



Community Empowerment – The Role of the Local Authority

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Empowerment Implementation

- Is empowerment compatible with representative democracy?
- Can you have too much empowerment?
- How can the different tools of empowerment be mixed together in an overall strategy?
- How can the culture of your organisation be changed to make empowerment a central rather than a marginal goal?
- Empowerment, the councillor role and politics

A new governance is emerging

- A world where no one is “in charge” but all need to engaged
- There is now a growing degree of consensus that representative democracy needs engagement with participative democracy, and vice versa.
- Representative democracy in these circumstances cannot simply be reduced to the election of representatives. It involves a commitment to a continuous dialogue.
- Citizens are generally cautious about claiming decision taking responsibility. Having a say, means wanting to influence, but it does not *always* mean having to decide.

Too much empowerment?

- Over most issues, where they have had little time, inclination or opportunity to form a view, most citizens are wisely in the 'don't know' camp. But the mantra that people 'are just not interested' should be tested and not assumed to be true.
- Most regular political activity is based on competition between organised minorities. An empowerment strategy should be about reaching out beyond that regular political activity to seek out voices that otherwise might not be heard and to bring in those not currently engaged.
- We need an approach to empowerment that allows citizens the opportunity to have a say over what is important to them.

What different tools offer

- Diversity is the key
- Developing a sense of the mix
- What they demand of citizens
- What they demand of public bodies

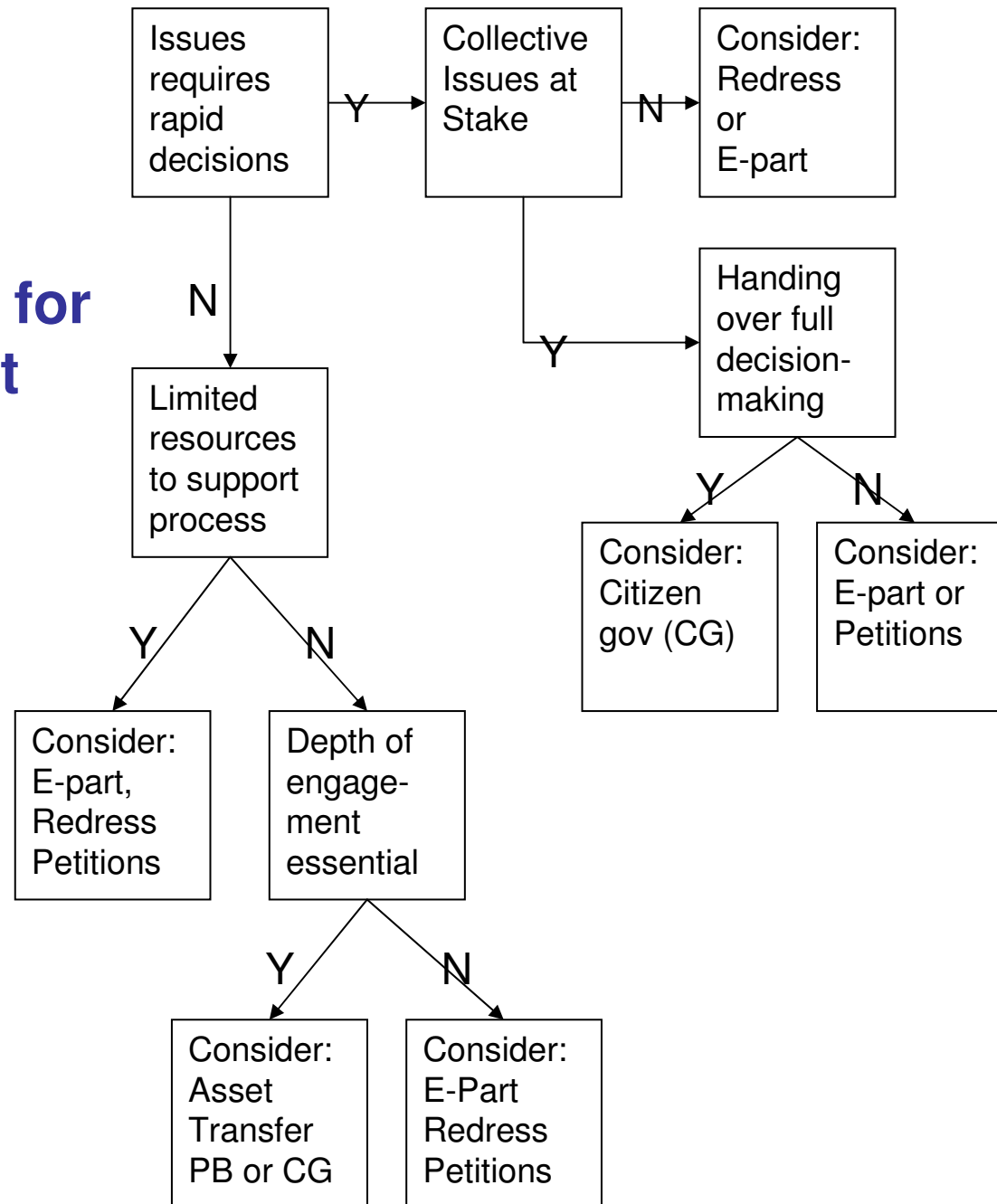
Empowerment tools from citizens' perspective

	Demand on citizens time	Decision-making control	Extent of deliberation	Problem solving capacity
Asset transfer	High	Rests with citizen	High	Collective focus
Citizen governance	High	Rests with citizen	High	Collective focus
E-participation	Medium	Shared	High	Individual or collective focus
Participatory budgeting	Medium	Shared	High	Collective focus
Petitions	Low	Rests with the authority	Low	Collective focus
Redress	Low	Rests with the authority	Low	Individual focus

Empowerment tools: perspective of public body

	Capacity to devolve power	Depth of decision-making	Resource requirements	Time Horizon
Asset transfer	High	Extensive	High at set up, low when running	Long term
Citizen governance	High	Extensive	Medium level of support	Long term
E-participation	Medium	Medium to Low	Medium	Short-term
Participatory budgeting	Medium	Medium	High	Budget cycle
Petitions	Low	Low	Low	Short term
Redress	Low	Low	Low if built into processes	Short term

Decision tree for empowerment choices



Culture change

- If local government is to take seriously a new “duty to involve”, then empowerment has to become not an add-on but a central feature of the management of the organisation.
- The idea of public value
- Redesigning both front end and back end of your public body: increasing the capacity to respond

The 'strange' political context of the White Paper

- Is 'Communities in Control' a White Paper too far?
- A very personal White Paper?
- The collapse of the Government's standing in public opinion
- A government in disarray?

Politics in trouble

- The crisis in politics
- A time for democratic renewal?
- Closing the gap between governed and governors: a local as well as a national responsibility

Empowerment: a non partisan shared vision?

- ‘Cameron Conservatism puts no faith in central direction and control’
- Liberal democrats traditional party of reform and localism
- Greens – act local
- Labour-a party desperate to reconnect
- Empowerment commitments shared?

Can't be implemented thru national legislation

- Requires ownership and engagement at the local level
- Not a policy where top-down targets are likely to have success
- Challenge the 'additional burden' argument
- There are many right ways to empowerment but all must be undertaken with integrity and honesty