Inspiring Democracy:

Community Anchors and Councillors

Research Report

February 2011
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Acknowledgements

We couldn’t have done this research without the participating community anchors, who were generous with their time and expertise, despite the research taking place at a time of uncertainty for the sector, in the run up to the comprehensive spending review: Caroline Rouse, Aston Mansfield; Martin Holcombe, Birmingham Settlement; Vicki Jones, The Gap Community Centre; Lynn Tupling, Retford Action Centre; Chris Parkin, Shiney Advice and Resource Project; Alison Lowe, Touchstone; Andrew Ingles, Community Action Blaby District. Thank you also to all the councillors, voluntary sector managers and citizens who we interviewed and particular thanks to those who attended the research workshop in Sheffield: Cllr Kay Scoresby, Newham Council; David Ellis, Bassettlaw LSP; Rosalind Goodrich, bassac. Sophie Marsden, Sarah Joy and Mark Parker from bassac were very involved throughout the project, contributing ideas based on their wealth of experience and giving us practical help.
1. Introduction and Research Objectives

IPEG were asked by bassac to undertake research to build on bassac’s existing Inspiring Democracy programme, which aims to promote engagement between councillors and citizens in communities. A literature review by bassac has already shown that, in some cases, there are clear mutual benefits of councillors engaging with citizens through community anchors, but found relatively little exploration of the long-term individual and organisational relationship and the impact on both sides.

The overall aim of the research is to highlight the different approaches and roles that community anchors do, and can, adopt in their relations with councillors. The research set out to address the following specific research questions.

1. What are community anchors and councillors aiming to achieve by working together? How does this differ in different circumstances?
2. What methods are used to enhance the relationship between community anchors and councillors and between citizens and councillors? How helpful are they?
3. What combinations of factors interact to create positive (or not so positive) relationships?
4. What are the success factors, challenges and barriers to improved relations and joint working?
5. How can we conceptualise the different approaches that community anchors and councillors adopt in working together (i.e. typology), and how can this be practically applied?
6. What impact does working with councillors have on community anchor organisations?
7. What impact do the relations between community anchors and councillors have on the ability of citizens and community anchors to influence wider policy making?
8. What role can bassac’s Inspiring Democracy programme play in supporting community anchor organisations to develop productive relationships with councillors?
9. What other changes to policy and practice are needed to support the development of joint working between community anchors and councillors?

2. Research Methods

We set out to co-produce the research, with bassac and its member organisations as equal partners. Co-production means that principles of empowerment are put into practice in research. It also allows the case study organisations to reflect and learn from their experience. It means that the ‘subjects’ of the research are in control of what is said ‘about’ them. Data was gathered using a brief desk review of documents, followed by case studies with 7 community anchor organisations. The case studies were carefully selected to reflect variety in geography, political control of the council; type of local authority; size and purpose of community anchor; and nature of the community anchor/councillor relationship. In each of the case studies, a community anchor chief officer wrote a short preparatory report on their experience of working with local councillors. The researchers interviewed up to 3 telephone stakeholder in each case study to get different perspectives, a total of 20 interviews (9 councillors, 8 voluntary sector managers, 2 citizen volunteers and 1 partnership
improvement consultant). We held a research workshop to collect further data, test out the emergent research propositions, and develop the draft typology, attended by 9 people.

The community anchors who participated in the research were Aston Mansfield, Birmingham Settlement, The Gap Community Centre, Retford Action Centre, Shiney Advice and Resource Project, Touchstone and Community Action Blaby District.

3. Summary of Findings

Ingredients – the factors that affect the relationships
Here we list a number of factors which can influence if and how anchors and councillors work together. How these factors combine together vary both across and within different cases.

a) “What’s in it for me?”
A strong motive for people to work together is when they can see a clear purpose that can be gained or a definite benefit for them or their organisation. So, before embarking on action together both community anchors and councillors may ask themselves, “What’s in it for me?” Examples include:
- A problem or concern that is shared by both a councillor and a community anchor, where both can see a benefit in working together to address it.
- Community Anchors may want to work with councillors who can deliver for them by: helping with funding; building wider recognition for what the anchor does well; opening doors to influence decision making or giving access to influential contacts.
- Councillors may want to work with community anchors who can deliver for them by: providing access to a wide range of citizens, or specific groups of people the councillor finds hard to reach; offering particular skills and knowledge; delivering high quality services that meet local strategies and targets.

b) Personalities.
We found examples where individual councillors and individuals from community anchors put a great deal of effort into forming and maintaining relationships. The personal qualities that enhance relationships include confidence in own position, behaving in an appropriate manner, professionalism, a willingness to listen, honesty about expectations, courage and openness, as well as the need for relationships based on trust.

c) Values.
Relationships can be enhanced by shared values and principles between community anchors and councillors, particularly if they are relevant to the topic they are working on together. Councillors can value anchors that are independent and not overly reliant on the council, but there is a fine line between taking an independent stance and making a direct challenge, and where that line is set will vary from different viewpoints. Shared politics was generally seen as something to be avoided. It helps if there is a mutual understanding of roles and representativeness.

e) Context.
The wider context can have an impact on relationships. Local forums, partnerships and networks of the voluntary sector can give a high level strategic voice to the sector, create a head of steam about a problem, and allow local organisations to be
less isolated. However, smaller voices may not always be heard, and if the sector is fragmented it can be difficult for a councillor to understand what the collective opinion is. Structures for neighbourhood working can offer the chance to work together to identify local priorities and undertake projects. The wider strategic context is important, including the attitudes of the council leadership, the approaches adopted by individual council departments, and the actions of the local strategic partnership. Councillors have very different levels of status and power, such as whether they are in the leading party of the opposition and whether they are in the cabinet. Local authority funding arrangements can affect relationships. In areas where there are two or three tiers of local government, community anchors need to negotiate relationships with parish, district and county councillors.

f) History.
Some community anchors and councillors have a shared history, for example, where councillors were involved in establishing the anchor and this can affect the on-going relationship. Community anchors are often long-standing organisations and want to ensure that they maintain a good public reputation: for some this means it is important to put significant effort into working with councillors to ensure that their reputation is widely known. But for others, there is a need to ensure that a hard-won reputation is not tarnished by getting embroiled in local political wrangling involving councillors.

Methods used to build relationships
- Informal contact, such as opportunities for the councillor to drop in for a cup of tea and meet users or citizens.
- Formal invitations inviting a councillor to an AGM, to present certificates or to the opening ceremony of a new building.
- Involving councillors in an activity where they can work alongside anchors staff or local people.
- Making sure councillors understand what the anchor does, using good quality and regular communication, inviting to open days, sending progress report or providing branded materials such as diaries.
- Inviting councillors to sit on the board.

A Typology of approaches used by community anchors
Here are some possible strategies that community anchors have used to build relationships with councillors. They are not mutually exclusive approaches – there are some anchors that use a combination of them all.

1. Friends in High Places
Getting to know the council leader, members of the cabinet, or people with specific responsibility for a relevant policy area can allow you to influence policy decisions and keeps those at the top informed of what you do. If your aim is to influence policy making, this might be a more effective strategy than spending time on councillors who have little power. But if there is a chance of a change of power, you might need to have friends in other places too.

2. Friends in the Neighbourhood
Community anchors that are based in one neighbourhood or ward can build close relationships with the local councillors who represent the area. For councillors, this can offer: access to the views of local people and an ally to champion local issues.
For anchors it can lead to friendly advice on how to meet strategic priorities, a champion in higher places and access to small local funding pots.

3. We're all friends together
Another approach is for community anchors to seek out opportunities to join in with local opportunities to influence decision making. Many areas now have structures for neighbourhood working, service coordination meetings, local strategic partnerships or regeneration partnerships that can have a say in setting local priorities, monitoring service delivery and allocating localised funds. Local councillors are usually involved and sometimes in the lead.

4. Here we are! Is there anyone out there?
Providing regular, high quality information about your achievements can help convince councillors you offer excellent services for people who need them. If councillors understand what you do they can signpost people to you; contact you if they want to work with you on something; and may even stick up for your when funding decisions are being made. One anchor realised the importance of this when "a decision to withdraw funding had been taken because no one had any real idea of what we actually did" (Community Anchor manager 6).

5. Get them actively involved
Inviting a councillor to work side by side with you and local citizens on a campaign or issue can help open doors to decision making and funding. It is also an opportunity to get to know each other and can lead to long-term bonds.

6. Following not leading
Sometimes it is the councillor who develops a strategy or action for dealing with an issue and the community anchor joins in or offers support to achieve it. While the anchor may not have been involved in devising the initiative, they may choose to support it because it is broadly a good idea and they have the resources to help deliver it.

How to build a successful relationship

Top tips for every community anchor who wants to work with councillors:
1) Be very clear what you offer, what you want and what hat you are wearing.
2) Invite them in to see what you do.
3) Provide opportunities for local people to meet councillors (making sure the venue is a place local people feel comfortable in).
4) All councillors are different, so start with an open mind about what they know and what they can do.
5) See councillors as partners, not people who run the show – win their respect.
6) Take up opportunities to have a voice at local networks etc where councillors often are.

Top tips for every councillor who wants to work with community anchors:
1) Go and see what the community anchor is doing.
2) Ask and listen: “What are you doing, what can I do to help?”
3) Use your wider knowledge to offer advice and make helpful practical suggestions: e.g. “you’re struggling for space, try the school”
4) Everyone knows you are a party animal, but think carefully about your behaviour e.g. don’t involve community anchors in point scoring against other parties
5) Don’t feel you have to be the expert. Don’t make promises you can’t fulfil – only offer what you can deliver.
6) Make yourself available – respond to invites and phone calls.

Conclusions and implications for policy and practice

The report identifies three key areas where more discussion and change is needed, and where the bassac Inspiring Democracy programme could play a role:

- **What is the role for big P politics?**
Many community anchors did not want to get involved in party politics and saw their role as being politically neutral. However, independent councillors are the exception not the rule. Councillors join political parties, stand on a party manifesto, and their democratic mandate comes out of the votes cast, based on their political affiliations and views. Asking them not to be political seems to many councillors to be nonsensical.

Possible ways forward include:

- Our findings have already discussed the importance of: shared understandings of roles and representativeness; mutual appreciation for the contributions and strengths of each party; for community anchors to ‘rise above’ politics and stay politically neutral; and for individuals to operate in an atmosphere of openness, honesty and tolerance.
- There is more that could be done to formalise agreements on the branding and promotion of projects’ good work, in order to ensure all partners take an appropriate share of the credit.
- There are some useful guides available for councillors on how they should conduct themselves in their community leadership roles.
- There are now many examples where community and neighbourhood resources are allocated by politicians together with the wider public. These mechanisms offer extra checks and balances on resource allocation, and make allocation more transparent. It also protects councillors from criticism about who gets what funding.
- The Inspiring Democracy programme could usefully facilitate a wider debate about possible ways to re-politicise politics in ways that recognise the value of councillors’ political roles, but that do not exacerbate current mistrust or distaste of politicians. Community anchors need to find new ways to allow politicians to be political during any joint work.

- **Helping all elected members have more power and influence**
Joint working was effective where councillors had knowledge about how systems worked and sources of funding, contacts in the council and elsewhere, and the ability to influence what happened. However, it was also clear that not all councillors were in this position. Some councillors were more powerful and effective than others. But, in their relationships with community anchors, the case study examples show how much ward members can do, even when they are not in power. Where frontline ward councillors see themselves as lacking in power and influence in their own wards this is a barrier to them getting involved in joint working.

Possible ways forward include:
• It is critical that investment is retained by authorities in member learning and development to give elected members the information and knowledge they demand to help their ward.

• Better use by councils of Overview and Scrutiny, or equivalent mechanisms, where councillors can challenge policy. There may be scope in the forthcoming Localism Bill for other ways that councillors’ power in neighbourhood issues can be strengthened, e.g. proposals to increase councillors say over planning issues. The Inspiring Democracy programme could have a key role in understanding the implications of the Localism Bill for relationships between community anchors and councillors.

• Some authorities are already evolving much improved systems for elected members to chase and resolve neighbourhood problems, problems with services etc.

• Councillors could review policy and approaches to work with the voluntary and community sectors so that they are consistent across departments.

- Improving the coherence of the voluntary and community sectors

   In this report, we have already listed some tips for community anchor organisations in working with councillors. In addition, there are some broader strategic issues for the voluntary and community sectors to address that could improve joint working with councillors:
   - the voluntary and community sectors are not always coherent on what their offer is to the public sector, or what added value this provides
   - the sectors do not always have adequate or well presented evidence of the effectiveness and reach of their work, which leaves councillors wondering whether they are the right vehicle for delivering community activities
   - fragmented, no coherent offer
   - there can be a lack of coherence within the sectors on leadership, and fragmentation within the sector, leaving councillors confused about who to talk to or work with
   - funding streams with a local authority area are often a patchwork, which can result in inconsistent or inequitable allocation of resources across the authority as a whole

   Possible ways forward include:

   • Community anchor organisations could strengthen their offer to the public sector, from their own organisations and their partners. The offer should include an overview of the added value provided by the sectors, including robust evidence of their effectiveness and wide reach into communities. The Inspiring Democracy programme could also play a role in supporting this development.

   • There needs to be more discussion locally about leadership within the sectors, and how to bridge tensions between organisational lobbying for their own cause and promoting the interests of the sector overall.

   • Community anchors and councillors could work together to take a more strategic overview of all relevant funding streams coming into a local authority area for community and voluntary sector work, in order to get maximum value and fairness.
1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the research

IPEG were asked by bassac to undertake research to build on bassac’s existing Inspiring Democracy programme which aims to promote engagement between councillors and citizens in communities through community anchor\(^1\) facilitation. Bassac is specifically looking to support community organisations to lead and facilitate increased participation of citizens in local politics. Inspiring Democracy is a three-year programme commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) involving activities ranging from research to seminars, delivered by bassac. For more information see www.bassac.org.uk/our-programmes/voice/inspiring-democracy

The programme started in September 2009 and so far, in terms of research, bassac has completed a review of the key literature relating to community anchor engagement with councillors. This review has fed into the programme as a whole, shaping activities and their outcomes and can be downloaded from the bassac website. bassac members’ relationships with local councillors were also explored in its annual member survey, carried out in October 2009.

The Inspiring Democracy literature review reveals that, in some cases, the advantages and mutual benefits of councillors engaging with citizens through community anchors are very clear. However, there is relatively little exploration of the long-term individual and organisational relationship and their impact on both sides. Therefore, the aim of this research is to fill that gap. In doing so, the research will also look at engagement methods used by community anchors to facilitate relationships between citizens and their local councillors.

The lack of clarity that remains around communication and interaction between citizens and councillors includes issues such as citizen and community anchor perceptions of different councillor roles (ward, district, county, parish and town); councillor views of community anchors in their area (especially in light of their personal areas of interest); collaboration and conflict within councils and how this affects work with the community and the balance of influence on these relationships between the local democratic system and individual personalities.

1.2. Aims of the Research and Research Questions

The overall aim of the research is to highlight the different approaches and roles that community anchors do, and can, adopt in their relations with councillors. In particular it will examine: a) Relations between community anchors and councillors; and b) The role community anchors play in facilitating links between citizens and councillors. In

\(^1\) Community Anchors refer to a certain kind of independent community-run and led organisation, rooted in a sense of place (whether an inner city neighbourhood or a rural district), and with a mission to improve things for the whole community, not simply a part of it (Community Alliance, Anchors of tomorrow: a vision for community organisations of the future, 2009). See also http://www.communityalliance.org/Communityanchors/. Community Anchors are diverse in nature, size, reach, priorities as well as in the communities they serve.
all questions, we will take account of differences between community anchors (size, purpose, activities etc); between councillors (party affiliation, role, length in office etc); and difference circumstances (e.g. lobbying, seeking funding, participating in decision making, and area contexts). The research set out to address the following specific research questions.

1. What are community anchors and councillors aiming to achieve by working together? How does this differ in different circumstances?
2. What methods are used to enhance the relationship between community anchors and councillors and between citizens and councillors? How helpful are they?
3. What combinations of factors interact to create positive (or not so positive) relationships?
4. What are the success factors, challenges and barriers to improved relations and joint working?
5. How can we conceptualise the different approaches that community anchors and councillors adopt in working together (i.e. typology), and how can this be practically applied?
6. What impact does working with councillors have on community anchor organisations?
7. What impact do the relations between community anchors and councillors have on the ability of citizens and community anchors to influence wider policy making?
8. What role can bassac’s Inspiring Democracy programme play in supporting community anchor organisations to develop productive relationships with councillors?
9. What other changes to policy and practice are needed to support the development of joint working between community anchors and councillors?

1.3. Research Methods

We set out to co-produce the research, with bassac and its member organisations as equal partners. Co-production means that principles of empowerment are put into practice in research. It also allows the case study organisations to reflect and learn from their experience. It means that the ‘subjects’ of the research are in control of what is said ‘about’ them.

Data was gathered using the following methods:

a) Brief desk review of documents and data
The purpose of the desk review was to refine the research questions and identify potential case studies. We examined background material to inform the research, including:
- The literature review that had already been completed by bassac;
- Secondary analysis of the questions on community anchor-councillor relations from bassac’s 2009 membership survey, with the addition of some additional variables on local authorities (e.g. size, type, ruling group, structure, region);
- Relevant documents from the Inspiring communities programme.

b) Case studies with 7 community anchor organisations
The case studies were selected in collaboration with bassac. A long list of 34 potential case studies was drawn up, using the bassac membership survey, with the addition of other bassac members. Ten of these were carefully selected, to reflect variety in: geography, political control of the council; type of local authority; size and
purpose of community anchor; and nature of the community anchor/councillor relationship. Eight community anchors agreed to take part in the research - one pulled out at the last minute, leaving no time to identify a replacement.

In each of the 7 case studies, the following methods were used.

a) Each of the 7 community anchor organisations was asked to: write a short preparatory report on their experience of working with local councillors (using a template from us – see appendix); provide any relevant documents on the local community anchor/councillor relationship and provide contact details for people (including at least one councillor) who were willing to be interviewed.

b) The researchers conducted up to 3 telephone interviews in each case study to get different perspectives, a total of 20 interviews. Typically we spoke to one or two councillors in each area plus someone from another local voluntary organisation, but the detail varied from area to area. We interviewed 9 councillors, 8 voluntary sector managers, 2 citizen volunteers and 1 partnership improvement consultant.

c) A research workshop was held in October in Sheffield to collect further data (e.g. more detailed examples from the case studies), test out the emergent research propositions, and develop the draft typology. We invited all the case study community anchors and all those we had interviewed. 2 bassac staff and 8 people, from 4 community anchors registered for the event, but unfortunately one was unable to attend at the last moment.

Using these methods meant that we could learn from the case studies’ on-the-ground knowledge of their relationships with councillors as well as allowing the organisations themselves to reflect on their own learning and direct our research through the preparatory reports. Telephone interviews allowed us to dig beneath and gather wider perspectives on the relationships. A research workshop provided the opportunity to gather more data, but also to develop the findings in collaboration with the case studies, and help us to generalise from unique cases to transferable knowledge.

1.4. Description of the Case Studies

Aston Mansfield is a large organisation in Newham, London, with a history going back over 100 years. Based in an area of major social deprivation with a transient population, it runs two large successful community centres, programmes for children and young people and has a community involvement unit that provides capacity building support to six hundred groups per year. It is a key player in a number of local and regional networks. It has made extensive attempts over the years to work with councillors and council officers in a wide variety of ways, but comments that “every time we start from scratch – it is not an on-going relationship and we are never viewed as having a borough-wide contribution” (report). Aston Mansfield has recently developed a relationship with the local influential councillor, which has led to an improvement in relations with councillors in the area surrounding one of their centres.

Birmingham Settlement is a large organisation in the inner city, which dates back to 1899. It has an excellent reputation for dealing with the most deprived communities, creating and sustaining community and places where people want to live, providing a wide range of services including money advice, employment and training and community development. It is good at reviewing its activities to meet current needs and sharing resources with others. The settlement has not worked closely with
councillors and attaches importance to maintaining its independence from the council. The chief executive attends regular meetings called by the councillor with lead responsibility for the third sector, who is impressed by their independent funding, ability to work with others and willingness to change with the times.

The Gap Community Centre is a small organisation set up 2001, based on the Warwick Percy and Emscote estates, a low income area with few facilities, in the gap between Warwick and Leamington Spa. “The Gap provides a hub, a centre, a heartbeat to the area and offers a wide selection of activities for both young and old alike” (councillor). Its particular strengths are youth work, the café and its Reflect for Change community leadership courses, completed by 40 local people. It is involved in a number of forums and partnerships across the district and the county. The Gap Community Centre work very hard to build close relations with councillors. It sees the key to building relations as to involve councillors in its activity.

Retford Action Centre is a medium-sized organisation, set up in 1996, based in a market town in a predominantly rural, ex-mining area of Nottinghamshire. It delivers a range of services, most of which focus on promoting the independence of older people, supporting people with long term conditions and the provision of local transport solutions. The organisation is very involved in the local strategic partnership and its sub-groups. Over the past ten years, they have put a lot of effort into working with councillors, ensuring the district and county councillors are aware of their work and also arranging opportunities for them to meet and interact with local people. They have learned to carefully manage relationships with both the Conservative leadership and the Labour opposition.

Shiney Advice and Resource Project (ShARP) is a small organisation in Shiney Row, a semi-rural coalfields area of Sunderland, which has high levels of deprivation, and a strong sense of community. It provides an independent advice and support service including welfare rights, housing, employment and debt advice, a credit union, café and training. It uses welfare rights as a vehicle for community development. Local councillors were instrumental in setting up ShARP in 1981. Two of the current councillors got involved in politics in part through their involvement with ShARP during the 1984-5 miners strike. It continues to have close links with local councillors, but they are no longer directly involved in the management committee.

Touchstone is the largest of the case study organisations, set up in 1982 and based in Leeds. It supports 2000 people with mental health difficulties in the community each year, including supported housing and day centres. It is the leading provider of services in Leeds to people from black and minority ethnic communities who experience mental health difficulties and has built up an excellent reputation with commissioners for its community development work in this area. The chief executive of Touchstone is a longstanding city councillor, who has been able to build effective relationships with councillors because she “knows what makes them all tick” (report).

Community Action Blaby District is a medium size organisation in an affluent area of rural and suburban Leicestershire. It is an umbrella community hub involved in community development, grant allocation for the local authority, neighbourhood management and local forums. It delivers services including community transport, mental health drop-in, support for carers and befriending. It is involved in the scrutiny process of the district council and sits on the board of the local strategic partnership: “it’s a two-way process – you find your opinions being sought” (report). Community
Action Blaby District also has contact with county councillors, but finds it harder to have influence there.

2. Ingredients – the factors that affect the relationships

There is no single “ideal type” of relationship between community anchors and councillors. It is clear from the case studies that community anchor organisations find themselves in different contexts, have distinct objectives, and have multiple relationships with various councillors for diverse purposes, and these relationships change over time. Here we list a number of factors which can influence if and how anchors and councillors work together, which we sum up as “what’s in it for me”, personalities, values, context and history. How these factors combine together vary both across and within different cases.

2.1. “What’s in it for me?”

A strong motive for people to work together is when they can see a clear purpose that can be gained or a definite benefit for them or their organisation. So, before embarking on action together both community anchors and councillors may ask themselves, “What’s in it for me?”

2.1.1. Common purpose – a reason for action

Where there is a problem or concern that is shared by both a councillor and a community anchor, both may see a benefit in working together to address it. Aston Mansfield worked in partnership with the local influential councillor and others to minimise the disruption caused by extensive redevelopment work over 4-5 years in Forest Gate, London. Working together and in close collaboration with a range of local community organisations “enabled all this work with road closures, increased mess and disruption in the area to pass off with little complaint and in some instances turned the events into learning opportunities and creative activities that enabled the community to be more involved and have a greater understanding of the work in progress” (report).

Retford Action Centre offer many services for local older people, and are very well connected with a range of other older people’s services, so when the district council produced a scrutiny report on services for older people in Bassetlaw, leading to a directory of services, it made sense both to the lead district councillor and Retford Action Centre, that they work together to compile the information.

2.1.2. Can the councillor deliver for us?

Help with/influence on funding

Some of the case study community anchors value the advice and support they get from individual councillors on sources of funding. Retford Action Centre, Aston Mansfield, The Gap Community Centre and ShARP have had councillors support their applications for funding, “The councillor lobbied on our behalf along with others and we were successful”. As well as providing information on funding sources, councillors can advise on current strategic priorities and how an anchor can adapt its
message or activity to meet those priorities when applying for funding. The Gap has a district councillor on the Social committee who is “well placed to identify sources of local funding we could apply for as well as how we could meet local strategic priorities and raise our profile within the District” (report). Another district councillor has recently been elected to the county council and has advised on county funding opportunities: “It is due to his encouragement that we tendered for the contract to run the youth club on the neighbouring estate” (report).

**Recognition for what we do well**
Working with a councillor opens up the possibility of wider recognition of the achievements of a community anchor: a well-connected councillor can spread the word widely to enhance the reputation of an organisation. Conversely, anchors in this study that have fought long and hard to build up a good reputation think twice about linking themselves with particular councillors who they regard as untrustworthy, overly political, or with unfavourable associations (see section 2.9.2 on Reputation for examples).

**Open doors to influence decision making**
Councillors have varying levels of access to decision making, depending on the topic, whether or not they are in the cabinet, whether they are a member of the party in power and many other factors. Backbench councillors have knowledge and influence that can help in some cases, for example, a local resident, concerned about a local planning issue said “the councillor got access to people [i.e. council officers and other councillors] we couldn’t and resolved the issue for us. So, people could do it themselves because we had access to councillors through The Gap” (Stakeholder 5)

**Contacts and knowledge**
Councillors, especially those who have been in office for a long time, can have wide-ranging contacts, in the council, the local area and in other public bodies. They often have knowledge, or access to knowledge on the priorities and procedures of the council. A group campaigning for fairtrade Status in Bassetlaw found a local councillor to be an invaluable part of the campaign because, “he has been a councillor for a long time, he knows a lot of people – his ability to lobby and have a quiet word is invaluable” (Stakeholder 1) The councillor was willing to use his access to power and influence to achieve results that benefit community anchors and local citizens, “[the councillor’s] function was to have the ear of so many people, not just in the council … A lot of things are decided before you meet – lobbying, whispers in ears” (Stakeholder 1)

**2.1.3. Can the community anchor deliver for me?**

**Access to local citizens**
Part of the councillor role is to engage with and represent the views of local citizens. One way of councillors meeting citizens and hearing their views is through community anchor organisations. During the interviews, councillors often spoke with high regard about anchors that deliver services to a wide range of citizens, or specific groups of people the council and councillors find hard to reach. “Their users are from a very broad band – very inclusive” (Councillor 6). A councillor whose role includes the championing of older people’s issues told us that she values being able to meet local older people by dropping into the lunch club organised by Retford Action Centre.
**Resources, skills, experience and knowledge**

Community anchors often have buildings and experienced staff that are useful for a councillor, and they may have particular skills and knowledge, such as access to a particular group of people, ability to successfully apply for funding, or experience in volunteering. A local councillor valued the contribution of Aston Mansfield to a local dance festival: their role included persuading local people to get involved in organising the event, providing their building for a reasonable cost and having staff around on the day: “the staff were brilliant”. Local councillors are approached by citizens for advice and value anchors that they can rely on as places to refer on cases for advice or support. A councillor said of Community Action Blaby District, “as a local councillor, the services they provide affect residents in my local area and if people come to me I can refer to them, signpost people towards them”.

**Information on local issues**

Community anchors are often rooted in local neighbourhoods, sometimes over a long period of time. Some are hosts to a range of smaller groups and organisations and involved in networks with faith and other groups. This can give them a good grasp of local issues and put them in a good position to undertake consultation on local views. All of this can be valuable to a councillor seeking to play a community leadership role. Councillors are partly responsible for the overall level of public service in an area, so they value the provision of high quality services, particularly if it is made clear how that service might meet local strategies and targets. Councillors want to be associated with community anchors that they perceive to be delivering services or activities that contribute to the council’s objectives, and meet local needs:

“They have changed the Settlement set up by Birmingham mothers for poor children and poor families. They have moved on and changed their focus to meet current needs.... They are very good at reviewing activities and seeing if still need to do it - evidence based” (Councillor 4).

“We have figures on poverty etc. Gap plays such an important role. Take that out and you would have massive problems in terms of anti social behaviour and deprivation. They provide a vital service to the area” (Councillor 7).

“Touchstone offers excellent services and value for money. It delivers services that are well-targeted in areas at need. They work with the community, and offer value for money” (Councillor 5).

On a more negative note, we also came across examples where councillors are so keen to be associated with positive initiatives that they seek credit for projects that community anchors have delivered, and become very interested once there is a chance to get their photo in the newspaper. One example was the launch of a Big Lottery funded play area developed by a community anchor. Councillors, including the council leader, arrived late for the event and then insisted that the opening ceremony be re-staged: “The leader’s press officer thought a picture on the play equipment would look good so all the children were cleared off of the slide and the leader and all the councillors climbed up it for a photo. They then left” (Community Anchor manager 4)
2.1.4. What citizens get from community anchors and councillors working together

Our research was not directly with citizens, so there is a limit to what we can say based on our research, but some issues did arise:

Ability to influence policy making
Retford Action Centre arranged a “have your say day” for older people to come together with both County Councillors and District Councillors. Staff reminded councillors at the start that there would be no political mud-slinging and they had been invited to listen and not to speak. Some really useful things came out of the day including the development of an older persons’ forum for Bassetlaw, who continue to lobby about local issues for older people.

Getting to know councillors
A volunteer has regularly met councillors at informal events, where there is an opportunity of chat, “you get a flavour of who the person is”, “you find out what they are like” (Stakeholder 5). Councillor visits to centres can be an opportunity for service users to meet councillors and offers them some official recognition: “I do think the civic relationship is very important. It’s really nice to have someone there in a chain – our mental health users really appreciate it” (Community Anchor manager 1)

Getting issues sorted
Community anchors based in localities can find it worthwhile to work with councillors if they are able to deliver results for local people. The Gap Community Centre encourages councillors to come into the centre for coffee mornings and more formal events. As a result of this informal contact, residents can raise local issues with councillors, “The road needed repairing – it was an issue for the older people in my street. I was able to ask Cllr X. She did follow it up and resolved it and let me know. The opportunity arose and so I took it.” (Stakeholder 5). This resident was impressed by the ability of the councillors to achieve direct results. She hadn’t voted for the local councillors and disagreed with them politically, “but the cllrs do what we want so it doesn’t matter. People see them as effective. All the issues are resolved” (Stakeholder 5).

A group in Worksop were campaigning for a bus terminus to replace the old garage. When they hit a brick wall, the chief officer of Retford Action Centre was able to raise the issue with county councillors and there was an active review.

2.2. Personalities

2.2.1. Individuals who make a real effort

Across the case studies, we heard about the importance of both councillors and individuals from community anchors that put a great deal of effort into building relationships. The London Borough of Newham has a system of “influential councillors” who are responsible for coordinating services and activity across a geographic area. The role is interpreted differently in various parts of the borough, but one particular councillor has been keen to hold service review meetings in the locality and has adopted a “philosophy of involving people all the time in problem solving. Ours was the only one to involve head teachers and so many stakeholders. I
don’t want a talking shop – people are actively involved in the problem solving” (Councillor 6). The manager of the The Gap Community Centre in Warwickshire “does a lot of brokering – approaching various people including myself” (Councillor 7). “She constantly networks and acts in partnership” (Stakeholder 5). One of the case study community anchors had a problem when their IT service was inadvertently switched off by the local authority several years ago, and after getting no response from the IT department, a leading councillor took up the case and “suddenly in a few weeks we had IT flying round… she has empathy with us – very aware of the work we have done” (Community Anchor manager).

2.2.2. Personal qualities

“Personalities make a difference” (Community Anchor manager 4). At the research workshop, participants mentioned qualities including: confidence in own position, behaving in an appropriate manner, professionalism, a willingness to listen, honesty about expectations, courage and openness, as well as the need for relationships based on trust. “It is key to build a trusting and honest relationship with councillors; this means you have to be clear about the kind of support you need from councillors and the ways in which you can support them in their role” (Community Anchor manager 7). Where one party is prickly, additional people skills may be required: “Cllr Y is a complex character who has a habit of being openly critical of many things. Over the past couple of years he appears to have warmed towards me (at least to my face!” (Community Anchor manager 6)

2.3. Values

2.3.1. Shared values and principles

Where individuals from community anchors and councillors find they have shared values, this can be a trigger for a positive relationship, particularly if those values are relevant to the topic they are working on together. A community activist in Leicestershire who wanted to achieve fairtrade status in the locality worked closely with a councillor: the two had both been connected to the same school in the past, and also, “both of us are Christians. His church and mine were already fairtrade. He had that ethos, support for the third world” (Stakeholder 1). In a coalfields area of Sunderland, councillors who had been active in the 1984-5 miners strike remember that ShARP played an important role in providing advice to mining families at that time. A Birmingham councillor, who had previously taught social care in a local college, spoke of their admiration for Birmingham Settlement, “I think the principle of social care is to support and enable vulnerable people – that’s what I taught … Birmingham Settlement are similar to my own principles” (Councillor 4).

2.3.2. Acknowledgement of different strengths

A number of councillors who work closely with community anchors mentioned that the voluntary sector has strengths that are different from, but can enhance those of the statutory sector. A councillor said “They can help us – they know things we don’t, we couldn’t grasp – carers and things like that, volunteers. They’ll tell us. We can give them political advice but they know the community” (Councillor 3) and another councillor in the same area said “Next month we have a big celebration led by the
council, but it couldn’t happen without the support of churches and community groups” (Councillor 1)

A community anchor chief executive talked of the importance that the council leader attached to their remaining independent from the council “The council leader is keen that we should be seen as entirely independent, have our own voice, etc. He is careful to give us the space to do that. We are very involved in the LSP and delivering some things for them – he wants us not to be influenced by what they want. He wants a bottom up organisation. That attitude gives us a lot of mutual respect” (Community Anchor manager 1). Another example of good relationships based on respect for organisations that are independent of the council is from a councillor who emphasised the need for “vibrant“ and “viable” community organisations and said of the local community anchor, “They manage on very little funding and its from elsewhere” (Councillor 4).

But there is a fine line between taking an independent stance and making a direct challenge to councillors, and where that line is set will vary from different viewpoints. We found one example where an attempt by one community anchor to voice issues raised by the wider voluntary sector on commissioning and other issues has led to hostility from the council leadership. The community anchor said: “Our independence and willingness to take issues and debate forward on behalf of the sector or local people has caused us to have a patchy relationship with the local authority and the leadership has allegedly actively discouraged councillors and activities from taking place in our buildings or working with us. While this is hearsay, the evidence would suggest that this is the case” (Community Anchor manager 4).

Shared politics was seen by all the community anchors in this study as something to be avoided. A community group leader voiced the opinion of many: “If I have patronage from one political party, nobody likes me. If I stay neutral I can work with anybody. Political affiliation has a drawback ... when I am dealing with different ward councillors, if I am perceived to be close to one political affiliation there are problems or drawbacks. If I am perceived as neutral there is no problem” (Stakeholder 8). This view was echoed by a community anchor chief executive, “I wouldn’t wish to be seen as supporting any particular colour – we are not a political organisation” (Community Anchor manager 1). And a similar view from a councillor in another area: “I have been aware of some animosity from individuals within groups who haven’t agreed with my politics – it hasn’t stopped them asking me for my support. People may not like you or your politics, but we have to rise above that” (Councillor 1).

2.3.3. Shared understanding of roles and representativeness

Where there were strong and positive relationships between individual councillors and community anchors, both sides tended to make statements indicating an understanding that both have valuable roles to play in the local community. One community anchor had generally negative views of the local councillors, but spoke highly of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the third sector, “she has a good overview of the sector as whole” (Community Anchor manager 2). The cabinet member, when interviewed, showed an awareness of the sector that differed from some of her colleagues: “I was instrumental in funding the Third Sector Assembly. There was a little difficulty with other cabinet members who thought we were negotiating with the third sector who were not elected; I had to persuade other
cabinet members. They are important partners. If third sector gives you better quality, better value then they should get contracts” (Councillor 4)

A senior manager at The Gap Community Centre in Warwickshire said “While individuals may not agree with the politics of an individual councillor, they are the ones with power locally. Also they have gone into local politics to try and help the people living in their communities so their prime motivator for the work they do is the same as ours” (report). A Warwickshire county councillor talked about the localities agenda of the new government and the importance of the “voluntary sector playing more of a role – a bottom up approach” (Councillor 7).

Where relationships were poor, there was a perception by the community anchor that the council did not understand the positive contribution that a community anchor can make. “Generally the relationship the council adopts is very paternal where they devise strategy and actions for dealing with issues and the sector, and we are expected to agree and be grateful. There is little opportunity to jointly develop or debate policies and decisions and any attempt to remedy this is seen as criticism by the local authority. This “patronage “style of working often extends to councillors who will have favourites in the sector that they will develop close contact with” (Community Anchor manager 4). This view was confirmed by a partnership advisor who worked in the area as an advisory consultant: “One of the actions was how to get elected members to acknowledge the professionalism of the voluntary sector – they were regarded as well-meaning amateurs … other local authorities were miles better than that” (Stakeholder 3).

A chief officer is wary of working the local councillors in the ward where the community anchor is based because “We seem to have different agendas. We are here for the long haul and I am not sure if councillors are too e.g. their willingness to attend or get involved in new or short term initiatives where funding/money is available” (Community Anchor manager 2).

A manager from an infrastructure organisation in a large city said “there are big power imbalances. The voluntary sector long feels that it is treated as a third class citizen and not given the respect for what it does. The things it does are missed if not there, but are not often noticed” (Stakeholder 6).

Councillors can also feel that their role is misunderstood. A community activist who went on to be a councillor feels that some individuals from the community sector are quick to judge councillors as something separate and other: “I think the big thing that hurt me more that anything – educated people said “she’s joined them””. “Them” is just an extension of what we are trying to do in our community. Equally in community and youth work there are lots of “thems” as well” (Stakeholder 2).

2.4. Context

2.4.1. Partnerships and networks

Some community anchors are involved in collective networks with other third sector organisations and may have relationships with councillors which are mediated or affected by those collective mechanisms.
In Birmingham the cabinet member with lead responsibility for the third sector holds regular forums with the chief executives of the third sector organisations in the city. Her positive impression of Birmingham Settlement has in part been influenced by her observation of how the chief executive works with others at that meeting; after a recent meeting she observed him discussing with another provider of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) on whether they could amalgamate to improve their service, and this impressed her.

Third Sector Leeds has direct contact with the council chief executive and the sector is represented on Vision for Leeds, a high level discussion forum. Third Sector Leeds invited the leaders of all the political groups to come and talk to them and has recently issued a joint statement on the need to talk to the sector first before considering cuts. “We got a pretty good positive response from councillors; they welcome the opportunity to link. In principle they agree, but it is difficult for them to walk the talk” (Stakeholder 6).

But while such forums can give a high level strategic voice to the sector, there is also the danger that individual voices are not heard, particularly those from small local geographies. An opposition county councillor in a rural area believes that moves by the county council to introduce more centralised co-ordination of the sector might cause a local community anchor to lose some of its influence: “They are sucking in resources to the centre. Money is being diverted from local voluntary action groups to the centre … I think local are more able to respond sensitively” (Councillor 2).

In any area, the voluntary sector is made up of many fragmented voices including, for example, local branches of national charities, infrastructure organisations, community anchors, smaller community groups and the faith sector. There are lots of voices, and it is not always clear, either to the sector or others who the leaders are or what the collective opinion on any issue is. If there is conflict between one part of the sector and the council leadership, other voluntary sector organisations can feel the need to choose sides, even where they may have acted differently.

Working with others in the same area who are concerned about the same issue can create a head of steam about a problem, persuading the councillor of the importance of the issue. A neighbourhood community organisation in Birmingham has lobbied over local schools admission issues by forming a group with others concerned about the issue. The group has successfully highlighted the issue to the Education cabinet member, and having met with him regularly, they have achieved two new primary schools and a refurbishment of the secondary school.

Working with groups from other areas can be important for local organisations that would otherwise be an isolated local voice to a much bigger council. The Gap Community Centre are involved in a wide range of partnerships including a youth forum, a community learning partnership, a volunteering forum and a family intervention project. They feel this gives them a voice beyond the immediate area they work in: “Although we are a local Warwick based project it is vital to our survival that we are represented as widely as possible across the district and to a lesser extent, the county” (report).
2.4.2. Neighbourhood working

Structures for neighbourhood working can offer a way for community organisations, councillors and others to work together to identify local priorities and undertake projects. The Gap Community Centre regularly attends the local Warwick community Forum, attended by district and county councillors as well as a range of community groups. As well as participating in setting local priorities, there is an opportunity to bid for small grants, and as a councillor observed “The public meet and raise their concerns. If Gap can help, they will sort that out ... Gap even offers advice outside their patch” (Councillor 7). Similarly, ShARP attends the coalfields area committee, which discusses local priorities and also has some devolved funds that are available for small projects that address those priorities. Community Action Blaby District is involved in the local community forum, where ideas are exchanged.

The London Borough of Newham has adopted an influential councillor system, where a named councillor (not necessarily one of the local councillors) is given responsibility for service coordination and initiatives in a particular geographic area. For Aston Mansfield, which has two centres in the borough, the system has provided an opportunity to work closely with the influential councillor in the area surrounding one of the centres. “The local service review meetings established by Cllr Z are innovative ... They bring together all the players involved in the local area (faith leaders, school head teachers, voluntary sector managers and local business people) with key council officers” (report). But the role is a relatively new one and is open to interpretation by the post holder, so in the other area where Aston Mansfield has a centre, there have not been similar opportunities to engage in policy making.

In cases where neighbourhood working is perceived to be working badly, this can have a negative effect on relations between community anchors and councillors. In one area, a neighbourhood regeneration scheme, with local councillors on the board, was perceived to be a poorly run organisation, showing partiality to some parts of the local community. The local community anchor is unwilling to risk its reputation by engaging with these councillors.

2.4.3. Strategic context

The attitudes and approach of the council leadership form part of the context within which councillors work and signals to both councillors and community anchors the importance that the council attaches to working in partnership with the sector.

A councillor’s attitude to the sector can be influenced by the messages they get from their party or council leadership. For example, a councillor felt he got a clear message from the council leader about the importance of responding to the voluntary sector: “Our leadership encourages us to be part of the public and the voluntary sector ... I was with the leader yesterday at the opening of the Metro station. A roundabout is being built and he got a complaint – we went straight round there, he runs round the grass roots” (Councillor 1).

One community anchor works in a borough where there is a very powerful council leader who “frequently gets involved in quite low level issues or causes and uses his position to ... give them a priority or take them in a direction that may not be the same as a longer process of thinking and consulting would have taken” (Community Anchor manager 4). During a recent exercise on partnership working in the area, an
independent consultant identified that both voluntary sector and public sector partners find the leader to be a key obstacle to working together. In circumstances where the leadership is unwilling to accept challenge, it can create a climate where an anchor feels there is little point in raising issues with councillors, if they have no power to change things. As a chief officer from another voluntary organisation in the area said, “I wouldn’t approach a councillor about anything other than individual casework for individual residents … everyone knows they have no influence” (Stakeholder 7).

Community organisations may have different experiences of the council depending on what parts of the council they have worked with. The council is not a single entity, but a complicated organisation made up of many different directorates, sections and individuals. One community organisation which delivered social care services had a very good relationship with the part of the council that is responsible for adult services, which they viewed as “a more competent department” (Stakeholder 7) but a community anchor in the same area told us “there are individual officers and councillors who have a deep understanding and regard for the expertise of the sector and will work with us in a constructive partnership manner - but they are the exception and it is unfortunate that the department that has the most relationships with the sector does not adopt this way of working” (Community Anchor manager 4).

If a community anchor gets the relationship with one councillor wrong it can snarl up relations with other departments and infect others when one relationship goes wrong.

Some community anchors are involved to varying degrees with local strategic partnerships. The chief officer of the Retford Action Centre is vice chair of the LSP and also chairs the transport sub-group. The centre does a great deal of work with local older people, many of whom live in rural areas, so transport issues are paramount to their clients, and the LSP is an opportunity to pursue those issues on a wider stage. Participation in partnership bodies or LSP sub-groups which focus on specific topic areas can bring community anchors into contact with senior councillors and portfolio holders with an interest in that topic, and this shared interest can help further the aims of both the anchor and the councillor.

2.4.4. Status of councillor

When community anchors are building relationships with councillors, they need to be aware of the different levels of status and power that the councillor may have. This issue of status came across in a number of ways during the research.

A chief officer of a community anchor in a large city felt that in the past there had been wards where only one party ever had a chance of getting elected. They felt that people living in wards which are safe seats for one party can lose out on investment because the councillors know they will get re-elected regardless of what they do.

Most community anchors are working in a complicated environment where they need to build relationships with councillors from more than one political party and with people with differing levels of power. Particularly where there is the possibility of change from one party to another, a community anchor needs to “build relationships with the current administration without diminishing relationships with the opposition” (Community Anchor manager 6). Funding issues can bring community anchors into conflicts between political parties, particularly where local authority funding is
withdrawn. One community anchor wrote to all councillors about plans to cut funding for a community car scheme, and had a much better response from opposition councillors. “I guess our relationship has been slightly uneasy in that the conservatives are proposing to make reductions to our funding, which I am not willing to give in to without a fight” (Community Anchor manager 6). Councillors too are aware that, if they are in opposition, there is a limit to what they can achieve for an anchor: “If we were on the cabinet I would have more power, so it would be different” (Councillor 2).

The adoption of the cabinet system by many councils has changed the role of councillors. As the chair of one community anchor put it, “the cabinet system means that some councillors are harder to access and others have less influence” (Community Anchor manager 7). This view was echoed by the chief executive of another community anchor, who has good contacts with a number of councillors and regularly raises issues with them, but although this is good opportunity to “let off steam, I know I have faith they won’t be able to do anything. I have good person relationships, but they are not terribly effective. It’s where the power lies – power lies at the top. A small group of people take the decisions” (Community Anchor manager 1).

2.4.5. Grants and commissioning

Local authorities have, in recent years, changed the way they provide funding to the voluntary sector. In the past grants were given to organisations, to cover the cost of on-going activities or services provided. Now more funding is directed through commissioning, where the council outlines the services it would like to be provided and asks organisations to submit bids to provide those services. For some community anchors this change has had an impact on the value of their relationship with councillors: in the past a local councillor could put in a good word to influence a grant allocation, but under a commissioning model, “is there any point in lobbing a county councillor?” (Community Anchor manager 1). Local or neighbourhood organisations that were previously grant-funded to provide a local service can feel squeezed out in a process to commission services that cover the whole county.

Funding decisions are generally not the responsibility of individual councillors, and sometimes good individual relationships with council officers or councillors are scuppered by decisions made somewhere else, or at a more senior level. A large, longstanding organisation with a wealth of funding experience has twice worked with a councillor and / or officers on funding bids that require statutory and voluntary partnership only for the application to be over ridden for one that does not fit the criteria and has gone on to fail. “Although … we could have been seen at the partner with more experience of making applications to funders we were not heard, [we were) told this was not what [the leader] wants” (Community Anchor manager 4).

Many community anchors receive funding from local authorities. The power that councils have to allocate or withdraw funding has an impact on relationships: even where community anchors disagree with funding decisions, “What can you do? There is no point rowing with the council. We try to stay in their good books … There is the Compact, the complaints procedure – but then next you are applying for funding so it would be commercial suicide” (Community Anchor manager 2).
2.4.6. Working with different tiers of government

In areas where there are two or three tiers of local government, community anchors need to negotiate relationships with parish, district and county councillors, which brings with it particular issues. Three of the case study community anchors were in areas with parish, district and county councils. All three covered either a district or a smaller geographical area. The community anchors have a relationship with a range of district councillors, including leading councillors, and can be partners on local strategic partnerships and similar local forums, and involved in scrutiny committees. As smaller councils, with a local geographic focus, district councils more often share the same concerns as the community anchor: “We have a very good relationship with the cabinet and scrutiny committees at district – they involve partners in scrutiny – the focus is on life in the district” (Community Anchor manager 1). Individual district councillors can more easily have an impact on the decisions of a smaller district councillor, and it is more likely that the senior council leadership will be aware of a local community anchor on their patch.

Illustration 1 – The difficulties of working in three tier local government

(Source: Research workshop on 21st October 2010)

County councils cover a much larger area, so the activity of a local community anchor is harder for them to notice, as shown in Illustration 1. A community anchor can build relationships with all the county councillors in its area without having a big impact on the council as a whole. Retford Action Centre works very well with all of the nine county councillors that cover the local area of Bassetlaw, but this is a drop in the ocean of a county council that has 67 members, and when they recently wanted to lobby about local transport issues they struggled to get heard by the county council leader or the cabinet member for transport. Community Action Blaby District work with some people who are both district and county councillors. Their experience is
that “the same person can influence the district council and not the county council” and in particular, “an opposition councillor is probably taken more notice of at district than at county” (Community Anchor manager 1).

2.5. History

2.5.1. Shared history

Some community anchors have a shared history with local councillors. The Gap Community Centre was formed a decade ago when both local people and the council saw the need for a community building in an area that was lacking community facilities. Councillors were very supportive from the start, although the initiative was led by locals. ShARP also had strong support from councillors at an early stage: “Councillors were instrumental in establishing the centre in 1981. The initial funding was secured by local councillors who wanted an advice project in the coalfields area” (report). Some local councillors were involved in ShARP as volunteers and members of the management committee prior to being elected and remember the 1984-85 miners’ strike, when ShARP supported and advised local strikers and their families.

2.5.2. The importance of reputation

All of the anchors in this study are at least a decade old, so none of them are starting with a blank canvass; they all have a history of working or at least co-existing with councillors. There are all long-standing, well-established organisations, with reputations that they have worked hard to establish, whether that be as a provider of high quality services or their ability to advocate for local people. There were two ways in which the importance of reputation was of particular importance to their relationship with councillors.

Firstly, the reputation that a community anchor has will influence how it is perceived by councillors and others, so some anchors put significant effort into ensuring their reputation is advertised widely. Ten years ago Retford Action Centre heard that the council planned to withdraw funding. When they contacted the council leader, he said the decision was taken because no one knew what they did. Since then the community anchor has made substantial efforts to ensure councillors get regular information about their activities and are invited to events. As a consequence, when the council were looking for an organisation to help develop new youth services in a neighbouring area, “I believe that our reputation and our significant presence in our new building in the centre of Retford influenced [the councillor's] decision to approach us” (report). Similarly, Touchstone is very proactive in ensuring that local councillors understand their work, including sending a diary to every councillor, and as a result, a leading councillor is clear about what they offer the city: “We get progress reports, a diary, bulletins; they are keen to develop relations. That is not seen in other quarters – they don’t keep in touch or let us know what they are doing. Touchstone has a good reputation” (Councillor 5).

Secondly, for some anchors, there is a need to guard against any associations with councillors that might tarnish or threaten an established reputation. The anchors involved in this research were all well-established, the youngest was formed in 2001 and the oldest in 1899. For those that had been in existence for a very long time, they are taking a risk if they establish relations with councillors who bring with them political and other connections. The chief officer of a community anchor based in an
area where there is a diverse mix of ethnic communities and where there is sometimes tension between communities in terms of who gets what said, “We do not want to get involved in some of the political wrangling that goes on in this area” (Community Anchor manager 2). He is worried that by allying his organisation too closely with councillors it will be “labelled” in a way it cannot control. He is wary of being tied too closely with councillors that are perceived to represent one particular ethnic group. “People want to link with us, but we are not always prepared to do so” (Community Anchor manager 2).

3. Recipes – combinations of factors that work (or don’t)

The following examples were discussed at the research workshop in Sheffield, attended by some of the community anchors and councillors, and are used here to illustrate how the various factors combine together to influence relationships between community anchors and councillors.

3.1.1. Forest Gate Window Wall

The issue: How to deal with extensive re-development work undertaken by Thames Water, which created a local eyesore in the town centre, causing concern for local residents. Local councillors, the community anchor and other partners worked with local people to create a “window wall” of local art to surround the eyesore. The process is summarised in Illustration 2.

Illustration 2 – The process of developing the Forest Gate Window Wall

Factors involved in the relationship:
- What's in it for me?: The window wall offered a solution to a shared problem. Both benefitted by not having the problem on their doorstep, and the councillor was able to build links with local groups and partners. The
councillor was able to persuade councillors, council officers and private sector to the table. Community anchor provided their building for the painting and found community organisations to take part. Local grants applied for to cover costs, matched with in kind contributions.

- **Personalities:** Both the councillor and the chief officer of the community anchor made a big effort to make this happen and persuade others to take part.
- **Values:** This was a partnership of schools, faith organisations, councillors, community organisations, private companies, with recognition of different strengths.
- **Context:** The window wall was conceived by the local service review meeting, a partnership of local stakeholders. The idea for the window wall was led by the local ‘influential councillor’ who had sufficient status to drive the project forward.

There were some negative aspects to the project: the window wall art experienced some vandalism, and over time the private sector organisations withdrew from the project.

### 3.1.2. Fairtrade for Bassetlaw

The issue: How to achieve fairtrade status for Bassetlaw – this is like a charter mark, where the town gains recognition for its commitment to fairtrade. A local person had the original idea and then persuaded others - including Retford Action Centre and councillors - to get involved. The steps involved are shown in Illustration 3.

**Illustration 3 – Timeline of work to achieve fairtrade status**

(Source: Research workshop on 21st October 2010)
Factors involved in the relationship:
- **What's in it for me?** A local councillor had connections that he could use to influence others to get the idea off the ground, and he was able to get council agreement.
- **Personalities:** The person who had the original idea, the chief officer and councillors all went the extra mile to bring the idea to fruition.
- **Values:** There was a shared commitment to the issue, with several of the main actors having a Christian commitment to support for the third world.
- **Context:** Involvement of the community anchor and other key players in the local strategic partnership enabled the idea to be brought before all the relevant local partners.

### 3.1.3. Misterton Community Gardens

The issue: A local person approached Retford Action Centre with an idea of creating a community garden in a local school. The chief officer brought together local partners including councillors, to apply for funding and achieve the idea, as shown in Illustration 4.

Factors involved in the relationship:
- **What's in it for me?** The position of the community anchor in the local community put them in a position where a local person approached them about the idea. The anchor was able to co-ordinate a lottery bid; the councillor could access small pots from the county council.
- **Personalities:** The chief officer from the community anchor made a big effort to make this happen.
- **Context:** Involvement of the community anchor in the local strategic partnership and other networks put them in a position to bring together relevant partners.

Illustration 4 – Steps in creating a community garden

(Source: Research workshop on 21st October 2010)
3.1.4. Inspiring Communities Grant Application

The issue: An application to the government’s Inspiring Communities programme for a local project to raise achievement and encourage citizenship. A community anchor worked with a school and a local councillor to develop the project. There could only be one application per borough, and the council leadership backed another bid, which did not meet the funding criteria, and failed. Factors involved in the relationship:

- What’s in it for me? A common purpose - the school, community anchor and councillor shared concern over the issue. The community anchor had the skills and experience to do a high quality funding bid.
- Values: Council officers and the council leadership did not recognise or value the expertise of the community anchor on funding, resulting in the submission of a bid that did not meet the criteria.
- Context: The council could have played a useful role in co-ordinating the bids across the borough, but this did not happen, so it became a competition rather than a collaborative effort.

3.1.5. Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour

The issue: District and county councillors and the local police identified a problem with anti-social behaviour on a local estate. A community anchor in a neighbouring area came forward to offer to deliver some youth work, but got no response. After the community anchor got independent funding for some pilot youth work, they were approached by a county councillor, who supported them to successfully tender for the work. The process is summarised in Illustration 5.

Illustration 5 – Timeline of addressing anti-social behaviour

(Source: Research workshop on 21st October 2010)
Factors involved in the relationship:
- What’s in it for me? A common purpose – everyone locally was concerned about the issue of anti-social behaviour. Both the councillor and the anchor got positive press reaction and raised their local profile.
- Values: The community anchor had the skills and experience to do the youth work, but this was not immediately recognised by the council.
- Reputation: The long-standing reputation of the community anchor for high quality youth work mattered.

4. Methods used to build relationships

4.1.1. Informal contact and links with citizens

Retford Action centre encourages local councillors to call in on an informal basis and talk to users and residents. “As a councillor, lots of the contact is informal – the casual meetings are the most important” (Councillor 8). A local councillor with responsibility for the over 50s forum regularly calls into the lunch club to meet the older people. In a similar way, councillors have an informal relationship with ShARP: “We pop in from time to time to have a cup of tea. They’ll contact us … Coffee mornings – can pop in and keep the relationship good. Tell us what has gone on” (Councillor 3). The Gap encourages councillors to drop into the GAP Action Partnership, a group of local people that meets weekly: councillors have a cup of tea with residents and listen to the issues being raised.

4.1.2. Formal approaches

Another way of increasing understanding is to invite councillors to events. Some community anchors invite councillors to their AGM or other formal events. Councillors, including the mayor, can be invited to open a new building or give out certificates at a rewards event.

4.1.3. Involving councillors in community anchor activity

The Gap Community Centre has run a series of Reflect for Change courses, where local people work together in a team to develop community leadership skills. Two county councillors were invited to take part in a DVD produced by the first Reflect for Change group, talking about the area and what they felt the issues were. A district councillor joined one of the Reflect for Change courses, working alongside a group of residents training to be community activists. “The course gave her a good understanding of how community organisations work and the barriers and issues we face. Because of her involvement in the project she has become a firm supporter of the organisation and sits on our Social Committee” (report).

4.1.4. Making sure councillors understand what we do

Community anchors that have good relationships with councillors invest time to make sure that relevant councillors know what they do, using good quality and regular communication. The Gap keep councillors informed of all developments at the centre and regularly invite them to events: “we do also work very hard on the relationships with them, we will take time to meet them both formally and informally, we invite them to all events we hold, we will put out any information to the community
that they want and we take the time to get to know them personally” (report). A councillor said “we’ve all participated in their gatherings, open days; councillors are invited to go up there” (Councillor 7). While much of the activity is focussed on local councillors, they also try to develop relationships with others, so last year they invited the mayor to come and visit to see what they do. Touchstone sends every councillor in the city a diary which has reports of their activity and a councillor said “We get progress reports, a diary, bulletins. They are keen to develop relations. That is not seen in other quarters – others don’t keep in touch or let us know what they are doing” (Councillor 5). Community Action Blaby District sends out a copy of their annual review to every councillor “We make sure they know about our volunteers, that we are good value for money” (report). One chief officer makes a point of attending civic events when invited to do so, and goes prepared with a mental list of the conversations he wants to have and people he wants to speak to.

4.1.5. Councillor on the board

The experience of having councillors on the board, or in leadership positions, was quite mixed among the case studies.

The Gap Community Centre has had positive experiences of having councillors as trustees. A district councillor who was a trustee in the early days of the organisation helped identify local sources of funding, explained how they could meet local strategic priorities and helped raise their profile in the district. Retford Action Centre has had a number of councillors as trustees over the years, and generally they have been supportive of the organisation.

When one community anchor was first formed, it had six councillors on the board, but this soon reduced as more local people got involved. The district council later took a decision that councillors should not be on voluntary sector management committees, because of a concern that they could potentially be held liable for financial problems. A local councillor feels “If I was a member of [the] management committee I would need to declare an interest and I couldn’t take part in the council decision. If I am outside I am able to represent them ... I campaign as a Labour councillor and I wouldn’t want that organisation to be linked to my politics” (Councillor 3).

Touchstone’s chief executive has been a Leeds city councillor for over twenty years and is an ex-deputy mayor. “She has two good citywide reputations in Leeds”, both as a councillor and as a voluntary sector chief executive (Stakeholder 9). “She manages it very well” (Stakeholder 6). “It is good for us as a sector, having a councillor with such good knowledge – she is an advocate for us.” But there are some reservations in the sector about combining the two roles: “You can’t work in a local authority if you are a councillor, but you can in the voluntary sector” (Stakeholder 6).

Not all experiences of having a councillor on the board are a success. One community anchor is required to have a council observer on their board under the terms of funding contracts. The councillors appointed to do this have previously not attended regularly and currently there are no observers in place. Another community anchor has a backbench district councillor as a longstanding trustee, who has no particular role or power in either in the council or the community anchor. Both the community anchor and the council would be reluctant to have a cabinet member
involved, because of the potential threat to their independence. County councillors in some areas are not permitted to be trustees of organisations funded by the council.

5. A typology of approaches used by community anchors

Here are some possible strategies that community anchors have used to build relationships with councillors. They are not mutually exclusive approaches – there are some anchors that use a combination of them all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Friends in High Places</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting to know the council leader, members of the cabinet, or people with specific responsibility for a relevant policy area can allow you to influence policy decisions and keeps those at the top informed of what you do. If your aim is to influence policy making, this might be a more effective strategy than spending time on councillors who have little power. But if there is a chance of a change of power, you might need to have friends in other places too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− The Birmingham lead councillor for the third sector calls regular meetings with chief officers. The chief executive of Birmingham Settlement attends those meetings and occasionally they meet separately. The councillor has been impressed by the settlement’s responsiveness to local needs, independent funding and ability to work with others, and has passed this on to other councillors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− The chief officer of Retford Action Centre is vice-chair of the local strategic partnership, and has built a good relationship with the council leader, who is the chair.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Friends in the neighbourhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community anchors that are based in one neighbourhood or ward can build close relationships with the local councillors who represent the area. For councillors, this can offer: access to the views of local people and an ally to champion local issues. For anchors it can lead to friendly advice on how to meet strategic priorities, a champion in higher places and access to small local funding pots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− The Gap have built a very close relationship with all the local district and county councillors, built up by inviting them to formal and informal events, working together on local issues, involving some on the board and committees, invites to hear the views of local people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− ShARP works very closely with its local ward councillors, two of which are former members of ShARP’s management committee. They have a shared history of involvement in the 1980s miners strike, but this has now developed into a more formal relationship. Councillors have supported ShARP’s funding bids and they have worked together on improving the commercial area of the town and developing the local park.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. We’re all friends together

#### Why?
Another approach is for community anchors to seek out opportunities to join in with local opportunities to influence decision making. Many areas now have structures for neighbourhood working, service coordination meetings, local strategic partnerships or regeneration partnerships that can have a say in setting local priorities, monitoring service delivery and allocating localised funds. Local councillors are usually involved and sometimes in the lead.

#### How?
- Aston Mansfield are involved in Service Review Meetings organised by the local “influential councillor” for Forest Gate, which bring together councillors, council officers and a wide range of partners to decide local priorities and address local issues. This has led to an enlarged summer festival and minimisation of disruption caused by major local development, as well as enhancing the reputation of Aston Mansfield.
- Retford Action Centre’s chief officer is the vice chair of the local strategic partnership and very involved in the transport sub-group. This has allowed her to raise issues about transport for older people in rural areas and brings the organisation to the attention of councillors, which may have helped in recent decision to offer new premises at a peppercorn rent.
- Community Action Blaby District has been encouraged by the district council to take part in the scrutiny process of the district council.

### 4. Here We Are! Is there anyone out there?

#### Why?
Providing regular, high quality information about your achievements can help convince councillors you offer excellent services for people who need them. If councillors understand what you do they can signpost people to you; contact you if they want to work with you on something; and may even stick up for your when funding decisions are being made. One anchor realised the importance of this when “a decision to withdraw funding had been taken because no one had any real idea of what we actually did” (Community Anchor manager 6).

#### How?
- Touchstone produces a diary (including reports on their impact) which they send to every councillor, in the hope that they will use it throughout the year. The chief officer is a councillor who takes opportunities to make sure other councillors understand the work they do. A leading councillor described the organisation as “attracting national attention”, “services that are well-targeted in areas at need”, “offer value for money”.
- Community Action Blaby District gives a copy of their annual review to every councillor, and takes any opportunity to make councillors aware of what they are doing “so they know about our volunteers, that we are good value for money” (report).
5. Get them actively involved

**Why?**
Inviting a councillor to work side by side with you and local citizens on a campaign or issue can help open doors to decision making and funding. It is also an opportunity to get to know each other and can lead to long-term bonds.

**How?**
- The Gap Community Centre persuaded a local councillor to join one of their *Reflect for Change* courses in community leadership, where a group of local people identify an important local issue and take action to address it. As a result, she now has a good understanding of the issues community organisations face, has become a firm supporter of The Gap.
- To achieve fairtrade Status for Bassetlaw in Nottinghamshire campaigners had to cut through lots of red tape and a councillor played an important role: “his ability to lobby and have a quiet word is invaluable” (Stakeholder 1)

6. Following not leading

**Why?**
Sometimes it is the councillor who develops a strategy or action for dealing with an issue and the community anchor joins in or offers support to achieve it. While the anchor may not have been involved in devising the initiative, they may choose to support it because it is broadly a good idea and they have the resources to help deliver it.

**How?**
- A Newham councillor proposed a “window wall” of local art to surround an eyesore created by local re-development. Many partners got involved. Aston Mansfield played a very big part in the project – offering their premises and staff for painting sessions; helping with consultation and supporting community groups and schools to undertake art work. They have built close links with the councillors and enhanced their reputation with local businesses and citizens.

6. How to build a successful relationship.

**Top tips for every community anchor who wants to work with councillors:**
7) Be very clear what you offer, what you want and what hat you are wearing.
8) Invite them in to see what you do.
9) Provide opportunities for local people to meet councillors (making sure the venue is a place local people feel comfortable in).
10) All councillors are different, so start with an open mind about what they know and what they can do.
11) See councillors as partners, not people who run the show – win their respect.
12) Take up opportunities to have a voice at local networks etc where councillors often are.

**Top tips for every councillor who wants to work with community anchors:**
7) Go and see what the community anchor is doing.
8) Ask and listen: “What are you doing, what can I do to help?”
9) Use your wider knowledge to offer advice and make helpful practical suggestions: e.g. “you’re struggling for space, try the school”
10) Everyone knows you are a party animal, but think carefully about your behaviour e.g. don’t involve community anchors in point scoring against other parties.
11) Don’t feel you have to be the expert. Don’t make promises you can’t fulfil – only offer what you can deliver.
12) Make yourself available – respond to invites and phone calls.

7. Conclusions and implications for policy and practice

The case study examples in this report illustrate the positive potential of community anchors and elected members working together. They highlight some of the benefits for both sides, as well as citizens, of joint working. But the other conclusion of this work is that joint working remains patchy, and too often requires heroic efforts on all sides to make it run smoothly and be effective to benefit residents and constituents. There is still a lot of change needed if these benefits are to be experienced in more neighbourhoods and authorities. We have identified three key areas where more discussion and change is needed, and where the bassac Inspiring Democracy programme could play a role:

- What is the role for big P politics?
- Helping all elected members have more power and influence
- Improving the coherence of the voluntary and community sectors

7.1. What is the role for big P politics?

One of the themes in our work was that relationships between community anchors and councillors worked well when they were not big P political, or embroiled in party politics. It is well established that the public dislike overly politicised politics or where politics is perceived as too adversarial and not for the common good (Stoker, 2006). Many community anchors did not want to get involved in party politics or ‘political mudslinging’, and saw their role as being politically neutral. They were wary of councillors who were ‘overly political’. Their recommendations were ‘Take off your party political hat’, and ‘leave politics at the door’.

Some issues are widely seen as beyond party politics. For example when there is a serious risk of death or injury through fire, nearly all elected members agree that safeguarding people’s lives is paramount. However, very few things in life have no political content. Unlike some other advanced liberal democracies such as New Zealand, independent councillors (i.e. not attached to a political party) are the exception not the rule. We organise our politics, and local authorities through political parties. Councillors join political parties, stand on a party manifesto, and have to account to their political group. It is the ruling party in a local authority which takes responsibility, credit and blame for what happens. Elected members are inherently political; they went into politics to be party political. Local politicians’ democratic mandate comes out of the votes cast, based on their political affiliations and views. The political nature of councillors as elected representatives distinguishes them from other forms of representation, such as the direct or participatory representation provided by community anchors. Therefore, asking elected members not to be political seems to many councillors as nonsensical, and an affront to fundamentally who they are and what they do.
This is an area of tension in many local areas, including those in this research. The fall out could also be seen in arguments over who took the credit for successful projects. In the research, there were criticisms of councillors that they were only interested in getting involved in projects in order to make political capital out of them, or get their picture in the local paper. Some community anchors did not trust councillors if they felt their main ‘what’s in it for me’ reason were to gain votes, rather than simply to benefit the ward. Where credit for projects was not shared equally, or perceived by anchors to have been missed for political gain, this damaged relationships between councillors and community anchors.

But if councillors are understood to be political creatures, standing on a democratic mandate, then these criticisms appear unfair. Politicians need to demonstrate to their electorate that they have made improvements. Voters should not be expected to vote when a politician’s record is not transparent, or of potential benefit to their lives. On these grounds, it would seem reasonable that local councillors publicised work where they have been involved.

The other area of fall out is in the styles used by councillors and community anchors. Big P politics lends itself to challenge and debate, whereas community organisations politically neutral stance lends itself towards a ‘softer’ deliberative approach, illustrated in Figure 1 below. Our findings highlighted that relationships had worked well where there had been open trusting collaborative relationships.

Figure 1. A comparison of debate and deliberation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEBATE</th>
<th>DELIBERATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>search for weaknesses in other position</td>
<td>search for strength in other position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>counterering other position at the expense of the relationship</td>
<td>many people have pieces of an answer to a workable solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>investing wholeheartedly in your beliefs</td>
<td>temporarily suspend judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oppositional, prove others wrong</td>
<td>collaborative, common understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goal is winning</td>
<td>goal is common ground for action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listen to find flaws and counterarguments</td>
<td>listen to understand and find agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defends original solutions</td>
<td>looks for better solutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: University of Missouri, not dated, p.8
http://www.ssu.missouri.edu/commdev/pubdelib/index.htm

Another fall out from debate over the political nature of councillors was that relationships with community anchors were damaged by some of the other negative perceptions of politicians. For example, one of the case studies said: “There is an assumption that councillors are feeding out of the trough – it is a sad fact that’s how people feel.” (Stakeholder 9) Political control over resource allocation at a
community or neighbourhood level can be open to accusations – however misplaced – of political bias or ‘vote buying’.

**Implications**

Possible ways forward include:

- Our findings have already discussed the importance of: shared understandings of roles and representativeness; mutual appreciation for the contributions and strengths of each party; for community anchors to ‘rise above’ politics and stay politically neutral; and for individuals to operate in an atmosphere of openness, honesty and tolerance.

- There is more that could be done to formalise agreements on the branding and promotion of projects’ good work, in order to ensure all partners take an appropriate share of the credit. This is routine in commissioned work, and similar models could be used in local community projects. For example, a written agreement before projects start that covers the form of words to be used to describe who was involved in the project and how it was organised and how promotional material should be worded.

- There are some useful guides available for councillors on how they should conduct themselves in their community leadership roles. For example, Local Government Improvement and Development (formally called Improvement and Development Agency – IDeA) has produced a Political Skills Framework (IDeA, 2007)\(^2\) with the following headings: local leadership; partnership working; communication skills; political understanding; scrutiny and challenge; regulating and monitoring. The Framework sets out the skills required under each heading, e.g. councillors encourage trust and respect by being approachable and empathising with others, but also what skills are NOT useful such as, councillors prefer political ‘blood sports’ to collaboration, or uses scrutiny for political gain.

- There are now many examples where community and neighbourhood resources are allocated by politicians together with the wider public. For example Community Panels, where Community Chest funding is awarded by a panel made up of community members and elected members. Or the many participatory budgeting exercises. These mechanisms offer extra checks and balances on resource allocation, and make allocation more transparent. It also protects councillors from criticism about who gets what funding.

- The Inspiring Democracy programme could usefully facilitate a wider debate about possible ways to re-politicise politics in ways that recognise the value of councillors’ political roles, but that do not exacerbate current mistrust or distaste of politicians. Community anchors need to find new ways to allow politicians to be political during any joint work.

**7.2. Helping all elected members have more power and influence**

A second theme in our findings is that joint working was effective where councillors had knowledge about how systems worked and sources of funding, contacts in the council and elsewhere, and the ability to influence what happened. However, it was also clear that not all councillors were in this position. Some councillors were more powerful and effective than others. There was a perception by some people in our research that councillors needed to be on the Executive to be really useful. And

\(^2\) [http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/6515699](http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/6515699)
some councillors would also agree with that statement: an opposition councillor said “If we were on the cabinet I would have more power, so it would be different”.

In reality, it is more difficult for backbenchers than it is for Executive members to get things done or create change. In reality it is harder for councillors in opposition than in the ruling administration. But, in their relationships with community anchors, the case study examples show how much ward members can do, even when they are not in power. Where frontline ward councillors see themselves as lacking in power and influence in their own wards this is a barrier to them getting involved in joint working. There are several issues:
- many councillors across the country want to know more about how to get access to resources for their ward, and more about how the council works
- there are sometimes gaps in ways councillors can challenge policies, e.g. if Overview and Scrutiny are not effective
- not all councils have effective systems for councillors to chase or resolve ward problems with officers, especially when someone has already tried, and failed, to sort things out
- related to this, when councillors are trying to help community organisations, they often delegate to officers within departments, but sometimes the officers’ responses are dictated by departmental policy, which is not consistent across the council

**Implications**

Possible ways forward include:
- Member learning and development to give elected members the information and knowledge they demand to help their ward. There is already a lot of excellent work in local authorities to offer councillors development opportunities. Their learning is accredited and quality assured by a series of regional organisations. It is critical that this investment by authorities is retained.
- Better use by councils of Overview and Scrutiny, or equivalent mechanisms, where councillors can challenge policy. There may be scope in the forthcoming Localism Bill for other ways that councillors’ power in neighbourhood issues can be strengthened, e.g. proposals to increase councillors say over planning issues. The Inspiring Democracy programme could have a key role in understanding the implications of the Localism Bill for relationships between community anchors and councillors.
- Some authorities are already evolving much improved systems for elected members to chase and resolve neighbourhood problems, problems with services etc. For example some have electronic systems where councillors have direct access to service request records, where they are able to track casework enquiries, and can expect to receive a reply from an officer within a set number of days. There is scope for more systems to be put in place by councils and other public service providers, and for these systems to extend beyond councils.
- Councillors could review policy and approaches to work with the voluntary and community sectors so that they are consistent across departments.

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3 For example see: [http://www.nwemployers.org.uk/learning-and-sharing-skills/councillor-development.html](http://www.nwemployers.org.uk/learning-and-sharing-skills/councillor-development.html), and [http://www.wmiga.gov.uk/supporting-councillors](http://www.wmiga.gov.uk/supporting-councillors)
7.3. Improving the coherence of the voluntary and community sectors

In this report, we have already listed some tips for community anchor organisations in working with councillors: be clear what you want to achieve together and what you want from councillors; advertise yourself to councillors and actively involve them in your work. In addition, there are some broader strategic issues for the voluntary and community sectors to address that could improve joint working with councillors:
- the voluntary and community sectors are not always coherent on what their offer is to the public sector, or what added value this provides;
- the sectors do not always have adequate or well presented evidence of the effectiveness and reach of their work, which leaves councillors wondering whether they are the right vehicle for delivering community activities;
- there can be a lack of coherence within the sectors on leadership, and fragmentation within the sector, leaving councillors confused about who to talk to or work with;
- funding streams within a local authority area are often a patchwork, which can result in inconsistent or inequitable allocation of resources across the authority as a whole.

**Implications**

Possible ways forward include:
- Community anchor organisations could strengthen their offer to the public sector, from their own organisations and their partners. The offer should include an overview of the added value provided by the sectors, including robust evidence of their effectiveness and wide reach into communities. The Inspiring Democracy programme could also play a role in supporting this development.
- There needs to be more discussion locally about leadership within the sectors, and how to bridge tensions between organisational lobbying for their own cause and promoting the interests of the sector overall.
- Community anchors and councillors could work together to take a more strategic overview of all relevant funding streams coming into a local authority area for community and voluntary sector work, in order to get maximum value and fairness.
Bibliography


## Appendices

### 1. Case Study Selection

IPEG and bassac carefully selected the case studies, to reflect variety in: geography, political control of the council; type of local authority; size and purpose of community anchor; and nature of the community anchor/councillor relationship. This table summarises the case studies: it is based on our view of the situation before we did the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Anchor</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Type of area</th>
<th>Council type</th>
<th>Political control</th>
<th>CA Size*</th>
<th>Why interesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aston Mansfield</td>
<td>London (Newham)</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>London borough</td>
<td>Labour with elected mayor</td>
<td>big</td>
<td>Good relationship on local environmental campaign; issues with wider council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham Settlement</td>
<td>W Midlands</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>NOC (Lib/con coalition. Con leader)</td>
<td>big</td>
<td>Very large organisation – largely independent of councillors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gap Community Centre</td>
<td>W Midlands (Warwick district)</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>District/ County</td>
<td>District-Con County-Con</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>Democracy - local organisation with good relations with local cllr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retford Action Centre</td>
<td>E. Midlands (Notts)</td>
<td>small town</td>
<td>District/ County</td>
<td>District-Con County-Con (both ex-Lab)</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>Very involved in local structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiney Advice and Resource Project</td>
<td>North East (Sunderland)</td>
<td>semi-rural</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>Small organisation with informal contact with local cllrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touchstone</td>
<td>Y &amp; H (Leeds)</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>NOC Labour &amp; Greens. Lib dem/con before May 2010</td>
<td>big</td>
<td>Cllr as CEO. Lots of BME work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Action Blaby District</td>
<td>E. Midlands (Leics)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>District/ County</td>
<td>District-Con County-Con</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>Small rural organisation, positive relationship</td>
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* Small = Up to 8 staff (full time equivalents) or under £250,000 turnover; Medium = 9 – 29 fte staff or £250,000 to £1 million turnover; Large = 30 or more staff or turnover of over £1 million.
2. Research tools

2.1. Template for Case study reports

Research project: Exploring the reality of relationship between community anchors and policy makers

Community Anchor – Descriptive Report

Please write a short report about your organisation and its relationships with councillors. Include lots of detail and plenty of examples. We are not looking for a crafted report that you would write for a funder, but rather a real account of the knotty problems and uncomfortable truths that you would write for a critical friend.

Please be open and honest - we want to protect the reputation of community anchors, so we will be careful how we report any sensitive material. The final report will be checked back with you and any amendments will be negotiated, so everyone is happy with the end product.

The guideline length is about 3-4 pages. We have suggested the topics you might want to include in each section, but this is just a guide – please tell us whatever you think might be of interest, in a way that suits you.

Please attach any documents, reports, photos or other evidence that you think will help illustrate how your community anchor organisation works with councillors.

Contact Sarah Cotterill, University of Manchester (0161 275 0792 or 07963330749) for any questions or clarification about the report. When completed, please return to: sarah.cotterill@manchester.ac.uk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Anchor Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your email address:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your phone no:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
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**Section 1 – Area Context.** (we suggest about ½ page)

*Describe the area you cover e.g. size of area, type of households, any local issues.*
*Local authority – name, type, party in control, any particular issues.*
*Describe the local structures (e.g. area forums, neighbourhood working etc.)*

**Section 2 – Our organisation** (we suggest about ½ page)

*What do you do? – describe your role, activities, services, campaigns etc. When was your organisation set up? How many staff? Turnover. Number and type of users/beneficiaries. How do you fund your work? Any changes over time.*
Section 3 – Highlights of our achievements. (we suggest about ½ page)
Describe what your organisation has done that you are proud of. How have you made a difference in the world? What are you really good at? Please give lots of detail and add examples.

Section 4 – Things that have not gone so well (we suggest about ½ page)
Describe things that you have tried, but they didn’t work out. Describe things you would like to do, but you are not so good at or don’t know how. Please give lots of detail and add examples.

Section 5 – Our relationships with councillors (we suggest about 1-2 pages)
Include details of all the contact you have with councillors, positive and negative, including lobbying as well as collaboration (using examples). If there has been a recent change of councillor/administration, we are interested in both current and historic relationships.
- How important is it for your organisation to build relationships with councillors?
- What activities/campaigns/services etc have you worked on with councillors?
- Which councillors do you work with (name, role, party, how long in office etc)?
- Who in your organisation works with councillors and how?
- If you have trustees, staff or volunteers who are also local councillors, how does that work?
- Describe the nature of the relationship (e.g. how did you meet in the first place; what you do together, how frequently you are in contact, how long known each other);
- What role have councillors played? What is the particular contribution they have made? How have they helped or hindered your achievements?
- Examples where you have tried to work with councillors and it has not worked out as expected. What happened and why?

Section 6 – My thoughts (we suggest about ½ page)
Please tell us your 3 key thoughts about what factors influence the relationship between your community anchor organisation and councillors.

Section 7 – People for the researchers to interview
Contact details (name, phone, email) for up to 3 people with different perspectives on your relationship with councillors. At least one should be a current or ex-councillor. Others could be local activists, community organisations or other partners. We’d prefer as wide a range of views as possible.
2.2. **Interview Questions - councillors**

1. **What is your role**
   a) On council? Which council?
   b) In community anchor?
   c) In community?

2. **Tell me a bit about what [community anchor] does.**
   a) What are its strengths?
   b) What does it do less well?

3. **Tell me about your relationship/contact with [community anchor].**
   (How did you meet? What do you do together, how often in contact?)

4. **What are the benefits of the relationship?**

5. **How does this relationship compare to any other community organisations you are in contact with? If different, why?**

6. **How does this relationship compare to the experience of other councillors? If different, why?**

7. **How important is it to the council that you have a relationship with [community anchor]?**

8. **How do the following affect the relationships you have with [community anchor]?**
   a) Politics
   b) Local structures e.g. area forums, neighbourhood working, LSP
   c) What has happened in the past

9. **What steps has the community anchor or councillor taken to try to build relationships? Which were effective?**

10. **What barriers/challenges have you faced in building relationships with [community anchor]?**

11. **Has there been any change in your relationship with [community anchor]? Are you expecting change?**

12. **What could happen (locally or nationally) to make it easier for you to work with [community anchor]?**

13. **What top tip would you give to other community anchors who want to work with councillors?**

14. **What top tip would you give to councillors who want to work with community anchors?**

15. **Anything else you want to say.**

Thanks
2.3. Interview Questions – non councillors

1. What is your connection or relationship with
   a) the council?
   b) the community anchor?
   c) Local community?

2. Tell me a bit about what [community anchor] does.
   d) What are its strengths?
   e) What does it do less well?

3. What can you tell me about the relationship between [community anchor] and councillors?

4. What are the benefits of the relationship?

5. How does this relationship compare to any other community organisations (including yours) you are in contact with? If different, why?

6. How does this relationship compare to the experience of other councillors? If different, why?

7. How important is it to the council that you have a relationship with [community anchor]?

8. How do the following affect the relationships you have with [community anchor]?
   f) Politics
   g) Local structures e.g. area forums, neighbourhood working, LSP
   h) What has happened in the past

9. What steps has the community anchor or councillor taken to try to build relationships? Which were effective?

10. What barriers/challenges have you faced in building relationships with councillors

11. Has there been any change in the relationship between community anchors and councillors? Are you expecting change?

12. What could happen (locally or nationally) to make it easier for you to work with [community anchor]?

13. What top tip would you give to other community anchors who want to work with councillors?

14. What top tip would you give to councillors who want to work with community anchors?

15. Anything else you want to say.

Thanks