for beneficiaries;
- Providing advice to businesses, (often entailing a site visit);
- Organising and attending cross-authority management co-ordination meetings and aligning activity accordingly;
- Organising the diversion of maintenance capacity to support a scheme;
- Budget management;
- Chasing beneficiaries to ensure scheme compliance;
- Briefing members about achievements to date (with a view to securing their ongoing support);
- Resolving emergent problems (via technical and organisational input) to ensure a scheme continues to operate as intended e.g. those associated with criminal activity, anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

Shaping regeneration work – ensuring appropriateness according to local circumstances and volition, the current state of [expert] knowledge and [national] policy/legislation

Variously included (in the case of officers):

- Advising whether proposed projects met certain objectives;
- Advising re legal requirements;
- Advising re potential cost-savings;
- Advising re facility management to achieve particular benefits;
- Responding to speculative enquirers about what services are and aren't available;
- Input to discussions to find new uses for a particular site;
- Contributing to brainstorming about potential projects/bids;
- Looking for projects to progress with a new funding opportunity;
- Exploring new x-type provision opportunities with others;
- Input to various plan-making processes (community plan scoping etc.)
- In doing so advocating certain agendas, perhaps entailing negotiating on certain points to ensure such agendas are realised to the best possible extent.

Included (in the case of members):

- Thinking about and discussing the problems of an area and the feasibility of particular solutions;
- Explaining to constituents the limits of possibility as regards local authority intervention locally;
- Informal networking and "talking up the place";
- Lobbying as regards the importance of certain issues/sites/areas, the desirability of certain projects;
- Liaising with officers and providing them with local knowledge as regards for instance, housing need and potential;
- Giving advice to people about how to, and what to expect from, contact with the authority;
- Input of ideas to a specific task and finish group;
- Input to Scrutiny and review as below (under planning/review)

Preparatory activities (cont.)

On the part of officers and members, informal information collation, analysis and dissemination variously included:

- Preparation of website material;
- Sign-posting to various services/appropriate contacts when talking to people (perhaps on unrelated business);
- Responding to general telephone and email queries/enquiries – ensuring people are given the information they need to access services/advice, co-ordinate their work etc;

- Briefing team members/elected members (or attending such briefings, reading written briefing material) with information on a 'need to know' basis likewise or in order to be able to pass on such information to others.
- Informal engagement with the public re needs, outcomes, effectiveness

More formally, were various activities (on the part of officers) associated with research or its management including: -

- Informal liaison with other providers to ascertain shared problems;
- Visiting a project elsewhere which there was interest in copying;
- Research using various media as regards good practice for a particular type of work; survey work;
- Database update work though site visits, collation of information from other departments;
- Preparation (scoping etc) for consultation as regards needs;
- Discussion with consultants about their research report.

Strategic planning and review by officers included:

- Undertaking performance and risk reviews;
- Revision of a Community Plan chapter according to feedback;
- Budget reviews and planning;
- Advisory input to the corporate x plan;
- Review of strategic area designations;
- Meeting with an external agency to assess the fit of plans with their strategic vision and operational plans;
- Work on action plans, in one case distinguishing between community need and want;
- Considering how to roll out a project;
- Review of x-type facility provision;
- Review of operations to promote a particular agenda;
- Liaison with x department re re-organisation.

For elected members, relevant activities were:

- Involvement in developing the Community Plan;
- Review of activities and plans through the Scrutiny Committee (perhaps acting as a Devil's Advocate) and Executive Committee procedures.

Helping others to achieve something/contributing to joint-outcomes by working with others in more structured partnership relationships, or facilitating such work, with the aim of producing something better than could be achieved on an individual basis.

On the part of officers included:

- Spending time in finding a way round other agencies' problems – e.g. information needs, technical issues, ways to operationalise their strategic vision in a hands-off manner (i.e. through the authority's work);
- Providing general support to other organisations in the form of advice about projects or procedures - e.g. helping groups fill out funding application forms, shape their ideas into viable projects;
- Chasing things on behalf of others - e.g. funding payments;
- Arranging suitable accommodation - e.g. for an organisations to work in the area, for a group to expand into;
- Providing access to resources held by the authority – e.g. sending out information for an agency as the Division had an appropriate database, publicising a seminar for an agency as officers had appropriate contacts;
- Gate-keeping or due process associated with particular legal and administrative powers – e.g. making recommendations as regards a funding application, drawing up x-type [legal] agreements for community groups;
- Provision of partnership secretariat functions - the facilitation of participation, organisation of partnership meetings' locations, invites, speakers, papers, agendas (which can take weeks of going to and fro) plus minute-taking;
- Giving advice to partnerships on how to take things forward, the bigger picture, options available;
- Managing relationships – e.g. smoothing over relations with a particular partner through a phone-call, keeping certain personalities in check at meetings;
- Providing a joint client-service

- Contributing ideas to joint-projects, working up project ideas and funding applications collaboratively;
- Attending meetings to discuss ideas and responses in relation to joint strategy-making and implementation;
- General information sharing and liaison in deliberate group settings – e.g. about actions taken, opportunities available.

On the part of elected members included:

- Opening doors for people to appropriate contacts in the authority;
- Ensuring businesses know where to go if they need help;
- Bringing people together to help get funding;
- Chasing outstanding issues on behalf of others;
- Providing partnerships with advice based on their particular experience or expertise.;
- Contributing ideas to partnership-work at meetings.

Ensuring the realisation of the potential value derived from the breadth of responsibilities and expertise of such a large interventionist organisation and maintaining the value associated with being a [democratically] accountable public body

Included (on the part of officers):

- Much co-ordination and liaison activity internally, using the range of available expertise and trying to join things up to achieve mutual aims, as well as balancing the books across the board;
- Reporting to higher level management, elected members, funding bodies re progress/plans (sometimes also involving site visits);
- Reporting to the public re activity via press releases, community meetings;
- Reporting to higher-level government bodies e.g. writing comments on policy proposals, completion of programme monitoring returns;
- Production of minutes of meetings;
- Devising and implementing monitoring systems/procedures including chasing figures and beneficiaries and the checking of compliance with rules, (e.g. re spend, outputs, outcomes);
- Preparing documents and updating of files so there is an appropriate audit trail of activities;
- 'Community service' e.g. hunting out information to help a student with their dissertation, providing work experience – explaining how things work, mentoring, and supporting schools-based extra-curricular real-world training;
- Dealing with queries re the future of local sites and buildings (raised by elected members, significant locally);
- Making arrangements to reduce disruption to local people caused by regeneration project works (responding to concern raised by elected members);
- Dealing with locally significant amenity problems (responding to complaints from the public).

On the part of members included:

- Input to decision-making and scrutiny processes;
- Trying to ensure ward issues are resolved (a regeneration activity by dint of the broad reach of problems apparently affecting regeneration potential in the area).

Officers and members also referred to:-

- Managing politics, apparently to try to ensure that 'democracy' still worked effectively by for instance, acting as a go-between between factions and acting to appease or keep in check powerful interests.

Appendix B: explanatory detail and exemplification of summary codes relating to the pin-pointing of significant value

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution	Detail/exemplification
Elected Members	Outreach	Interviewees variously referred to being roving ambassadors to encourage people to take certain actions or make them aware of support available and to going out and encouraging people to participate or to talk about issues/problems faced.
	Advocacy	Common reference to advocacy of constituents' interests; others referred to *"talking up the place"* to potential investors, reminding people of their part in regeneration, and explaining to the community the Borough-wide view.
	Intermediation/ sign-posting	Interviewees referred to the importance of *"sensitive communication"* in acting as a go-between between the authority and communities or local business; to opening doors for people, pointing people in the right direction to get help; to digesting information/guidance on behalf of local people/business to be able to advise them.
	Legitimation	*"It's the responsibility of the politicians to win arguments – with the rest of the councillors and the community"* Generally interviewees referred to their role in legitimating through explaining why things had to be so.
	Expertise/ advice	*"We as members... know our communities well and hopefully will identify needs"* Generally interviewees referred to local knowledge and insider information they were able to pass on.
	Strategic linkage	Limited reference to linking the local to the Borough-wide view.
	Support	Some reference to role in support to various groups through explaining what is possible and helping it happen.
	Facilitation	Some reference to informal means of oiling the wheels through networking, bringing people together etc.
	Ensuring momentum	*"[My role is] pushing through projects – making sure they don't get left on the shelf – finding out where the blockages are and trying to overcome them"*
	Imagination	Some limited reference to the value of constant engagement with an area and its problems, bringing ideas to members.
Officers	Advocacy	*"I see my role as reminding people that there's a big role for x and x in their work"* *"Oh I'm there to be a bloody nuisance...to try to act as a sort of balance, when you see things happening, and you think, well hang on a minute, let's just think about this...I mean ok, I won't be a popular person..."*
	Expertise/ Advice	Many interviewees referred to the advice they were able to give both externally and internally due to their specialist professional expertise and experience in various fields, local knowledge, and access to colleagues with wide-ranging expertise.
	Facilitation	*"I guess it's a facilitation role – we're the link really"* *"It [my work] smoothes the way be making sure that things which are being proposed are things that should, can be*

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution	Detail/exemplification
		implemented" Others variously referred to their work tying into bigger schemes, or contributing important building blocks, knowing how to contact to get things done
	Partnership	*"[My role is] finding common ground and understanding where a partner or someone is coming from, so that you can go forward in a way that suits them and their concerns"* *"I'm very good at developing partnership linkages and maintaining partnership linkages"* Others variously referred to their role in ensuring appropriate partners and buy-in for a particular agenda and being aware of the need for a team effort – maximising the amount of support available by working in this way.
	Strategic linkage	*"I think the main difference is that in the Regeneration Division...we have to have an eye all the time on the big picture, whereas X might be focused on their business plan or... [a particular] area, whereas we constantly have one eye ...on the greater scheme of things"* Others variously referred to the importance of making connections between agendas, avoiding pigeonholing; to having regard to the long-term; to prioritising; to ensuring fit with various plans.
	Intermediation	*"I am very much a broker"* *"We're the link really, not only between x and the Borough, but also between the Borough and the Assembly"* Others variously referred to the value of their impartiality compared to others, being able to advise as to which was the best source of support; being a go-between between politicians and staff or external agencies/groups; bending things from higher levels to make them relevant locally.
	Co-ordination	*"I think it's... looking for opportunities, when you hear, if you hear person A talking about something, that you've heard person C talking about previously, you perhaps suggest the two get together and perhaps arranging a meeting where you say, look let's all sit down together..."* *"It's a case I think of us being a link between all the partners involved in it and trying to pull everything together"* [plus] *"it's a case of trying to resolve all the issues that are going on in that big melting pot, and trying to see a way forward, to gather the programme really"* Others referred to co-ordinating capacity, allocated spend and need.
	Imagination	*"You have to have, quite a sort of... bag of tricks if you like...there's no one tried and tested method and it might be that you end up doing something completely different that you've never done before, because they are quite...organic... they don't follow a process like that...and there are constraints that are fairly universal - there'll always be financial constraints, there'll always be political constraints,*

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution	Detail/exemplification
		there'll always be physical constraints, but how they bob and flow within the project will be unique to that project" Many refer to their roles in using their imagination to maximise the benefits of projects or overcome problems.
	Ensuring momentum	*"I think...the added value is that none of this would happen, practically none of this would happen without us doing it"* Others variously referred to the importance of their resolving problems/proactively seeking to avoid them; helping to construct consensus; processing things quickly to get a project moving.
	Outreach	*"[My role is] to promote what we're doing and what we're doing well"* Others variously referred to their role being concerned with engagement of various groups, and ensuring people understood what was going on.
	Support/hand holding	*"Some* [people] *don't fully understand the process and need a lot of guidance and help* [which I am give]"* Others variously referred to the value they contributed through mentoring, training, guidance, being an exemplar/demonstrator.
	Bending provision	There was reference to linking what the public want with what they get in terms of service provision, finding ways through established ways of working to make things happen, making sure higher-level agency agendas were relevant to the local level.
	Delivery/ implementation	*"We are at the implementation stage of things...what we do is really bring on what's effectively the product"*
	Maintaining structures, systems	There was some reference to a key contribution being designing and implementing systems to bring about improvements, and to providing clarity and consistency in decision-making – upholding due procedure
	Legitimation/ justification	There was some reference to bringing the legitimacy of due process, careful leadership – making sure everyone was on board, and association with democratic representation, getting information out to prevent rumour, feeding in the results of public consultation to decision-making.
	Gate-keeping	*"[My key contribution is in] using the position I have to open doors and avenues"* Also reference to giving permission for projects to go ahead.
External interviewees re officers	Partnership	*"There are very, very good partnership arrangements in Blaenau Gwent [that we benefit from]"* Others variously referred to established close collaborative relationships; good working relationships where mutual complementarity was established; the importance of officers" proactive management of partnership relations.
	Expertise/ advice	*"[They] have the local knowledge [that we need]"* Others refer to valuable specialist and professional expertise
	Delivery/ implementation	Reference to the distinctive implementation manpower and service delivery remit of the authority, delivering contracts, implementing joint plans and so on.

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution	Detail/exemplification
	Intermediation	Various references to officers acting as important intermediaries to external agencies/funding streams, as well as acting as a go-between within the authority.
	Facilitation	There was reference to facilitation through providing match/accessible funding, opportunity to network, office space, and access to a wide range of helpful expertise/delivery capacity
	Gate-keeping	There was reference to officers providing the gateway to opportunities to further their agendas, as well as to more conventional gate-keeping in the form of making decisions over funding and permissions, leasing arrangements etc.
	Bending provision	Various references to the contribution made through the modification of services to further wider agendas.
	Co-ordination	Some reference variously to the importance of officers' liaison, integration and alignment work.
	Maintaining structures, systems	Reference variously to the value of officers providing structures for funding to go through, implementing various procedures, and to their key monitoring and reporting role
	Legitimation/ justification	Some reference to the value of brought be association with due process, including consultation
	Imagination	"[They] *came up with all kinds of things* [which we wouldn't have thought of to help further our aims]" Some reference to the importance of officers coming up with project ideas, imaginative solutions.
	Outreach	There was some (limited) reference to officers providing the key link to certain populations to ensure they would be engaged, and to the significance of them organising meetings to inform people re opportunities etc.
	Support/hand-holding	There was some reference to officers being on-tap to help overcome difficulties, guiding groups through processes
	Advocacy	There was some reference to the role of the authority in furthering higher-level agendas through negotiation in relation to on the ground schemes.
External interviewees re members	Advocacy	There was reference to much local advocacy concerned with the ward represented, or issues seen by the particular member, with members generally described to have strong views that they made known as much as possible
	Facilitation	Limited reference to members oiling the wheels in relation to projects by various informal means.
	Intermediation/ sign posting	Limited reference to members acting as a go-between to the rest of the authority or wider interests.
	Maintaining systems, structures	Limited reference to having to work through elected members, to the value of Scrutiny.
	Legitimation/ justification	Limited reference variously to members being important in securing consensus, providing a chain of accountability/stewardship

Appendix C: explanatory detail and exemplification of summary codes relating to the pin-pointing of problems

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution or problem	Detail/exemplification
Officers	Underplayed	Many suggested neglect of various agendas or potential, or that their work was skewed by lack of funding, inadequate understanding of its potential/importance or politics.
	Lack of internal buy-in – lack of awareness, lack of follow-through of agendas/actions	*"[The Regeneration Division] doesn't link in enough with [our department's functions] to utilise...[them] to add value to their resources"* *"There is a real lack of commitment from other departments to get involved in the regeneration agenda"* *"[It's a constraint that] x-agenda is quite a new thing – people don't understand what it means"*
	Co-ordination problems	*"There is no-one there checking up on a regular basis – what's been done, what needs to be done, where are we going, what's next"* *"There's quite a lot of disorganisation within the authority...where we might be doing work which is completely irrelevant, or just because of the lack of organisation, we end up having to do the same thing 2 or 3 times"* Others variously referred to other departments and external agencies working in different directions according to what suits them, not informing each other of what they were doing, or consulting with appropriate officers in other departments, and to a general lack of communication between agencies involved in regeneration to avoid overlap, ensure synergies/maximum use of opportunities etc.
	Delivery inadequacies	*"What we need is staff – we could do the outputs if you could give us money for staff – but they say, ' we don't fund people'"* Others variously referred to the knock-on impact of contingencies/being required to be reactive or responsive to circumstances, and to how deficiencies in project management quality, bids' realism and overall managerial oversight had serious consequences for them down the line. Another common theme was lack of money to be able to implement a scheme properly, and being over-stretched due to lack of alternative staff capacity or having to do corporate management work on top of day-to-day work.
	The nature of priorities – illogical, contradictory, competing for time/resources	*"[What makes my work difficult?] Immediate response-type reports which doesn't seem to be delivered in any, well there's no obvious planning behind it certainly and that side of things can actually skew your work quite considerably" "I think the constant request for information...you have got to question yourself, the benefit of what you're doing, and if it's just stacking up information for statistical purposes you've got to question whether it's worth your time"* *"[Notes the diversionary affect of] constant contact with*

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution or problem	Detail/exemplification
~		*members over, - they may not be strategically important issues but they're local issues that the members consider of importance to themselves, to their standing in the community"* Others variously referred to being put into situations where they were verging on having a conflict of interest; to being diverted from activity that actually brought in money to do things; to the impact of their work being considerably reduced by decisions elsewhere in the authority.
	External dependency	*"It's called a partnership but it's not like any partnership I've ever known...If you're married to somebody it's a bit of give and take isn't it, ... I mean they call it, x-agency thinks it's a partnership.. but it's very uneven...it's always their agenda [and that makes things difficult – it's difficult to marry their agendas with local agendas]"* *"Everything has to be funded externally"- "[matching funding streams] it's just a nightmare"* Others variously referred to the problems of ensuring projects are sustainable with time-limited funding, and to the apparent arbitrary-nature of external funding decisions that the progress of their work was subject to.
	The political/officer interface	*"Sometimes I get involved in political issues such as may be councillors, who see themselves as representing the community - the councillor says 'no, this shouldn't be going on here' and then I kind of get roped into it...it's the political element I think more than anything that's very difficult"* *"Politicians I've found generally tend to not look at what's done, but what needs to be done – always look at the next thing rather than be satisfied with what's been achieved – it's difficult to move on to address where there's not so much influence in the political scenario in another area"* *"[Member interference in my field] erodes things and then sets precedents that other people get wind of"* Others referred to quite personal attempts to disrupt their work, or unhelpful 'them/us' attitudes and distancing that were founded on instances of it (to defend against it)
	Inadequate strategy/strategic direction	*"[We may as well] plan in retrospect – you could do 10 years and then we could see what's happened, and we could try to justify what's happened"* *"I would say [the main limitation on the added value I create is] we're very project-driven and that probably needs to change"* Others variously referred to lack of clarity as to where they were meant to be taking things or how their work fitted into the bigger picture, and a failure to ensure adequate resources to maintain schemes being implemented, or to match planned projects to implementation capacity; to feeling pressure to chase money for the sake for it rather than in line with strategy.

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution or problem	Detail/exemplification
-	The nature of decision-making – lack of transparency, consistency, clarity re responsibility	"[What makes my work difficult?] Inconsistent decision making...it's just the teeth which the whole thing is supposed to, or the whole process is supposed to work on decisions, and the decisions don't seem to – you can go through all the processes of creating good policies and this that and the other, but if you're going to ignore them at the end of the day in making decisions, then that's an empty process" Others referred to being pulled in different directions - lack of clarity re what should take priority/who they should answer to.
	Bureaucracy – slow unnecessary tasks, hindrance to flexibility	"We're almost creating our own bureaucracies –...there's obviously a need to need to inform senior management, top management, members, the public about what is going on and there's also a need to monitor performance, but we don't seem to have cracked the way of doing that without creating a lot of...separate information feeds if you like, ...and you just think is anybody reading this?" "The type of work we're involved in needs a high level of flexibility, which corporate issues can hinder"
External interviewees	Officers' role as underplayed	"[Officers are] not always allowed to perform to their full potential" "There's been advice and support from officers...but there's no strategic direction on how they can use us for their aims – it's rather they use us because we can access money they can't" Others variously refer to officers ignoring their advice and information re opportunities; to a lack of consultation; to a lack of recognition of the importance of joint strategies.
	Members' role as underplayed/misdirected	"There are examples of local councillors... representing their patch and blatantly not representing even two miles down the road – [the area] will suffer because of it" "I'm not necessarily sure that those councillors fully understand what's actually happening in their communities...and if they don't necessarily understand issues how can they necessarily directly influence them?" "People who are elected...as local councillors have to remember that they're there to represent their constituents and speak on behalf of their constituents, not to form their own opinions and say this is what my constituents say, which is what tends to happen – some people on that Council are very full of themselves" Others variously referred to infighting and the problems of local politics being a 'closed shop'; to the failure of members to listen to external ideas and professional advice; officers' work being skewed towards inappropriate actions according to political whims.
	Members as barriers to ideas	"The Council are still locked into 'I know best, I represent the community'" "x-department plays a big part in regeneration, and x-type

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution or problem	Detail/exemplification
~		*proposals are very difficult to get through unless driven by them, and that is political without any shadow of a doubt"*

Many interviewees referred to councillors being disruptive to their work both directly and through their control off officers' inputs and tending to be risk averse rather than willing to embrace new ideas. |
| | The political/officer interface – intimidation, manipulation, disruption | *"[Officers lack the] political confidence [to take decisions without going to members] – "[I am often told] I don't know I'll have to ask"...*

"You just find that you think you've agreed something with them and then one councillor decides that they want to do something else, and it's all up in the air"

Others variously referred to having to play political games to keep things moving, to suit political sensitivities; to the authority being very 'member dominated', elected members' over-riding professional advice; to being caught up in and subject to the whims of power politics. |
| | Lack of responsiveness – to research/comment, problems on the ground, partnership | *"It becomes a one-sided, lop-sided relationship...they might not want to play with your marbles as they have enough marbles"*

"There can be a tendency whereby the things that other people can offer to the partnership, that work can be sort of forgotten about – it can just become a local authority driven machine"

Others variously referred to lack of response to comments made about how things might be improved, building new working relations; to a lack of willingness to respond to problems through bending of resources; to rigidities that got in the way of responsiveness and new ways of working; to a lack of awareness of problems on the ground to be able to respond to. |
| | Co-ordination problems | *"My experience of local authorities is they're compartmentalised - they've got separate functions and they don't necessarily talk across..so they don't get the opportunities to see the mutual benefit [which could also benefit us]"*

Others variously referred to having to personally intervene due to co-ordination/communication failure internally; to a lack of cross-cutting/integrative thinking affecting the integration of their agencies' agendas with the authority's; to failure to engage with and hence co-ordinate with, external agencies' needs. |
| | Degree of inclusiveness/ openness | *"For the plan to impact on our plan we need to be sure that it represents partners' views [and we're not]"*

"We'll try and influence the strategy, but to be honest, our opportunities to do that and the ability to influence the top brass is limited, because we have no political clout in that sphere, so we just try to deliver services on the ground... but it's without the support of the local authority" |

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution or problem	Detail/exemplification
		"It can feel a bit like a closed shop" – "[they need to] make the voluntary sector feel more valued, more part of things" Others referred to a general insularity and lack of engagement with external agencies to examine their needs, how they could help them or were obstructing their work.
	Lack of internal-buy-in	"[They seem to think of x – a joint undertaking as] a nice comfortable, friendly add-on, rather than something that demands changes" Others variously referred to a reluctance to be proactive internally on agreed common agendas, or to follow through agreements into plans and operations, perhaps due to lack of internal backing; to a lack of awareness of external needs and agendas, and problems being caused for them.
	The nature of decision-making	"You're talking to an officer and you think everything's fine, but then you actually find out that really, it's not quite fine, that it's not like you thought it was" Others variously refer to decision-making that appeared to be on the basis of whims; to lack of clarity as to ownership/leadership of multi-departmental/agency projects that they [the interviewee] are working on; to officers constantly having to ask for permission from members, and to having decisions taken out of their hands (which then impacts on the multi-agency project in question]; to lack of clarity re who to contact as regards specific issues, or lack of clear management direction in specific fields they interact in.
	Inadequate strategy/strategic direction	"Money dictates rather than overall goals" – "[which means it can be quite] stop-start" Others variously referred to lack of clarity as to the strategic direction; to failure to view opportunities they presented strategically enough to prioritise/shape activity accordingly – general short-sightedness; to a lack of regional strategic work to improve efficiency in operations they [the interviewees] were associated with; to failure to make connections between problems and potential in different parts of the authority, or to make connections between the problems of other agencies and the potential for strategically designed synergies; to a failure to keep an eye on the future and what might be coming – to look ahead.
	Nature of ideas-outmoded, rigid, unrealistic	"The concept of x [which we seek to promote] hasn't reached Blaenau Gwent yet – they're 20 years behind" "They didn't conceive that it was possible to change that strategy in line with local needs" Others variously referred to generally being unable to push ideas for innovation; to having to battle to overcome old-fashioned attitudes/approaches; to a lack of imagination in ideas put forward for consideration by them [the external interviewee]; to failure to take on board the implications of external changes which they [the external interviewees] were charged with promoting/delivering.

Appendix C   v

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution or problem	Detail/exemplification
˛	Inadequate communication outwards	*"The letter we sent in [about x idea]...has been dismissed, has been forgotten"* Others variously suggested that communication about what was going on was very hit and miss, both for the public and for external agencies who hadn't happened to attend particular meetings or meet a particular officer; that meetings were often cancelled at the last minute with no explanation; that agendas were sent out at the last minute giving the external agency insufficient time to consider them; that changes were implemented with little explanation or reference to previous consultation; that meetings were held for no apparent reason, without clear objectives.
	The nature of priorities	*"You go through their programme [of planned activity] up there...and something, you think that's a bit weird – where's it come from?'"* *"There seems to be conflicting demands and pressures within the authority"* *"We don't get the feeling that the LA recognise the importance of this [agenda]"* Others variously referred to the rigidity of strategy standing in the way of opportunities, to the problems of marrying local priorities with those of their agencies.

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Appendix D: explanatory detail and exemplification of summary codes relating to the strategic view of the authority's regeneration role

Appendix D: explanatory detail and exemplification of summary codes relating to the strategic view of the authority's regeneration role

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution of the authority as a whole to regeneration	Detail/exemplification
Officers	Vital – essential and enlivening	"It's very important – without it a lot of schemes wouldn't exist" "I think it's one of the key players if not the key player when you look at the range of regeneration work we do" "If it wasn't for Blaenau Gwent [CBC] is here I don't think much would have happened Generally there was much reference to leadership, and lack of alternative capacity
	Strategic guidance/co-ordination	"It has the status, has the clout, has the ability to make those connections - [its role is in] leadership. profile. setting the vision, clarifying the key objectives and actions" "I think that things like that health board and that have got to look and have looked to the authority for guidance you know, and the voluntary sector as well, basically it's generated by the Council, it's guided by the Council I suppose"
	Conduit (of money, ideas)	"You have to tap into external resources out there and bring funding in, and the local authority is best placed to administer it" Others referred to the authority being a conduit for guidance, expertise, policy from above
	Facilitator	Mainly reference to how expertise acted as oil in the wheels for community groups and others
	Local/community advocate	"The authority's the one that's looking out specifically for Blaenau Gwent" Others variously referred to working for the greater good rather than parochialism, and the profile and clout the authority has to promote the local vision etc.
	Inevitable	"[Because]...we're a major landowner, there's so much kind of council housing bits and pieces like that, the council is one of, again the major employers, all things like that – in the absence of other major sectors –...we're kind of quite a big player in the area". Many referred to the authority bring best placed to deliver regeneration due to its remit, responsibilities and relative size
	Dominant/arrogant	"To a certain extent it is needed it's needed that someone does it, however the Council seems to sometimes get carried away with it's role in doing this, it sees itself as central and if any other methods or things do come up, they're often seen as a problem..." Generally there was reference to dominance by default – playing a major role and taking the lead due to lack of alternative capacity. However, there was also concern at the

Appendix D: explanatory detail and exemplification of summary codes relating to the strategic view of the authority's
regeneration role

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution of the authority as a whole to regeneration	Detail/exemplification
		arrogance this sometimes brought with it in the apparent failure to listen or properly consider alternatives.
	Underplayed	*"We're good at pulling in money to deliver projects, but then there's the question of whether those projects are actually needed or are an essential part of regeneration..."* *"It's not that we're not doing the right things, it's just that we're not doing as much of the right things as we could if we weren't actually being forced to do the wrong things at the same time – we are squeezing a lot of good work through as best we can...it's just a pity that it's an uphill struggle rather than a nice warm wind to our sails"* *"At the moment I don't think we're having the level of impact we should be having"* - *"there's lots of issues we're not addressing at the moment, which are on the agenda but not tied down yet"* Others variously referred to a lack of joined up working/thinking, lack of maintenance of projects implemented, lack of capacity, failure to think big enough/outside the box
	A power-base rather than focus for 'real' regeneration	*"You sometimes wonder whether regeneration initiatives are there to suit communities or council politics"* This was in line with many descriptions of politicians' interference in things to suit their own agendas, general heavy-handedness on the part of some elected members, and a political reluctance to engage with (and to support officers' engagement with) Communities First or Development Trusts as there is 'the suspicion that they're trying to take over the role of the local authority'
	Mixed	Generally there was concern at the uneven commitment to regeneration within the authority (distinguishing between departments and between members and officers), at a contrast between the emphasis put on delivery and that put on maintenance, and at the varied quality of outputs/outcomes of regeneration activity undertaken.
	Changing/learning	*"Only 8 years ago, there was no such Division, and only two officers working on what we would now describe as regeneration projects, so in a relatively short space of time it's grown and grown and grown. I mean a lot of that has come from Communities First and those kinds of development"* *"They [the authority] are learning they need to ask the community"* Others referred to relationships that are developing with the voluntary sector/other partners - recognising their potential contribution, and the gradual development of a more corporate approach.
Elected members	Vital	*"We are proactive in assessing needs, putting mechanisms in place"*

Appendix D: explanatory detail and exemplification of summary codes relating to the strategic view of the authority's regeneration role

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution of the authority as a whole to regeneration	Detail/exemplification
		"Rarely do you have, from outside the authority, an idea or thought that is so devastating or radical that the Council should act on it"
	Inevitable	Interviewees noted the influence the authority had through being a provider – particularly of Council housing; there was also reference to the significance of the local spending of employees.
	Conduit (for funding, ideas)/leverage	Some reference to the authority's key role being in the drawing down of money from various sources and making it available to deliver projects
	Strategic guidance	"[We don't want and don't allow] jobs at all costs" Others referred to the authority being important in leading overall strategy, in translating needs into mechanisms, in prioritising and in trying to think of everything in forward visions.
	'Big stuff' cf. 'people stuff'	Interviewees referred to its significant role/expenditure in relation to physical change/transformation, making big projects happen.
	Partnership working	Interviewees noted the importance of good working relationships and collaboration with various agencies, and actively seeking partnership.
	Facilitator	Interviewees noted its role in enabling and support of external initiative, notably development trusts, and facilitating partnership through providing joint-accommodation etc.
	Underplayed	There was reference to lack of strategic planning, over-emphasis on certain aspects of the authority's remit with wasteful and unproductive spending, lack of leadership, failure to look ahead enough.
External interviewees	Vital	"The regeneration department has been very important and will continue to be important in this area" "if they hadn't [been dominant] there wouldn't have been anything done, as generally speaking, the capacity for people to do something for themselves is limited" "It is driving an awful lot of things – some of which it's not getting the credit for"
	Conduit	Reference to money being channelled through it, to implementation of higher-level agendas.
	Inevitable	"There's no other organisation...that comes anywhere near the sort of..I mean when you look at the remit of the local authority, it's quite huge, it's almost all embracing, and.. it impacts on every individual's life, the decisions that are made, and if you look at the structure of the local authority, or any local authority, it has a huge impact or huge potential impact on every aspect of life within the Borough" "They can bring... the whole wider strategic influence to bear, whereas with x I can only bring a part of that... – so they've got to be the key player, they've got to be the key centre" "There's a certain amount that's just had to be done by a central authority [e.g. land reclamation]"

Appendix D: explanatory detail and exemplification of summary codes relating to the strategic view of the authority's regeneration role

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution of the authority as a whole to regeneration	Detail/exemplification
	Local/community advocate	Reference to its significance in helping to provide for local determinism, to trying to get higher-level agencies to align themselves with the local vision.
	Big stuff cf. people stuff	*"[They] seem to play a good role in economic regeneration - getting new businesses in etc" - but "in terms of dealing with people issues they play a more limited role"* *"They have skills within.. in doing the big stuff, but it's the people stuff..that's really a struggle"- " there's a famous saying...somebody said capacity building, and one councillor said 'well where is this building?', 'where are you going to put it ?'- and apparently that's a true story?"* Interviewees variously referred to how there was a lack of attention to grassroots feed-in to grand ideas; to the authority bring obsessed with structures rather than considering what people need and want; to the authority having the physical capacity, whilst they [external agencies] had the capacity on the softer side.
	Strategic guidance	Interviewees variously referred to the authority's role in providing focus and prioritising regeneration; in ensuring strategic links through regulatory controls; in making decisions for the greater good rather than in individuals' interests.
	Guided community leadership	Reference to the authority being looked to for action by local communities, to the significance of them holding the purse strings, managing the politics, bringing people together, helping them to access funding.
	Democratic	Reference to being a vital local institution, providing a chain of accountability and the democratic dimension.
	Facilitator	Interviewees variously referred to the authority's facilitating regeneration activity in terms of bringing key people/agencies together; supporting partnerships with secretariats etc; supporting external initiative.
	Dominant/arrogant	*"Everything revolves around the Council"* *"It's a little bit of 'I haven't thought of that so I'm not going to promote it"* *"It's been difficult to open things up" - "[there's been the attitude that] regeneration is their work and no one else should touch it"*
	Underplayed	*"They're very like a smoke blanket on things – hovering over them [rather than fully engaging]"* Others variously refer to lack of strategy/vison; coherence/buy-in within the authority; neglect of certain agendas; lack of attention to external potential and opportunities to act as a catalyst.
	Power base rather than focus for 'real' regeneration	*"[A lot of regeneration is about] councillors vying [for power] - ulterior motives as to who can do the best project"* *"[It is openly said to us that] x is not an agenda that elected members in Blaenau Gwent want – that it is seen as a threat*

Appendix D: explanatory detail and exemplification of summary codes relating to the strategic view of the authority's
regeneration role

Perspective	Code re key/ summary contribution of the authority as a whole to regeneration	Detail/exemplification
		to their local democratic right to be elected members...and when you start off on that basis then you know you're in for a long hard fight"
	Mixed	"[I'm] not sure whether the officer class isn't racing ahead of the political class- they're not ready" Others variously note both positive and negative aspects; uneven take-up of new ideas re good practice; that not all are singing to the same tune.
	Changing	"[They are finally shrugging off the] fuddy-duddy introverted complex" – "you can see new ideas creeping in, new faces, people with perhaps a bit more go" Others variously refer to new attitudes to engagement/support of external agencies and with the public; better integration of agendas; change from being reactive to more proactive

Supplementary codes and detail relating to negative characterisations (from all interviewees)

- A disjointed/imbalanced approach

"[Regeneration] is not given the budget- it goes on Leisure" [Elected member interviewee]

"It's not linked, it's not joined up" [External interviewee]

Others variously referred to over-emphasis on structures without adequate connection to grassroots activity; to failure to connect to the regional picture; to fragmentation based on silos, political and geographical competition; to being good at pulling down money but less good at successful implementation of projects; to components being missing from the agenda; to ad-hoc decision-making.

- Remoteness/arrogance

"Certainly politicians don't seem to recognise the value of working in partnership and that is seen by partnership organisations as well – they recognise it's not value" [Officer interviewee]

"..Interests come into it again.. The classic one's our X Strategy, where the whole strategy was written about what the Council does, and you know, without, and, I think it's 'we have so many x-facilities providing so much and so on, and how do we continue this', rather than actually starting from the fact well what do people actually want, it was all well what is provided, it's all what we're doing rather that starting from the fact, well what are the functions we should be providing and why" [Officer interviewee]

Others variously referred to the attitude that no-one else had a right to work in the regeneration field locally – is a threat to be controlled, or wouldn't come up with any decent ideas; to changes in partnership agendas without partnership agreement; to the authority shying away from community engagement and hence being ignorant about their needs and wants, leaving people lacking understanding about what it is doing

- Prominence of personality rivalries/power politics

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Appendix D: explanatory detail and exemplification of summary codes relating to the strategic view of the authority's regeneration role

"[Strong personalities in Exec make it their business to get the] *best slice of the cake"* [Elected member interviewee]

"Instead of Empire-building, [by elected members] *Blaenau Gwent should be seen as a whole"* [External interviewee]

it's members' portfolios, members of different groups having a bash at each other, people like their sections to be the greatest in the world, or want x-department to do everything or x-division to do everything and they've all got their little bands...it gets ridiculous at certain times, you're competing rather than working with each other" [Officer interviewee]

- **Short termism/myopia/superficiality**

"[We're only] *affecting things at the edges"* [Elected member interviewee]

"The planning isn't there, the strategic planning isn't as good as it should be" [External interviewee]

Others variously referred to failures to consider the sustainability of assets developed in terms of adequate funding for maintenance and in terms of environmental impact; to crisis management distracting from development/more proactive work.

- **Unreasonable opposition by elected members**

"[Certain councillors are] *very opinionated and strong, and whether things are dealt with rationally..."* [Officer interviewee]

Others variously referred to petty concerns of members holding things up; to individuals who are known to be obstructive; to the influence of inadequate understanding in decisions/discussions.

- **Inappropriate political influence**

"I do believe the authority does its very best when you look at the officer level, but the problem does come with the officers versus the elected members" [External interviewee]

"I've no problem with a member-led authority, just a member-dominated one" [Officer interviewee]

"The stronger the member is, the more influential he is, [and that] *can impact on things and be to the detriment of an area effectively, because you haven't got unlimited pots of money"* [Officer interviewee]

- **Tendency to be insular/territorial**

"I've heard it said, 'what does some outside [organisation]*...know about what's best for us?"* [Elected member]

Others variously refer to territorial disputes with external agencies, and a tendency to be isolationist, being reluctant to let go or work in partnership sub-regionally or on an inter-agency basis.

- **Inertia**

"[There's a] *need to shake them up"* [External interviewee]

Others variously referred to an authority tendency to replace like with like; to meetings to discuss/promote change having little impact – failure to embrace change wholeheartedly; to failure to allocate resources to support change.

Appendix E: detail relating to the analysis of shaping factors

Factors shaping individuals' regeneration work/key contributions: officers
Key factors described by officers as shaping their work, role and added value were:-

- The local authority environment - inherent characteristics, position and processes within it

"[A constraint on my work is] *the inability to use resources in a more flexible way – the resources beneath you can't always be chopped and changed"*

"*If we were operating on private, in a the private sense, then you would be responsible to other bodies – shareholders or whoever, whereas with the LA, we can give status, we can legitimise working in a particular way, we can legitimise working without bias, ...we can't be sort of bullied into using particular providers, you know we've got to sort of deliver in a very sort of fair way, which is open to all of us"*

"*While we're thinking, this is a good idea, this has got merit, let's do it, there seems to be an air of 'well who's thought of it, who's idea is it?' - That is counterproductive – and it seems to go on generally"*

"*There may be barriers in terms of advice, giving advice to people to develop their ideas, I think that's a barrier because, there are reasons why people...some people are very reluctant to go to, to deal with the Council"*

Others variously referred to the benefits of like-minded support, a range of expertise to tap into, capacity for and tendency towards multi-disciplinary work, good local knowledge, the profile derived from being based in/associated with the authority; or more negatively, to the slowness and inflexibility of bureaucracy, to onerous accountability requirements; to legitimacy given and needing to be maintained by being based in/associated with the authority; to the influence of the nature of the authority's priorities, of the nature of internal communication, the positioning of the individual within the authority.

- Responsibility

Interviewees variously referred to have a designated role but having the discretion to translate it into action, some taking this to allow for an entrepreneurial or proactive approach, some to take in/link up with the bigger picture, bearing risk in doing so. Reference was also made to the influence of expertise, profile and power associated with such responsibility.

- Responsiveness

Interviewees variously referred to responding to requests for help from different sources, dealing with both immediate and more strategic (capacity-based) issues; to responding to needs, concerns, opportunities and problems discerned more indirectly (e.g. through review of provision, partnership/forum discussions, networking); to responding through more negative [in]action to members' agendas (e.g. dislike of certain external groups/agencies, promotion of particular schemes/sites rather than others); to responding to continued learning.

- External higher-level direction

"*We have to demonstrate that the money we get from X-agency is used for the right purposes..."*

Other interviewees variously described how they were obliged to follow work programmes agreed with various higher-level agencies; how their work was shaped by the plans and guidelines related to higher-level strategies which they are charged with delivering locally, by guidelines from higher-level agencies they must apply to their work, or by funding criteria they must comply with to access funding from such bodies; how they were affected by dependency on higher-level bodies in relation to uncertainty over financial and other commitments (lack of internal funding), and the need to court relations with such agencies accordingly – meeting with them, trying to impress them with particular ways of working (e.g. partnership); how dynamism in agendas, grant regimes etc, was something they had to keep up with and how it affected demand for advice etc.; how sometimes a lack of higher-level direction gave them problems as it meant that had less clout in promoting particular agendas; how national policy and legal restrictions and requirements meant they were obliged to work in a particular way or to particular timescales, dictating the bounds of possibility in

people's work; how they were affected by needing to comply with the requirements of various inspections, and to ways of working prompted as a result of these.

- **Capacity/resources – money, staff capacity, property ownership**

"The one thing [that makes my work difficult] – there is certainly never enough funding, never enough, particularly with the serious amount of deprivation in Blaenau Gwent"

"We never seem to have enough, or more to the point, the right resources to do things, people don't seem to have the right skills in certain areas..."

"Everybody is pushed for time – it would be nice to devote a lot more time to working with colleagues to develop ideas and follow them through"

Others variously referred to lack of money/capacity driving partnership/joint working, and lack of money making attention to equitable distribution important; to inadequate capacity driving participation in training/education sessions, a search for advice/new staff or appointment and management of consultants; to being able to help external agencies through providing accommodation from the authority's property holdings.

- **External capacity**

"Although I'm working in partnership a lot of the work falls to me to lead on, and to do the bulk of it [as I have the expertise and 'drive']' – "they're volunteers and only have so much time"

"it's very difficult for a development trust to manage their ordinary workloads as well as x...so we're mostly trying to help, but we're limited in our resources as well"

"We try to be flexible in terms of service delivery so that we fit in - fill gaps rather than duplicate things"

Others variously referred to how their work was affected by community negativity and apathy, or on the other hand by good levels of interest from the community; by people's lack of awareness of their service or lack of awareness as to what could be realistically provided/achieved and as regards the consequences of their actions; to some external capacity being obstructive to their work insofar as they seemed to be working against what they [officers] are trying to achieve; to way that external partners can shape things due to their different expertise/perspectives; to how their work was evolving with the development of external capacity.

- **Contact with members**

"We now get cold calls, members will call up and expect an immediate response"

"Politicians...are on a different level They can't always foresee, cannot get the expertise themselves and we're there to advise and to recommend, but often that's politically unacceptable to them anyway – that influences quite a lot of ouputs and outcomes, which is not always to the wider public interest"

"The strength of individuals as politicians can be quite influential in how projects actually come out of that - a very strong influence like this will determine whether projects in a particular area are on or off"

Others variously referred to there being a lack of contact with members that restricted certain dimensions of their work; to members pressurising them to do things in their ward; to contact that was obliged through due process such as Scrutiny; to having ways of doing things (independent advice, protocols, procedures) that deliberately insulated them from political influence; to members being supportive of their work locally.

- **Reactive demands on time**

"[My work is made more difficult by] the constant demand for information or for reports or whatever. Reports, especially reports that I have to do on a regular basis to Council, to keep them informed of what we're doing – fine, but it's... as I said earlier, it's a constant stream now of, 'Can you tell me this?' 'Can you give me that?'..."

"I'm getting sucked in more and more to give advice"

> "if there's hassle going on I tend to deal with it"
>
> "[My job is] fire-fighting in many respects"
>
> Others variously described being obliged to cover for colleagues out of the office for various reasons, or much of their time being spent on answering ad hoc external queries.

- **Strategy/strategic considerations**

> "We as a Division do not have a proper driving strategy and plan that anybody can buy into" - "the key driver here is more about bids"
>
> "What part my role is, is to respond to their [external groups'] priorities, [but] may be tweak them a little bit so they fit better in the great scheme of things"
>
> "it's like if you've got a classroom with 30 kids, and there's one troublesome kid, you've got to sort that out, but you've got to make sure that that's not to the detriment of the whole class" - "You can't spread it evenly because that doesn't achieve anything because some things naturally have got to grow faster and bigger than other things, and you've just got to make sure that whatever your ultimate objective is or whatever the ultimate thing is that you are tasked with achieving, that everything that's happening around you is feeding into that thing in some way, or not going to compromise that in an unacceptable way"
>
> Other interviewees variously referred to their job being concerned with implementing particular strategies or plans, both internal ones and ones agreed with external agencies/partnerships; to strategies providing terms of reference or focus; to ensuring fit with the plans of other departments, agencies etc; to having regard to the need for consensus as far as possible about the way forward.

Also prominent were:-

- **Lack of buy-in**

> "[I've] never had the opportunity to develop it [my work] and take it on a level... which is where my understanding of the role, was going to be. Now I think that's mostly to do to the fact that the management didn't understand what the...potential was in regeneration [terms].
>
> "it's kind of ingrained that it [my type of work] doesn't matter"
>
> Others referred to only tokenistic involvement in things; to other priorities overshadowing their work; to petty jealousies disrupting working relations/suggestions as regards better ways of working; to some improvements to buy-in as attitudes begin to change to certain subject areas/approaches they are promoting

- **Working relations**

> "A lot of the time it depends on how well you get on with somebody as to what you can get done"
>
> "I've built up good relationships, or the team has built up good relationships with a lot of different departments, and if the Borough wasn't involved... then I think it would probably make it 10 times more difficult"
>
> Others referred to problems that arose where terms of reference weren't clear (internally between officers and members, externally with external agencies/groups), and conversely how their work was helped by clear terms of reference with external bodies, and/or trust that had built up, synergies that had developed over several years of working together.

Whilst taking Regeneration Division interviewees alone, also prominent were:-

- **Nature of higher-level input –supportive, distracting, underplayed**

> "I tend to get pulled in different directions – I haven't got one master and commander..."
>
> "It's [my work] a completely new field for the Council and erm, senior managers neither understand it nor want to understand it..."

> "[Corporate management requirements] *take[s] me away from my, what I consider to be more core activities, and it's becoming immense at the moment"*
>
> Others referred to their input and ability to add value depending on opportunities afforded by higher-level managers to network, work on a project, meet with officers from other departments etc.

- **Employment conditions**

> Interviewees variously referred to having to cover other roles due to unfilled posts, or a complete lack of posts, affecting the amount of time they could put into their own/main work; to the location of the office inhibiting effectiveness, and to problems due to lack of co-location with relevant colleagues elsewhere in the authority; to the need to attend to low morale, absence and retention issues affecting their work; to the benefits and synergies that had developed due to colleagues being in post long term (as opposed to in the private sector); to the expertise in handling particular situations/relations (making work easier) derived from long experience in post.

5.2 Factors shaping individuals' regeneration work/contributions: elected members

Key factors described by members as shaping their work, role and added value were:-

- **The local authority environment - inherent characteristics, position and processes within it**

> Interviewees variously described how their work was made harder because they were marginalised by politicking; easier by being well-briefed internally, by being able to call on the expertise and support of officers; acting as an intermediary because of their position both in the community and in the authority; being approached for advice etc due to their good profile within the community because of being an elected representative in an important body; giving consideration to what would be seen as a legitimate position in the eyes of the electorate, and having to account to them at election time – requiring that they dealt with ward issues.

- **Responsiveness**

> Interviewees referred to responding to the needs of local businesses-people and community groups for advice and help, and making themselves available to be able to do so; to keeping an eye on things so they could take appropriate action; to engaging with local problems to try and arrive at solutions; to finding ways to sort out long-term and short-term community concerns

- **Reactive demands on time**

> Interviewees referred to dealing with requests for advice/information from various quarters, and to dealing with problems that arose locally on a day-to-day basis.

- **Responsibility**

> Interviewees variously referred to their work being shaped by having the responsibility to be a good ward representative, to help local people, to 'finish' the task set for the task and finish group they were on; to having both representative and corporate responsibilities which they had to combine; to Scrutiny responsibilities; to the influence of local knowledge that accompanied being a community representative, and from their long experience of working in the authority.

- **External capacity**

> Interviewees variously referred to difficulties they had due to a lack of interest from local people in regeneration issues – the bigger picture; to having to educate people about the Borough-wide view, and what was realistically possible; to having to persuade people of the need to embrace change rather than resist it; to bringing their expertise to partnerships/individuals who sought it (implying a lack of capacity).

Appendix F: examples of the conundrums, intractable problems and confounding factors faced by the authority

- **The problem of possibilities/success being dependent on decisions made by higher-level authorities/dynamics in the wider economy**

"We keep being asked to be joined up in our approach and the way we work , but it doesn't seem to happen at the Assembly level" [Officer interviewee]

"if you get a downturn in the local economy, it starts impacting on local things – you've got to control for that, similarly with the national situation economically, that will impact on it locally, and those are factors outside your control [Officer interviewee]

"To some extent [their regeneration role is determined by] the role they're allowed to play [by the Welsh Assembly]" [External interviewee]

"[They are affected by] project funding from the Assembly – that's for specific things and only available for 3 years, and the closing date was yesterday" [External interviewee]

"We've got the calibre...but it will always revolve around the commitment of other agencies" [Elected member interviewee]

- **The problem of appearing dominant and arrogant whilst needing to lead etc due to deficient alternative capacity**

"You've got to be dominant, you've got to go for it, you've got to be aggressive – that's the only way you're going to get things done" [External interviewee]

"If they hadn't [been dominant] there wouldn't have been anything done, as generally speaking, the capacity for people to do something for themselves is limited" [External interviewee]

"I think you do need perhaps a local authority to lead it – otherwise it lacks direction...you just have pockets of things – I don't think you'd get anywhere – not to regenerate the whole area, when you're dealing with the scale of things we're dealing with, you have you have, you have to have the quality of the officers to deal with it – because they are significant risks involved in it, which could expose groups...it has to be done in a structured manner" [Officer interviewee]

- **The problem of there being apathy amongst the general public as compared to the need/requirement for involvement**

"Communities need to be involved but need to be led, otherwise you don't get anywhere" [Officer interviewee]

"It's a long hard battle [to get people involved] as a lot of people still see the local authority as very paternalistic – providing everything from cradle to grave" [Officer interviewee]

"Ultimately the people should be driving regeneration, whereas they seem...they seem to be sitting back and saying well let the Council tell us what to do about it "[Officer interviewee]

- **The issue of democratic legitimacy as compared to professional legitimacy/integrity - where in a democratic body, the limits to officer discretion as opposed to member involvement should lie**

"As officers we sometimes get frustrated with the political dimension, but at the end of the day, that's democracy" [Officer interviewee]

"Politicians...are on a different level They can't always foresee, cannot get the expertise themselves and we're there to advise and to recommend, but often that's politically unacceptable to them anyway – that influences quite a lot of ouputs/outcomes, which is not always to the wider public interest" [Officer interviewee]

"They've [officers have] got a hell of a job because technically...they're [the authority is] not there to lead...they can only...influence and persuade, and that's very difficult, particularly if

you've got such powerful local councillors sitting on these boards who have their own agenda...they're[officers are] in a very very difficult position I think" [External interviewee]

- **The problem of people complaining without acknowledging or understanding certain aspects of the situation/good or without involvement in the process**

"People look to us and think we can solve all the problems – we cant, have to say that some of the responsibility lies in their hands "[Elected member interviewee]

"I think a lot of agencies, because they don't have to work to the same guidelines as the authority, they do see us as a dinosaur" [Officer interviewee]

"[Certain agencies have a tendency, at public meetings to] slap us in the face without the facts" [Officer interviewee]

- **The problem of local parochialism as compared to the need to operate strategically**

"It's difficult for them to be strategic, they are very much 'local' councillors" [Officer interviewee]

"Trying to get them to understand the concept of prioritisation is very difficult, because for a ward, to a ward politician, that's not an issue – they get elected, representing their ward, and they don't care what's happening in other wards as long as something's happening in their ward, and trying to get the prioritisation then..." [Officer interviewee]

"People's thought pattern... is traditional – there's the logic well if one town can have this why can't we have it" [Elected member interviewee]

"There's a 'why not us?' mentality which you have to work within, around or perhaps against" [Officer interviewee]

- **The problem of local culture being out of synch with visions for the area and the need for change**

"I think the regeneration we've done so far has been excellent, but the public still think of 'oh when the steelworks were here, oh when the Semtex were here, oh when the coal mines were here' – the cultural change that needs to happen in Blaenau Gwent is huge" [Officer interviewee]

"What is missing is for people to be excited about the opportunities, there are fantastic assets – but all people see are the losses" [External interviewee]

- **The problem of being faced with inevitable tradeoffs in the course of necessary prioritisation**

"Looking from the politicians' viewpoint, they want the best for their community, and they will put every case they possibly can to achieve what they can for that community. That has to be balanced against available resources...– and when I say about the resources, both in terms of number of workforce who can deal with it, against the actual financial resources available - and one tends to sort of try to go for a more basic, moderate project with bigger impact...things like parks will have a much more widespread impact, and effectively a bigger gain, but it's understandable that in terms of the politicians, their individual parts of that ward can't be ignored, but nevertheless, in the process of things, the funding situation, one does the best you can" [Officer interviewee]

"As we're not the most affluent...we have to prioritise things, and then there's always something that gets left behind" [Elected member interviewee]

"[Whether they embrace x-opportunity] I suppose depends on how many other fires they're putting out" [External interviewee]

- **The difficulty of overcoming embedded ways of working**

"I don't think that's a reaction of the Council [deliberately against a certain agenda], I think that is literally because it's new to the Council, and they don't know, and they've never worked in partnership before – so what's the best way to work if you don't know? The way you've always worked – you know?" [Officer interviewee]

> *"I think all local authorities tend to do things, they start to do things and then they carry on doing them without saying 'well should we carry on doing this?'"* [Officer interviewee]
>
> *" [Members see] Communities First as just as they see [the Development] Trusts, as – and the same goes exactly for trusts, the suspicion that they're trying to take over the role of the LA"* [Officer interviewee]

- The problem of there being plenty of commitment, capacity and ideas for regeneration within the authority, but resources available do not match this.

> *"The one thing – there is certainly never enough funding, never enough, particularly with the serious amount of deprivation in Blaenau Gwent – I've always said that the Objective One money – 1.2 billion, could probably be spent in BG alone"* [Officer interviewee]
>
> *"I have every praise for the staff, but ultimately they're under-resourced"* [Elected member interviewee]
>
> *"People have been trying to solve this problem for years – we can't get to the weaknesses, we can't somehow get this model to work spiffing...and it's mainly resources, it's mainly that we're asking too much..."* [External interviewee]

- The problem of which direction to align policy in – with the grassroots' opinion, with members' opinion, or with that set by higher-level agencies which are also major funders, when all may be at odds with each other but each have claims to legitimacy

> *"We try and influence their [x agency's] business plan...the ongoing argument is that we define locally what the priorities are and they should then fund according to those, whereas, they're saying, 'ok, but we have a business plan' - there tends to be a lot of fighting over who's driving what.. between our members and [them]"* [Officer interviewee]
>
> *"[In effect] there are two regeneration systems – there is another regeneration system which is actually below and above them, which doesn't necessarily include them"* [Elected member interviewee]
>
> *"Certainly the Welsh Assembly wants community-led, community, bottom up, community involvement, so that you work with the community to achieve what they see as their needs and wants and their desires. That's difficult with the role of politicians who don't always see eye to eye with their own community, have their own agenda"* [Officer interviewee]

Appendix G: summary of evidence concerning local authority functionality within the context of governance from the 'grey' and academic literature

Type of functionality	Local authority	Details	Sources
Complementary activity: big stuff/ relative magnitude/ catalyst	Gateshead, Nottingham, Wakefield, Tynedale, Woking, Southampton [1]; Wirral, Shepway, Darlington, Warrington, North Tyneside [2]; Newcastle, Bournemouth [3]; Warwickshire, Tynedale NE Lincs, Tyne & Wear; [4]; Scottish Borders & Berwick upon Tweed [5]	Big stuff – large scale, infrastructure/prestige/fl agship/ public realm projects, often acts as catalyst to investment of others – 'place shaping' (Lyons, 2006); seen to be driving force locally	[1] Lyons, 2006 ; [2] Audit Commission 2002, 2003c, 2003d, 2005b, 2006; [3] LGA, 2003; [4] RI&I, 2004; [5] Grewal, 2004
Complementary activity: service provision, regulation & steering	Ipswich Borough	MAD – making a difference scheme, bending resources to improve local neighbourhoods.	IDeA 2005b
	Eastleigh, Rotherham [1]; Waverley Borough [2]; Rotherham, North Tyneside [3]; [4] Manchester	Use of S106s to secure local employment agreements (Eastleigh); fast-tracking planning applications of employment-creating schemes (Rotherham); seconding dedicated staff to deal with major applications (Manchester); Adoption of a positive approach to rural diversification, rural affordable housing (Waverley Borough); use of planning powers to secure resources for regeneration (Rotherham, N. Tyneside)	[1]LGA, 2003; [2] RI&I, 2004; [3] Audit Commission, 2004c, 2006; [4] Williams, 2006

Type of functionality	Local authority	Details	Sources
~	Eastbourne [1]; Leeds [2]; Stockport [3]; Surrey, Woking, Middlewich, Tower Hamlets [4]; [Thames Gateway] [5]; Darlington, Bradford, Wirral [6]; general [7]	Strategic vision for the area – with high profile launch, (Eastbourne, Leeds, Stockport, Surrey, Woking, Darlington, Bradford) 'place-making' (Lyons, 2006), taking the lead, creating a unified front locally (Thames Gateway, Tower Hamlets, Bradford, Wirral), sense of identity, pride (Middlewich); co-ordination and implementation of strategic planning and its mechanisms	[1] LGA, 2003; [2] Carpenter, 2005a; [3] Connor, 2004 ; [4] Lyons, 2006; [5] Rydin, 1998; [6] Audit Commission, 2003d, 2004d, 2005a; [7] Abram & Cowell, 2004; Cowell, 2004; Sorabji, 2005; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006
	Tynedale, Caradon	Research re needs (Tynedale); Monitoring the state of the local economy, producing indicators (Caradon)	RI&I, 2004
	Wirral, Darlington [1]; Northumberland [2]; High Peak District Council [3]; Kent [4]; Manchester [5]; Pembrokeshire [6]; Edinburgh [7]	Local procurement strategy & support – opening up to local business (Northumberland, Wirral); Local authority construction contracts to be subject to local labour clauses – opening up to support local employment (Kent); training local people to take up posts as lifeguards in new council-run local swimming pool – opening up employment (Manchester); opening up to support local employment & skills development (Pembrokeshire, Darlington, Edinburgh)	[1] Audit Commission 2003d, 2005a; [2] Thorp, 2005; [3] I&DeA 2005a; [4] Downer, 2005; [5] R&R 2004a; [6] WAO, 2005; [7] Lindsay & Sturgeon, 2003

Type of functionality	Local authority	Details	Sources
	Birmingham [1]; Liverpool [2]; Brighton [3]; Sheffield, Barnsley [4]; Manchester [5] general [6]	Upward advocacy - e.g. by council leader to the government to take action re MG Rover (Birmingham); to deter super casino locating locally (Liverpool, Brighton); to try to secure Objective One status (Sheffield, Barnsley); to get necessary funding (Manchester)	[1] LGC, 2005; [2] R&R, 2004b; [3] R&R, 2004c; [4] Armstrong & Wells, 2006; [5] Williams, 2006 [6] Sullivan et al, 2004, Ward, 2000, Harding & Garside, 1995.
	Southampton, Nottingham [1] ; Lancaster; North Tyneside; Darlington; Rotherham; Hampshire [2]; Scottish Borders & Berwick upon Tweed [3]; Manchester [4]; general [5];	Seeking to get capacities (including funding) in place to implement vision for area; membership of regional boards/committees that influence major funding decisions (Lancaster); marketing (Manchester, Scottish Borders & Berwick upon Tweed); supporting innovation with grants (Hampshire)	[1] Lyons, 2006; [2] Audit Commission, 2003d, 2003e, 2004c, 2004e, 2006,; [3] Grewal, 2004; [4] Jessop, 2000; [5] Harvey, 1989; Butcher et al, 1990, Bailey, 1995, Stewart, 1995;
Intervention: partnership making & sustaining	Doncaster Metropolitan Borough	Mediation between interests to gain consensus amongst working group where previously was disagreement in park scheme.	IDeA, 2005c
	Maldon District [1]; Doncaster MBC [2]; Croydon [3]; Tynedale, Caradon, Richmondshire [4]; Rotherham [5]; Sheffield [6]; Manchester [7]; Wales-wide/England-wide [8]; general [9]	Vital partner to have on board to make a scheme work (to bend services/funding/expertise); risk-taking capacity: taking on head lease of building (Tynedale), providing loan (Caradon), acting as accountable body (Richmondshire, Rotherham, Manchester, general); advice & support (general, Manchester, Sheffield); encourage participation of others (Sheffield)	[1] IDeA, 2005d ; [2] IDeA, 2005c; [3] LGA, 2003; [4] RI&I, 2004; [5] Audit Commission, 2004c; [6] Lawless, 1994; [7] Williams, 2006; [8] CPC, 2001; NRU, 2002; [9] R. Tym et al, 2002; Bristow et al, 2003; Franklin, 2003; Fuller, 2004; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006

Type of functionality	Local authority	Details	Sources
	Ipswich Borough, Newcastle City, Stockport [1]; Doncaster, Easington Wirral, Rotherham, Neath Port Talbot, Darlington, Great Yarmouth, Bradford [2]; Tynedale [3]; Lincolnshire [4]; Wales-wide [5]; general [6]	Leadership of partnerships & process (Ipswich, general); convened steering group (Ipswich, Tynedale); convening of partnership (Newcastle, Stockport, Rotherham, Neath-Port Talbot, Darlington, Great Yarmouth, Wirral); bringing RDA on board (Lincs); convening geographical partnerships (Easington); staffing/administrative support & co-ordination (general/Wales-wide, Doncaster, Neath Port Talbot, Bradford)	[1] LGA, 2003; [2] Audit Commission, 2002, 2003d, 2003f, 2003g, 2003h, 2004c, 2004d, 2005a; [3] Lyons, 2006; [4] RI&I, 2004; [5] CPC, 2001; [6]Carley, 2000; R.Tym et al, 2002; Franklin, 2003; Bristow et al, 2003; ODPM, 2004, Fuller et al, 2004; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006;
	Cheshire County Council	Facilitation of annual networking event for community enterprises	LGA, 2003
Intervention: providing local delivery capacity and presence	Maldon District [1]; Doncaster Metropolitan Borough [2]	Support & delivery/implementation of community-initiated improvements to an area	[1] IDeA, 2005d; [2] IDeA , 2005c
	Ipswich Borough Council	Notification of other remote landowners (e.g. NTL, Network Rail) that they needed to do work on land as part of local clean-up.	IDeA, 2005b
	Croydon [1]; Manchester [2]	In-house planning and supervision of Croydon Tramlink projects; project management (Manchester)	[1] LGA, 2003; [2] Jessop, 2000
	Tynedale [1]; Rotherham [2]; Gateshead [3]	Delivery of major local projects planned with others through in-house capacity	[1] RI&I, 2004; [2] Audit Commission, 2004c; [3] Lyons, 2006;
	Wakefield, Middlewich Surrey, Gateshead, [1]; Wirral; Darlington [2]; general [3]	Engagement – scenario planning (Surrey); communication of vision (Gateshead); involvement to build community capacity, make things happen locally (Wirral, Wakefield; Middlewich);	[1] Lyons, 2006; [2] Audit Commission, 2003d, 2005a; [3] Stoker, 1996; Pearce & Mawson, 2003; Sullivan & Sweeting, 2006

Type of functionality	Local authority	Details	Sources
	Wales-wide	Employment of programme staff (providing a local base/office space)	CPC, 2001
	Darlington [1]; Ipswich [2]	Provision of (operational) space/tools for other providers to develop new services	[1] Audit Commission, 2003d; [2] IDeA, 2005a
Intervention: ad hoc, informal support	Cheshire County Council [1]; Bradford City [2]	Community Enterprise Unit gives support & advice as needed (Cheshire) ; voluntary sector support unit gives support & advice as needed (Bradford)	[1] LGA, 2003; [2] Carpenter, 2005b; Readfearn, 2003
	Caradon, S. Tyneside Richmondshire, S. Holland, [1]; Cambridgeshire [2]; Leeds [3]; Liverpool, South Tyneside [4]	Opening up – lending officer time and expertise, helping with funding applications, appointment of staff, business plan formulation	[1]RI&I, 2004; [2] IDeA, 2005e; [3] Carpenter, 2005a; [4] LGA, 2003
	Tynedale, Caradon, South Holland, Richmondshire [1]; Norwich City [2]; Doncaster Metropolitan Borough [3]; Darlington [4]	Funding/loans to groups/projects; bids and linking funding for community & voluntary sector, dissemination of info re funding opportunities (Darlington)	[1] RI&I, 2004; [2] LGA, 2003; [3] IDeA, 2005c; [4] Audit Commission, 2003d
Intervention: proactive/strategic approach & role	Ipswich Borough Council	Liaison with other relevant landowners on behalf of local communities to get land cleaned up; provision of material for other groups (e.g. probationers) to do some of the work – overall, the organisational hub for scheme	IDeA, 2005b
	Blackburn & Darwen	Organisation and provision of training and support to ensure local people can access new jobs	LGA, 2003
	Cheshire County Council	Provision of needed Community Enterprise Unit to support community enterprise as necessary	LGA, 2003

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Type of functionality	Local authority	Details	Sources
~	Waverley Borough Council	Creation of a matched funding scheme – partnership funding officer to pursue & top-sliced funding to match, >£6m support community projects	RI&I, 2004
	Tynedale	Appointment of regeneration manager to take forward programme devised by stakeholders	RI&I, 2004
	Bradford	Provision of voluntary and community sector support service (though seeking to take a less hands-on role, this was being contested)	Carpenter, 2005b; Readfearn, 2003 (New Start, 22/10/04)
	Westminster [1]; N,. Tyneside [2]	City council offered land swap to encourage a landowner to release land needed for major scheme to go ahead (Westminster); N. Tyneside: council facilitated relocation of businesses to release land with tourism potential	[1] R&R, 2005; [2] Audit Commission, 2006
	Easington	Endeavouring to create integrated geographical partnerships, dealing with the problem of competing administrative remits	Audit Commission, 2002
	Bradford	Gap-filling – council only takes a role in business support where 'it perceives a gap that other organisations do not fill' (p. 18)	Audit Commission, 2004d
	Darlington	Gives grants where other agencies would be unable to	Audit Commission, 2003d
	Wales-wide	People in Communities programme co-ordinators (based in local authorities) working between different structures	CPC, 2001
	Middlewich [1]; Wirral [2]	Community capacity-building – enabling subsequent independent activity	[1] Lyons, 2006; [2] Audit Commission Best Value report, 2005a

Type of functionality	Local authority	Details	Sources
Intervention: inevitable contact/ gate-keeping	Maldon District [1]; Southwark [2]; Wirral [3]; Manchester [4]	Release of land/buildings for community regeneration/other regeneration project needs (Southwark, under duress though)	[1] IDeA, 2005d; [2] Looney, 2004; [3] Audit Commission, 2005a; [4] Williams, 2006
	Tyne & Wear, Warwickshire, NE Lincs	Provision of managed workspace –site/space where was none locally otherwise	LGA, 2003
	Rotherham [1]; Waverley Borough [2]; Gateshead [3]; Great Yarmouth, Wirral [4]	Fast-tracking of employment creating planning applications; positive approach to agricultural diversification (Waverley); significance of development control & regulatory processes – decision-making (Gateshead, Great Yarmouth)	[1] LGA, 2003; [2] RI&I, 2004; [3] Lyons, 2006; [4] Audit Commission, 2003h, 2005a
	Wales-wide [1]; England-wide [2]; Manchester [3]	Councillor involvement as democratic representatives of communities	[1] CPC, 2001; [2] ODPM, 2004; [3] Williams, 2006