

EVENT REPORT

Democratic Dictatorship – *Is it too late to stop the rot?*



Dedicated to our late Chairman, **Paul Lowen**,
who passed away on 25th March 2006

Participation, Inclusion & Exclusion in the 21st Century

Is Inclusion an Urban Myth?

Running with the Challenge

Our Democratic Dictatorship - What we can do to stop the rot

EVENT REPORT

Democratic Dictatorship – *Is it too late to stop the rot?*



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About Action for Involvement

Inspired by our late Chairman, Paul Lowen, Action for Involvement evolved out of our Power Inquiry investigations in to political involvement, inclusion and participation. Chaired by Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, the Power Inquiry is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

On completing our work for the Power Inquiry and with the assistance of Voluntary Action Sheffield we re-grouped under our own constitution on 29th March 2006. We then made a successful bid to the Big Lottery Fund's Awards for All so we could organise and deliver events, similar to the one we had delivered for the Power Inquiry in September 2005 at Sheffield Hallam University.

We are a community-based consumer action group concerned with ensuring people benefit from the introduction of corporate governance and social responsibility in to the Public and Private Sectors.

As such we aim to create greater awareness of:

- Corporate enforcement, regulation, compliance and value for money
- Public Sector effectiveness: accountability, governance, transparency
- The extent that local authorities empower people to take control

In doing so our objective is to educate people in our communities alongside people in the public and private sector of the need for a fair exchange.

Our core mission is to educate people in our Community about the way corporate governance and corporate social responsibility affects the Public/Private Sector relationship on our everyday lives in order to bring about better service delivery

We are fortunate to have a dynamic, enthused and strong team who relate to, and understand the issues of disaffection affecting our community with a wide range of expertise.

Part I: Framework

Terms Of Reference

Provide a forum for Sheffield's residents to have their say on political participation and inclusion in our local community and make appropriate regional and national inputs.

Focus

We asked our Event participants to consider the issues and focused on:

- those who control the lives we live
- whether we care who these people are who control our lives and
- how we can get people started?

Purpose

Create space to discuss issues affecting political involvement, participation and inclusion to feed in to our investigations and report on to decision makers.

We have therefore taken great pains to represent views which is not to be seen as endorsing any political opinions or parties whether or not invited to speak at our Events. Our report is a composition of ideas and concerns from speakers and participants alike:

- Part I: Event Framework
- Part II: Executive Summary, Purpose, Methods and Focus
- Part III: Issues Raised by Speakers
- Part IV: Open Discussion
- Part V: Conclusion - Our Inherited Challenge

Methods

Invited speakers represented their views and although we aim to identify key issues, the verbatim transcript can be found on our website. Participant inputs are anecdotal. Our report is to be taken on an "as is" basis. Conclusions and inferences may not be drawn from the synopses or reports of our speakers. Other contributors are referred to by first name for privacy purposes.

In order to ensure a broad platform we trawled for speakers representing a range of views on political involvement, regeneration, democratic conversation, communications disorders and learning difficulties. We sent invites to 9 people and organisations including The Hansard Society, Statewatch, both Sheffield Universities, Sheffield City Council and Yorkshire Forward in addition to our speakers.

As a community-based consumer action group we are very keen to see people in our communities take initiatives to raise standards of service delivery received from the Public Private Partnership. Accordingly and in the spirit of our late Chairman's goals we asked people to share their views on political inclusion and participation.

Part II: Executive Summary

Our report reflects the issues raised by our speakers and participants, notably Parliament's apparent inability to control and manage vital debates. We therefore considered the value of good conversation within a democratic framework amid the overpowering need to revitalise communities.

Speakers explored how to stimulate good conversation and the meaning of democracy on the topical debates of: consumerism, devolution, privatisation, globalisation, media and political relationships, community regeneration and social inclusion. As with previous Events, a consensus seemed to exist that Parliament and politics - as we traditionally think of them - is not the only solution to control political and social organisation.

In a stimulating discussion, we questioned existing practices and sought to find other workable solutions by exploring the views and ideas presented by our speakers.

As in previous years, everyone considered the myth of political apathy as the source of poor election turnouts, is just that. Nick dismissed Americanised celebrity politicians as ineffective and there were more benefits to be gained from using globalisation's effect on our participation and involvement. Issues raised in response to Perry's question of how to stimulate activity focused on making better use of existing resources, talent in systems and communities and including people with communications disorders or learning difficulties on their own terms.

We discussed how to create viable systems and procedures intended to protect us from poor practices relating to our voting methods, communications, regulatory frameworks, compliance, enforcement systems and expert advice. Again, as in previous years, much of this was ascribed to the failure of the governors to involve or inform us - the governed - as to the why's or wherefore's of decisions before enactment.

A particular concern, yet again, which Nick raised, is that of poor relations between media and political classes which was not seen to add value to the compelling need for long-term solutions regarding the major consideration of constitutional reform. Perry reinforced this by voicing his concern over the stranglehold which the effect of poor relations in media and political classes have on our entitlement to constructive democratic relations. This has led Perry to consider a systems approach to explore effective ways to break this vicious circle, find ways to encourage change and arrange conversations to bring systems together; that is the media, politicians and electorate in the same room at the same time.

In our efforts to find practical, cost-effective solutions we looked at how public, private and not-for-profits conducted their activities. Achievable solutions for a fairer, more just and equitable political system must include greater transparency and accountability.

Part II: Executive Summary

Where privatisation of public services is undertaken, it must be for genuine reasons to achieve improved service delivery rather than the politically motivated ideological dogma of the past generation. We duly considered more open systems and the invaluable role of the Internet and similar technologies to politics, notably, single issue politics.

Crucially, we need people to reach out and contribute to our society. As we state, many people feel discouraged, disenchanting and disenfranchised over the way they feel issues important to them seem to be mishandled by our local councils, councillors and other officials in their use of limited resources.

In this context, Moisant raises vital concerns as to who and how to blend the individual views into a consistent whole and to do so legitimately if public or political institutions are either unable to do so or are unwelcomed (Is participative democracy the answer to citizens' aspirations or just geek speak? Round Table 20, Moisant, 2006, www.worldgovforum.com/article.php3?id_article=691 Accessed on 3rd November 2007).

It is disheartening to learn from Lisa that little, if any progress has been made to find effective solutions to include people with non-standard disabilities in to mainstream society. Inclusion and participation must be at the heart of community regeneration.

On behalf of Carole, who co-authored with Wendy and Josh, our Special Report: "*Hard to Reach? - We think Not!*", Wendy said it is time for us to be included, to be seen and heard. It is not an option to sweep us under the carpet in the dismissive way wider society deems acceptable. Respecting our needs, ability and capability to contribute on *our* terms is long overdue.

Although Government initiatives do not go far enough, Nick's valued insights in to our past and present political context indicate the Government accepts slowly, need for greater innovation in our governance.

Constructive proposals are beginning to show on the political agenda. Encouragement to create opportunities to play a more active part in national and local government is slowly filtering through, albeit on a selective basis and Government is disseminating information on participation, local decision making and partnership.

As Rose stated, Local Government Minister, Hazel Blears, uses inspirational terms: *daily democracy*, *devolution to the doorstep* and *double devolution*. All of this makes Rose think "*Yes, Yes, that's what we want*" to push boundaries so that we can make the most of the available opportunities".

Part II: Executive Summary

Our Government also seems to take matters rather more seriously than has been the case as indicated in the recent Chamberlain Group¹ announcement after two years work:

“decentralising power could restore public confidence in political institutions and deal with low electoral turnout. ... spending flexibility with Whitehall releasing its grip through a reduction in the ring-fencing of grants for specific projects ... hand over more power and responsibilities to local authorities and accept that services may vary from council to council. (*MPs call for council spending flexibility*, H  l  ne Mulholland and agencies [Guardian Unlimited](#), Friday 2nd November 2007, Accessed on 4th November 2007)

We hope it will lead to a reduction of the destructive political processes Nick outlined and so aptly described by Perry as the “*infantilisation*” process caused by the poor relationship between the media, political and electorate classes.

¹An informal grouping of senior MPs, peers and former local government ministers from both Labour and Conservative administrations

Part III: Speakers *(in order of appearance)*

People Power, Nick Clegg, MP and Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary studied at the Universities of Cambridge, Minnesota and College D'Europe. Nick began his career as a journalist, then as a development aid and trade expert in the European Union. He was elected a member of the European Parliament in 1999 and Trade & Industry spokesman for the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. He co-founded the Campaign for Parliamentary Reform arguing for more transparency and accountability in the European Parliament. Nick stood down from the European Parliament in 2004 and was elected MP for Sheffield Hallam in 2005 with an 8,682 majority. Charles Kennedy appointed Nick as Europe spokesman acting as Sir Menzies Campbell's deputy. On winning the 2006 leadership election, Sir Menzies Campbell appointed Nick as Shadow Home Secretary. Nick has spearheaded the Liberal Democrats' defence of civil liberties, proposing a Freedom Bill to repeal unnecessary and illiberal legislation, campaigns against Identity Cards, retention of innocent people's DNA and excessive counter-terrorism legislation, prison reform, a liberal approach to immigration and defends the Human Rights Act against ongoing attacks from across the political spectrum. Nick Clegg is married to Miriam Gonzalez Durantez with two children.



In considering the reinvigoration of politics in order to address the worrying trend of lower election turnouts, I will look at the influence we can bring and impact on our society of:

1. consumerism
2. mechanical reconfiguration of our constitution to facilitate domestic devolution;
3. rebalance and reconfigure the media and political class relationships;
4. extent of our influence on globalisation

My Parliamentary Role & Consumerism

When a young schoolgirl in my constituency raised her hand in the disarming way children have to ask: "*Well, what do you actually do as my MP?*" she floored me on a basic question about my work as her representative. Like all other local constituency MPs, I spend 85% of my time trying to get answers from the Public and Private Sector:

- parents who do not understand why their child can not go to their chosen school,
- patient who needs to know whether the NHS will cover the cost of their treatment
- conflicting Council's Housing Benefits Department letters about housing benefits
- transfer of utility services referred from one supplier to another and back again

These representative situations exemplify our powerlessness to create contemporary life's oddest irony in that as consumers we are told we are empowered, as indeed we are, only to be bounced around, frustrated and disempowered. Such incidents indicate a stagnant, unresponsive system leads to increased support to marginal, extreme political movements.

Although 4th or 5th in the world's wealth league, consumer empowerment leads to an erosion of citizen participation. Contributory to it is globalisation and homogenisation of economic life. The Northern Rock debacle created a sense of the stark macro-economic economic management debates of the Seventies. These have ceased to oppose macro-economic visions on employment, inflation, interest rates, taxation, independent monetary policy and private/public sector mix. Instead we now debate: identity politics, political probity, environment, centralisation, managing public services.

Part III: Speakers *(in order of appearance)*

Media Relations

Relations between political and media classes pose an impossible conundrum which has made normal conversation potentially impossible and contributes to the misperceptions surrounding our activities with the electorate, our voters. This degenerating relationship perpetuates hostility and suspicion, evasive language, obscure terms, political games to oust hidden scandals in a foreground dominated by personalities contributing to the view of politics, politicians and increasingly issue-based or fringe parties of voter turnout.

Electoral System & Governance

All parties talk of de-centralisation and devolution, yet no-one does it. Over-centralised government unable to reinvigorate the political process has seen a declining turnout for decades giving our political representatives less legitimacy. Politicians have far less reach.

Our electoral system gives Government control of a majority on a mere 26% of the eligible vote in one of the most executive-led Western governments and allows a few thousand voters in marginal seats to dictate our governance and encourages disenfranchisement.

Constitutional reform is the only way to reinvigorate politics. A constitutional settlement will include a bill of rights, division of labour between Government branches, their rights and prerogatives with increased Mayoral politics encouraging individuals to act against Whitehall's centralised State. Our Government seem encouraging, yet recognition of the urgency does not go far enough. Policies with a constitutional bias for devolved governance, power granted upwards to Whitehall and devolving tax-raising powers failing which devolution lacks the requisite power and resources.

Globalisation

In global science *the democratic deficit* makes major tension and renders local or national politicians impotent. Decision-making authority escapes state boundaries. Security and prosperity are beyond the reach of the national governors' globalised corporate bodies. Individuals can no longer influence strategic direction, power structure, domestic and local political debate of our global world.

Facilitated by the internet, ideologies are now capable of transcending borders making environmental change and mass-migration supra-national. Bodies like the EU are more relevant now than when founded, apparently to aid food shortages, resolve Franco-Germanic conflicts, self-sufficiency of coal and steel capacity in Ruhr & Alsace. European integration has mutated into a sophisticated response to globalisation legitimating decision-making bodies - sovereignty, reach and control surpass national boundaries.

Part III: Speakers *(in order of appearance)*

Community Challenge, Rose Ardron, former Chair, Burngreave New Deal for Communities has been a Burngreave resident for 33 years, a founder member of Burngreave Community Action Forum and involved with New Deal for Communities (NDC) since its inception in 2001 as an elected community representative and Chair of the Partnership Board from 2003. She is a Voluntary, Community and Faith sector representative on Sheffield First (Local Strategic Partnership) Board. As a freelance trainer and researcher, Rose specialises in community regeneration and strengthening community voice with Voluntary Community Sector organisations; Community Empowerment Networks; sector advocates and representatives to support community engagement and participation in regeneration. She also works on national evaluations of programmes such as Community Participation Programmes, New Deal for Communities and Guide Neighbourhoods.



I stood down from the Board due to the responsibilities and demands of being a volunteer. I would do it again, encourage others to participate and call the system to account. The Government invited local communities to I felt Burngreave could not refuse resources for change and decided to face the challenges of a partnership world.

Nick described our political issues and context. Government disseminates?? on participation, local decision making and partnership. Our Minister, Hazel Blears, uses inspirational terms: *daily democracy*, *devolution to the doorstep* and *double devolution* which make me think “Yes, Yes, that’s what we want” to push boundaries so we can make the most of what is on offer.

Burngreave is an inner city, multi-cultural, diverse community lacking investment and a history of poor services. This entitled us to New Deal for Communities’ funds targeted on social inclusion & neighbourhood renewal. We received resources to lead in finding community regeneration solutions in partnership with services, agencies and the local authority. They wanted us with our ability to influence operations, make an enduring difference, find new ways to engage and empower people.

As Chair I was accountable for success, setbacks, collective effort, managing and keeping partners at the table. In Year 7, service is better; crime, health, education, employment and income are improved.. Some people feel they don’t have a say, dispute our success and feel that we rubber-stamp a pre-set government agenda. We need to involve people who feel this unconditional opposition.

Regeneration is complex. Learning is from mistakes. Participation is responses, decisions and bringing issues around power in to the open. Broadening participation exposes flaws in systems and methods. As *invited* space, New Deal’s agenda is set by government. We may shape, influence, and build relationships *but* do not own the agenda. It can feel like being an unpaid State manager with management frameworks, technical knowledge and indicators. I still question the need for volunteers to fit this model.

Vitally we need cross party political support for community empowerment. We also need people we value on the outside to raise issues, create our space and set our agenda and people on the inside to make it work.

Part III: Speakers *(in order of appearance)*

An Ode to be Seen AND Heard, Lisa Watchorn, Regional Director of Dimensions UK Ltd, a national organisation supporting adults with learning disabilities. Lisa has over 20 years experience of management roles in national and local government and not-for-profit sectors. Lisa's eldest son has a diagnosis of high-functioning autism. Lisa is passionate about self-directed support, empowerment and carer representative of her local LDPB, co-founded a self-advocacy group for adults with learning difficulty and volunteers on the National Autistic Society Advocacy for Education helpline.

"The greater obstacle to conversation is: not knowing the heart of the person one speaks to. Only when people find ways to speaking with each other from the heart will they truly begin to be equal. (Han Fe Tzu 3rd Century BC) Dimensions support about 100 people in Sheffield; two thirds can not speak and many only have paid support. *"Not being able to speak is not the same as having nothing to say"* - a quote I saw shortly after my son was diagnosed with autism. For these reasons, I probably spend more time than most reflecting on communications issues with only 7% of communication spoken while 93% is body language and other non-verbals.



Nick discussed power, devolving power, powerlessness and *the system*. Inclusion, advocacy and self-directed support build trust and understanding, yet people who can not speak, use language, control their voice or body can not access rights we take for granted.

- Thomas Eddison's teachers told him he was too stupid to learn.
- Albert Einstein was 4 before he could speak, began to read at 7 and quit school at 15.
- We talk over wheelchair users and finish sentences for chronic stammerers.
- My son heard such awful things said of him at meetings that I stopped taking him.
- Professionals talk at our support staff and ignore our clients.

Self-advocacy creates building blocks for independent living without relying on paid staff. However, to create change we need to experience it and although I cringe to recall first speaking with Wendy, was when I first realised my office has an entryphone intercom and gave any thought the such barriers it poses for people with communications difficulties.

Martin Luther King said *"He who looks at how it is, he looks at how it is and asks why? I look at how it could be and ask why not?"* is reflected in a Dimensions solutions-based project I am particularly proud to have been involved with that is: Helping Debbie, who can not speak but has strong views and preferences, to express herself. We used video to show how Debbie communicates and celebrated a fascinating work on the big screen as her smile radiated the room. Debbie also raises crucial issues:

- What practical barriers could each of us remove now?
- What can we do to empower and support people who can not speak?
- How can we enhance the availability of communications aids in our technological era?

Democracy as conversation, Perry Walker is Head of Democracy & Participation at leading think tank and registered charity, nef (the new economics foundation), which aims to put people and environment at the heart of economic decision-



Part III: Speakers *(in order of appearance)*

making. Perry is committed to new initiatives giving people a voice and vote to rejuvenate democracy at grassroots level. His wide experience in invention and development of participatory processes include Democs, aMap, and Imagine. Expertise in design, facilitation and participative evaluation of such processes has led to writing many books and pamphlets: 'We the People, Developing a New Democracy', 'Participation Works! 21 methods of community participation for the 21st century', and, as co-author, 'Strategies for Success: Strategic Planning for Voluntary Organisations' (NCVO 1995). Perry is on the board of Involve, which supports participation. Early in his career Perry worked for the Civil Service and the John Lewis Partnership.

Democracy is what we do; we do not “*have*” democracy. As a professional in the field, I am proudest of initiating a referendum in Herefordshire under a little known Local Government Act, 1978 provision which allows any 12 people to call a referendum. Although the planning decision was irreversible, the referendum, in which 10% of the population of my town voted, felt like ‘doing democracy’.

‘Doing democracy’ makes it less likely to become *infantilised*. *Infantilisation* is a vertical political system, where politicians behave like parents, and all of us behave like children. We can also avoid this by adopting a systems approach. What does this mean? An American soldier in Iraq said “We’re in Iraq because they shoot at us; they shoot at us because we’re here.” That’s a system, looking at the individual components and how they interact. We need to bring systems like the media and politicians into the same room.

Part of doing democracy is conversation. Like developing a muscle, the more we do it, the stronger the muscle. The value of good communicating can be seen in birdlife; socially active bluetits learn from each other yet the robin’s solitary lifestyle does not learn new things. Exciting examples of good conversation are:

- Keith Hayman an organiser of Talk Shop 2002, a series of events for adult discussion is credited with revitalising the Sheffield Telegraph’s letters and leader.
- America Speaks - a 21st century town meeting - had 4000 people to discuss and plan the Twin Towers site.

Not all communication is good. A proposal to stop cars in Richmond Park led to increasingly sarcastic letters in a local newspaper.

A way of doing democracy I have been involved in developing is Democs, a conversation card game to help people make meaning of information, converse and overcome fear of making a fool of themselves. I am most proud of:

- Jimmy, a homeless alcoholic at a homelessness strategies event who I overheard say to a local authority representative that through Democs he felt equal for the first time.
- A nano-technology discussion review of Democs, felt illiterate people would find it too hard until a Roma person said “I am illiterate and had a fantastic time”. He wanted to understand new technologies after Nazis used new technologies to destroy his people.

Our success poses the questions: how can we encourage more people to get started?

Part IV: Picking up the Baton

Preamble

Underlying our event, were inclusion and participation which “like democracy, has meant many things to many people. The opportunities for participation are there to be grasped but only if all those involved have a common understanding and share a common language”, (Wilcox, D., 1994 www.partnerships.org.uk/guide/intro.htm, Accessed on 1st November 2007).

An objective of our event was to explore their practicalities applied to our everyday life and see what we could change in our community to improve the quality of our lives. As such we discussed potentially contentious issue of how to stimulate people to partake in good democratic conversation, contribute to decisions affecting the quality of their lives and those around them including:

- Our democratic framework and related entitlements
- Constitutional reform and the reinvigoration of national and local politics
- Privatisation and Public Sector Accountability
- Community regeneration
- Involving people with disabilities such as communications and learning difficulties

Initiatives for a more flexible, open democratic model encompass virtual neighbourhood councils, on and off-line consultations affecting national or local issues are designed to overcome the inertia affecting our lack of involvement and participation.

A question we strived to address at this event and through our other activities is how to involve people in our communities when all the evidence indicates an unprecedented level of inertia, apathy, complacency and disinterest.

Participative Democracy and Devolution

What is *democracy*? And what ideological belief are we subscribing to?

In his analysis of our democratic political framework, Bernard Clayson evaluates party political needs, funding, motivation, decision-making, power, corporate growth, Government, voters to conclude:

“Democracy is a much abused word today with party politics hi-jacking the concept for their own ends, which rarely, if ever, meet the aspirations of the electorate” and his dictionary definition states that “democracy is “government by the people; state so governed. ... *We have NEVER had a democracy*” [and that]

1. Government by the people, where the power is retained, and directly exercised by the people.
2. Government by the delegation of that power to elected representatives. (Planet Thanet, www.planet-thanet.fsnet.co.uk/nps/index.htm#What%20is%20Democracy? Accessed on 9th November 2007)

Part IV: Picking up the Baton

In recommending the first, he states the “second is what we, and most countries, have got, but even that principle has been hi-jacked by party-politics ... i.e. perpetuation of the party is the prime objective.” (ibid)

Reinvigorating politics

So, how do we ascribe meaning to democracy, politics and our value on its revival? “If democracy has a meaning at all, it is through exercising informed and responsible

voting”, (Ahmadi, Chair of Black & Minority Ethnic Employee Network and Senior European Officer at Somerset County Council News Release Make a Date - to vote, Somerset County Council, Wednesday 20 April 2005

http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:IFUUK4_YCmQJ:www.somerset.gov.uk/somerset/latestnews/pressreleases/details.cfm%3FreleaseID%3D127+political+inclusion+and+media+relations&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=39&gl=uk&client=firefox-a Accessed on 4th November 2007)

Whether current interest in participative democracy can reinvigorate representative democracy rather than highlight flaws is debatable. Similar questions need to be asked of the value in technology and internet to stimulate any interest in participative democracy. Anonymity of online pseudonyms protects users, yet its freedom is double edged with the difficulty of validating the content for inclusion with balance and impartiality.

In this context Moisant asks: “Can individual viewpoints play a citizen’s role on the Internet? How can the anonymity be overcome (or used)? How can individual views blend into a consistent whole? Who can blend them legitimately? If public or political institutions are unable to do so (or if their efforts to do so are unwelcome), who can? And how? (Is participative democracy the answer to citizens’ aspirations or just geek speak? Round Table 20, Moisant, 2006, www.worldgovforum.com/article.php3?id_article=691 Accessed on 3rd November 2007)

Crucially, is it still appropriate for us to only have our say via an antiquated voting system merely once in every five years? We need to introduce people to different international levels, participative local democracy and divest ourselves of 19th Century political values, a view which seemed to be greeted with some scepticism.

America’s celebrity politics model with campaigns to resuscitate us from inertia, apathy and disillusionment is unlikely to achieve desired results. As Nick said disenfranchisement in the US electoral system is as unlikely to add to the UKs debate on inclusion and participation. He added: “*Big brother* doesn’t debase cultural and political discussions. Strong personalities are entitled to present ideas under pressure and tested in controlled institutions such as mayoral politics which he advocates.”

Design of political institutions focuses on the ability to take decisions, accountability and a mandate that balances personalities with regard to the normal checks to carry people along and pursue an agenda of ideas. As Nick considered himself an incremental radical, the royalists among us will be relieved to learn we stopped short of discussing the “wholesale reform” of our constitution and the Royal Family’s role.

Part IV: Picking up the Baton

Public/Private Partnership

From everything Nick said, it was clear he “would be the first to man the barricades against” public sector sell-offs to create bogus competition as happens in health, education and transport. Privatised services need to be strategic, operate effectively and function in a true market place. Unless all such conditions are met, privatisation must not proceed because it abdicates political accountability as happened with our rail services and Sheffield’s, once excellent, public transport system.

It is no compensation to us that the Conservative Party policy chief, Willetts admitted in a Daily Telegraph interview that deregulating rail services was “ideologically driven and *wrong*.” (Tories: we were wrong on rail, *Sylvester and Marston*, 13th December 2003, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2003/12/13/nrail13.xml, Accessed on 10th November 2007).

Although a particularly outrageous case of abuse and neglect in a private nursing home brought under the Human Rights Act was abhorrent to everyone, Nick saw no need to regulate private or voluntary sector bodies to deliver public service contracts. Nevertheless, Wendy remained unsettled regarding the recent High Court decision whereby this Act can not be used to call the Public Sector to account for permitting private companies and social enterprises to mismanage contracted out services.

Sustainable regeneration programmes such as New Deal for Communities rely on engaging local people, listening to their experiences or ideas to regenerate their community www.ce.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/scrcs_006876.hcsp#, Accessed on 11th November 2007. Closely aligned to neighbourhood renewal, Visit CLG website for summary of NDC environment. www.greenwich.gov.uk/Greenwich/YourEnvironment/FAQ/WhatsRegeneration.htm, Accessed on 11th November 2007

Meeting national targets to effect lasting change for Burngreave included “widened involvement, strengthened resources and sustained urban regeneration rooted in informal networking processes.” www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/government/G45.asp, Accessed on 11th November 2007.

In achieving sustainable results, agencies learned to feedback into their networks the need to ease concerns for staff, police and local residents, all of whom must be involved. Learning outcomes recognised the need to redistribute power, involve people, innovate at meetings and the value of formal structures to reduce threats or fears of innovation.

The IES study by Robinson et al, (2004) found sustainability requires quality management, effective communications, clear accessible policies and practices underpinned by huge continuing investment to ensure basics. Their emphasis on such large financial resources would indicate a worrying concern for Community Regeneration after funding expires. IES also warns against “embarking on a drive to increase engagement levels ... bearing in mind the ease with which [it, like the psychological contract] can be shattered.” (Report 408, The Drivers of Employee Engagement April www.employment-studies.co.uk/summary/summary.php?id=408, Accessed on 11th November 2007).

Part IV: Picking up the Baton

Encouraging people to explore reinvigorating community involvement and participation entails thinking differently. O'Brien et al hold that inclusion, participation and citizenship “must start with who we are, ... learn to get along while recognizing our differences” constrained by delusions that “we must all be “one big, happy family!” (OBHF)” prevent us learning how to overcome differences to achieve shared objectives. (The Ethics of Inclusion: Three Common Delusions, O'Brien et al, www.inclusion.com/inclusion.html, Accessed on 1st November 2007)

Inclusion also entails being prepared to take risks that may not work. Perry suggested an innovative evaluation exercise to rate a meeting’s value to participants who were asked to place a shoe in a circle, the position of the shoe representing the success of the meeting. The centre would symbolise a successful meeting and the periphery as awful.

Allusions to the professional’s role, prompted an activist and academic to question the legitimacy of paid staff representing communities and act on their community’s behalf. “Participation processes demand very careful design: the patterns of meeting and involvement often test both the ingenuity and the budget of the organisers. (The Ethics of Inclusion: Three Common Delusions, O'Brien J., et al, www.inclusion.com/inclusion.html, Accessed on 1st November 2007)

Thus we returned to the core skill of knowing how and when to use a resident’s first-hand community experience rather than the expertise of local staff skilled in managing workloads and bringing people together to steer such projects to its goal.

Including People with Communications and Learning Difficulties

In his pamphlet, *Personalisation through Participation: A new script for public service*, Leadbeater (Demos, www.demos.co.uk/publications/personalisation, 2004, Accessed on 4th November 2007) explores the benefits of inclusion and self-managed support services for people with learning difficulties and other disabilities such as cerebral palsy.

Despite Government wishes, creating support to include people with complex needs in to community life poses, as Lisa observed, controversial questions of how to introduce and include people who rely on paid staff for the simplest communications. This led Martin to observe that in trying to overcome barriers in his community group, major obstacles to inclusion were illogical fear, ignorance and insecurity.

As Lisa said this is a multi-faceted debate. On one hand, people with special needs are entitled to join in everyday life without feeling excluded by their disability, yet it is as important to appreciate the difficulty of supporting a child with complex needs in mainstream education.

Trends are moving to network circles, social events, invite people in the community and encourage more involvement. It raises important issues of choice and understanding options and leads to questions such as whether people are living where they want with the people they want to live with and supported by the staff they want.

Part IV: Picking up the Baton

Other issues are how to achieve inclusion and overcoming barriers such as those Martin identified. Techniques include NDT's inclusion traffic lights which must be applied with care to avoid misuse (Accidents at the inclusion traffic lights: Mistakes and misunderstandings in supporting people to achieve social inclusion, www.ndt.org.uk/ETS/ETILT.htm Web page version of Emerging Themes paper, Accessed on 4th November 2007) and mapping everyone in a person's life, inviting people to move further in to the circle which on people being willing to move further in.

Technology is a powerful tool which can include disabled people as exemplified by Joe's client, who he said had Korsakoff's Syndrome (also known as Alcoholic Dementia). Remarkably the client overcame the memory loss of this condition to develop a website which he used to educate about the condition and acts as his advocate. This site was such an outstanding success that an ISP incensed by the volume of hits led the client to ask Joe to upload the site on to his servers.

Conversation for Democracy

Among Perry's concerns in all of this is that our vertical system encourages us to behave like children because people out there such as politicians try to behave like parents. He went on to say that thinking of Democracy as conversation is like developing a muscle to become more adult in the process Nick described.

The importance Perry therefore places on good conversation for "doing Democracy" can not be under-estimated. As a professional in the field he is most proud of three incidents where people are speaking *and* listening.

- Jimmy, a homeless alcoholic at a homelessness strategies event overheard to say to a local authority representative that through Democs he felt equal for the first time.
- A nano-technology discussion review of Democs, felt illiterate people would find it too hard until a Roma person said "I am illiterate and had a fantastic time". He wanted to understand new technologies after Nazis used new technologies to destroy his people.
- After another event, designed for elder people, participant feedback was that they had done "more talking in a group and listening than in years".

In this context of good conversation, Perry referred to one of the best examples that he knew of and initiated by Keith Hayman with Talk Shop 2002 in Sheffield. Keith stimulated local people to join in a series of events to discuss our society which is reputed to have reinvigorated the letters and leader pages of the Sheffield Telegraph.

Conversely, poor conversation happens where no medium exists to comment such as the case of people who can only resort to using the local paper's letters page as happened with plans to restrict cars through Richmond Park in London



Part IV: Picking up the Baton

On the value of a systems approach, Perry explained it is partly about us as individuals and our interaction; His example to demonstrate the value of this approach was of an American soldier in Iraq who said “We are here in Iraq because they shoot at us. They shoot at us because we’re here.”

We also need to consider the fear people have of discussing issues with people they don’t know with local and national institutions of democracy are losing power. “Citizens and politicians increasingly disengage from each other ... many people no longer believe in the institutions of democracy and are not prepared to support them, and governments cannot govern without the support and consent of the people.” (Participation and democracy, www.neweconomics.org.uk/gen/participation_top.aspx, accessed 16th November 2007).

Action for Involvement has previously explored concerns of this nature through speakers at our Event and Report in 2006 (<http://actionforinvolvement.org.uk/pdfsanddocs/2006MainEventReport.pdf>, Accessed on 11th November 2007). It has also been discussed during the Power Inquiry Sheffield Event and Report 2005 (<http://actionforinvolvement.org.uk/pdfsanddocs/PowerEnq20053rdEdition.pdf>, Accessed on 11th November 2007) and in the Power Inquiry’s reports (http://makeitanissue.org.uk/devlog/2007/01/the_power_commission_was_estab.php, Accessed on 18th November 2007).

Perry is deeply concerned by the stranglehold of poor relations between the media and politicians with its effect on our entitlement to constructive democratic relationships. He suggests a systems approach could resolve this vicious circle, find new ways to encourage change and arrange conversations to bring the system together, in this case the system of the media, politicians and electorate in the same room at the same time.

“Smile at us, pay us, pass us; but do not quite forget; for we are the people of England, that never have spoken yet.” GK Chesterton, *The Secret People*

Part V: Conclusion - Running with the Challenge



AFI has created a vital space for people across the political spectrum to gather and share concerns. In this way we can build the trust that underlies the good conversations which Perry advised us cohesive communities need. This is encouraging because our Events indicate people feel discouraged, disenchanted and disenfranchised over the way they feel local councils, councillors and staff misuse resources or mishandle our concerns.

As in previous reports, it is vital to think and do things differently. Unlike last year, Nick's inputs suggests awareness is seeping in to political consciousness that to build capacity requires giving people ability to be involved in decision-making and open the information flow to overcome obstacles to people's knowledge of the world around them.

It remains troubling to learn from Nick that relations between media and political classes is contentious and long-term solutions are urgently required. Perry stressed concern on this and the stranglehold of such relations on our entitlement to constructive democratic relations. It led Perry to consider a systems approach to explore effective ways to break this vicious circle, find ways to encourage change with conversations to bring systems together, that is media, politicians and electorate in the same room at the same time.

For inclusion and participation to be at the heart of community regeneration, it can only happen through the good conversations Perry recommends. On behalf of Carole, who co-authored with Wendy and Josh, our Special Report: *"Hard to Reach? - We think Not!"*, Wendy said it is time for us to be included, to be seen and heard. It is not an option to sweep us under the carpet in the dismissive way wider society deems acceptable. Respecting our needs, ability and capability to contribute on *our* terms is long overdue.

Rose's experience of Government initiatives suggests a number of possibilities. Many more ways have seemingly been created for us to be more active in governance and government of our councils:

- Hazel Blears announcement at the Local Government Association conference of 10 pilot projects giving people power to decide local budget priorities and similar to the Open Budget process which the Power Inquiry helped London Borough of Harrow set up in 2005. (Local Communities Given Budgeting Power, Molly Kearney, July 5, 2007 12:40 PM, www.makeitanissue.org.uk/2007/07/local_communities_given_budget.php, Accessed on November 2007).
- Chamberlain Group's "decentralising power could restore public confidence in political institutions and deal with low electoral turnout. ... spending flexibility with Whitehall releasing its grip through a reduction in the ring-fencing of grants for specific projects ... hand over more power and responsibilities to local authorities" (Hélène Mulholland and agencies Friday November 2, 2007, [Guardian Unlimited](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,2204222,00.html) www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,2204222,00.html Accessed on 4th November 2007)

Part V: Conclusion - Running with the Challenge

Technology has an increasingly important role in modern society and as Moixon also states, it remains to be seen “whether the Internet and technology can indeed pave the road to a more participative form of democracy or whether it is just a castle in the air built by web buffs with something to say is another. And whether there are concrete and lasting examples of online or other new channels reviving democracy and smoothing consultation in France, the rest of Europe or the rest of the world is yet another.” (Is participative democracy the answer to citizens’ aspirations or just geek speak? Friday, October 20th, 2006, 9h00, Round table 20, www.worldgovforum.com/article.php3?id_article=691 Accessed on 3rd November 2007)

Encouraging as it is to learn technology has led to effective self-advocacy, to educate and inform, we are disappointed to learn from Lisa’s report that we are still a parallel society with progress having been made to encourage people with communications and learning difficulties to play a more active part in society.

Crucially, so much more can be achieved by including and drawing on talent to enhance potential with effective ways to reach out and invite contributions from people who we exclude.

Regardless of the resources we pump in to capacity building, unless we open and create channels of communication, supposedly “*hard to reach*” groups will remain the “**BIG unresolved issue**” (Is Inclusion a Myth? Building Community Involvement with Mobile Technologies, Science & Data Processing, Harris et al, Action for Involvement, 2007, Accessed on 11th November 2007).

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The Secret People, GK Chesterton

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Joe Pritchard & Wendy Stern
Acting Treasurer & Secretary



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Aims

To advance the education of the people of Sheffield through the provision of facilities that enable full participation in the life of the city and thereby improving their conditions of life.

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