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BUILDING A SAFE, JUST  
AND TOLERANT SOCIETY



# CIVIL RENEWAL: A NEW AGENDA

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# INTRODUCTION

The basic purpose of this pamphlet is to outline why I believe that what I term “civil renewal” must form the centrepiece of the government’s reform agenda in the coming years.

Some of the ideas I will talk about have been framed by my own personal experience and the beliefs and commitments I have formed during my political career. Twenty years ago I co-authored a pamphlet for the Fabian Society entitled *Building from the Bottom*, and in 1987 a book entitled *Democracy in Crisis*.<sup>1</sup> Both of these reflected my thinking then, as now, about the critical importance of engaging individuals, families and communities in our democracy, and how that could promote genuine self-determination.

I have subsequently taken forward these ideas in more recent thinking and writing, including pamphlets I published as Secretary of State for Education and Employment, and my book *Politics & Progress*.<sup>2</sup> I hope that in this text I can draw these thoughts together into a comprehensive policy framework for understanding civil renewal and what it means for our efforts to strengthen communities, revitalise our democracy, and provide opportunity and security for all. In the concluding section I will outline some major areas for future reforms, centred on policing, the criminal justice system and the extension of active citizenship.

It is important to emphasise at the outset that this is as much about redefining the relationship of the state to the people it serves, locally as well as nationally, as it is about economic and social regeneration driven by popular engagement.

- 1 David Blunkett and Geoff Green, *Building from the Bottom*, London: Fabian Society (1982); David Blunkett and Keith Jackson, *Democracy in Crisis: the Town Halls Respond*, London: Hogarth Press (1987).
- 2 David Blunkett, *Politics & Progress: Renewing Democracy & Civil Society*, London: Politics, (2001). See also my pamphlets *On Your Side: The New Welfare State as an Engine of Prosperity* London: DfEE (2000), and *Enabling Government: the Welfare State in the 21st Century*, London DfEE (2000).

# ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP – DEMOCRACY AND COMMUNITY IN POLITICAL THOUGHT

I want to start by tracing some ancient history.

The practice of free citizenship as we know it is commonly held to have begun in the *polis* of Ancient Greece. Many of our political concepts are derived directly from the reflections of Greek philosophers upon the political constitutions of the societies in which they lived. It is no exaggeration to say that the practice of free citizenship in Ancient Greece has radiated throughout the history of humankind ever since, inspiring awe, devotion and imitation in equal measure.

Many will argue that there is little we can usefully learn today from the practice of small ancient city states. It is self evident that our globalised society is vastly different from those found in Ancient Greece. Huge economic and social changes have taken place. Our intellectual horizons are unimaginably more expansive. But for all that, I believe that the polis of Ancient Greece has much still to teach us, for reasons that I will spell out in this pamphlet.

The Ancient Greeks conceived of citizenship not as something to be possessed, but as shared membership of a political community. Of course, citizenship did not extend to foreigners or slaves, and women were excluded from the exercise of political power. But within the restricted group for whom it obtained, citizenship expressed something much more than a legal form: it was, as Aristotle put it, a “mode of life”.

In the golden age of Ancient Athens citizens participated directly in collective self-government. Each male citizen over the age of twenty was a member of the Assembly; a town hall meeting of all citizens which took place regularly throughout the year. In addition, there was a popularly elected Council of Five Hundred, which functioned largely

as the executive power with rotating office holders. Ten generals were also directly elected, posts which held important political as well as military power. Each citizen was also enrolled at age 18 to a local democratic unit, the deme, which supplied candidates to a panel of six thousand a year who were drawn by lot to sit on “jury courts” – playing the role of both judge and jury in contemporary terms.

These potentially democratic institutions gave every citizen a direct role and responsibility for participation in public life. It has been estimated that as many as one in six citizens would hold some civic office in any one year. The rest could participate in political discussions at the Assembly of citizens ten times a year. Consequently, the experience of government was one of *self-government* – of fulfilment of the highest ideals through service to the common good. As Pericles famously stated:

“An Athenian citizen does not neglect the state because he takes care of his own household; and even those of us who are engaged in business have a very fair idea of politics. We alone regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as a harmless, but as a useless character; and if few of us are originators, we are all sound judges of policy.”<sup>3</sup>

In this understanding of politics and community, we are in a profound sense only truly free when we participate in shaping public affairs. Those who concern themselves solely with their private business are not genuinely fulfilled or true to their potential. The practice of citizenship develops our capacities and promotes the habits and virtues of mutuality. We are educated by our participation in free and full discussion of public policy. Crucially, the active participation of all ensures that oligarchs, aristocrats or despots do not govern over the citizen, making laws that she or he has had no part in shaping. Tyranny destroys self-government.

By the same token, the community is worthy of loyalty and patriotic commitment. Active citizenship brings with it the cultivation of civic virtues, and the free acceptance of duties and

3 Thucydides, Book 2 quoted in Sabine and Thorson, *A History of Political Theory*, 4th Ed Dryden Press, (1973), from which this sketch of the polis is drawn.

obligations to the rest of the community. The ultimate sacrifice is military service in defence of the homeland.

From this brief sketch we can identify some of the key themes in what has become known as the “civic republican”<sup>4</sup> tradition of political thought, which over the centuries has drawn its inspiration from the Greek city state. These are:

- The idea that individual freedom in its fullest sense depends on *participation* in the government of the community, or more properly, self-government.
- That self-government requires the creation and active maintenance by the community of *democratic institutions* in which all citizens have equal status by law and in which power and the exercise of executive, legislative and judicial functions are widely shared.
- That enduring and genuine citizen participation in public life *require education for citizenship*, including the development of the habits, skills and knowledge needed for active engagement in the community.
- Likewise that active citizens must cultivate *civic virtues*, including commitment to the common good; the free acceptance of duty and obligation; and patriotism in its best sense of loyalty to community and shared values.
- Finally, the recognition of the *public realm* as the locus of the highest achievements of the community, in which citizens have shared pride.

The Renaissance love affair with antiquity saw the reawakening of interest in these democratic ideals in the modern period. Whilst riven by factionalism, corruption and endemic violence, the fragile and brief political autonomy of the Renaissance city states opened up the space for renewed interest in civic governance and the foundations of successful community self-government. Machiavelli,

4 I use this term in its philosophical sense of “action for the common good by citizens”, rather than the common usage of non-monarchical. Countries can be properly described as “civic republican” but still have monarchs.

better known for his cynical advice to princes, also wrote powerfully in *The Discourses* on the importance of civic virtue and the social and political institutions in which it was inculcated and maintained in republican city states. The Renaissance cities also took intense pride in the achievements of their artists, scientists, architects and political thinkers. The strength of the community, as much as the wealth and prestige of its most powerful families, was expressed in its cultural and political attainments.

These ideas were taken up in the 17th and 18th century by admirers of Machiavelli and the ancient city states, such as Thomas Jefferson, and in his own inimitable way, by Jean Jacques Rousseau. In recent years there has been a surge of interest amongst political theorists in civic republican thinking, often associated with communitarian philosophers such as Michael Sandel, Quentin Skinner and Charles Taylor, but also overlapping with strong currents of social capital theory. And I should not neglect to mention my own friend and mentor, Bernard Crick, and his seminal work, *In Defence of Politics*.<sup>5</sup>

These different currents of thought have given us some important new grounds upon which to advance progressive ideas in the new century. I want to look in the following sections at a number of these, and how they contribute to the policy framework I have called civil renewal. First, I will look at how we should understand the concepts of freedom, duty and obligation. Second, I will look at new ways of thinking about asset holding and how it can promote self-determination and social justice. Third, how civil renewal can shape the reform of public services and how an enabling state can further empower communities. And finally, I will look at the next steps in the Home Office's agenda for civil renewal.

5 Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics*, (First ed. Penguin 1962, 5th. ed. Continuum 2000).

## FREEDOM, DUTY AND OBLIGATION

How we define liberty and the ends we pursue in life are crucial to understanding the duties and obligations we have. The progressive tradition is rich in writing on freedom, and the Anglo-Saxon contribution to the literature in particular has been immense. From Hobbes's bleak vision to John Stuart Mill and the late John Rawls in the last century, the canon is monumental. It has supplied us with a wealth of philosophical knowledge and insight.

But despite this proud history, the progressive political tradition has also in my view struggled with how freedom can be reconciled with duty, order and obligation. Our narrative on issues of social order and duty has been much weaker than that of other traditions with, I think, deleterious effects.

By way of explanation, I want to focus here on an influential strand of continental thinking, running from Enlightenment critics of nascent bourgeois society such as Rousseau, through the late eighteenth century Romantic movement and beyond. Compared to its English speaking counterparts, this tradition of thinking about freedom is unashamedly conceptual, more concerned with high order philosophy than mundane empirical reality. But its legacy has been immense, not least because it inspired Marx.

The Romantics held a notion of freedom as radical self-determination. For the Romantics, the arrival of bourgeois, and later industrial, society had atomised human beings, dislocating them from each other and from their organic relationship to the natural world. Humanity had become alienated from itself and deprived of its true potential. A way needed to be found to restore the unity and expressive power of human life.

For some early socialist thinkers, the recovery of freedom lay in a return to communal living on the land. Class struggle, exploitation and the divorce from nature would be overcome if people lived together in self-sustaining agricultural communities. Agrarian

utopianism of this kind exercised a powerful hold on the socialist imagination from the very beginnings of urbanisation. It has its echoes in certain strands of ecological thinking today.

But for Marx and other thinkers, it was simply reactionary nostalgia. Freedom could not be obtained by rolling back the productive forces unleashed by capitalism, but by liberating the potential of man and machine in a society beyond class exploitation. Human beings would become free and truly self-realised when the wealth and power of society was held in common. Beyond the abolition of class, however, Marxism offered little guidance on what freedom in a communist society would look like, for the obvious reason that it would depend on what free human beings would themselves create. Even to ask the question is to invite contradiction.

At root, this is because Marx remained animated by the same romantic concept of freedom – undifferentiated unity and full self-determination – as the early socialist theorists he so mercilessly lampooned. He had no conception of how the pluralism and complexity of contemporary societies, the constraints imposed by the environment and the very stuff of democratic politics itself – debate and dissent – would necessarily persist in any post-capitalist society. Despite his status as a major theorist of how powerful forces structure society, Marx had only the most limited concept of the context, limits or possibilities of a free society. Humanity would simply jump from a state of servitude (class society) to a realm of untrammelled freedom (classless society). Even the state would disappear in a communist world to be replaced by an “administration of things”, as Marx famously put it.

This shows us the manifest difficulty with the definition of freedom as radical self-determination. Why is this important? Because it is an idea that has exerted considerable influence on progressive thinking, offering a vision of social change in which men and women can overcome the constraints of their circumstances to make and remake their society. It holds out the promise of revolutionary change, of unfettered creativity and the construction of a new social order.

But freedom conceived in these terms ultimately has no social context, historical or environmental setting, or bounds of any real sort. It is, as the philosopher Charles Taylor has described it, “unsituated freedom”.<sup>6</sup>

Now this is an important part of the explanation for the failure of progressive thinking to connect with concepts of duty and social order. For duties and obligations arise from the very things that give a context to freedom and underpin our social order: family and community ties, mutual bonds and traditions, our relationship to the environment, and so on. As individuals, the goals we pursue in life; the support we have to achieve those ambitions; the very language we depend on to communicate to others – all of these are underpinned and shaped by mutual belonging to a community. And the limits that we face to our aspirations are not simply constraints imposed by the state or other external agencies that we seek to overcome. They are part of the world, social and environmental, that we inhabit.

## **Traditionalists vs Libertarians**

It is for this same reason that traditionalists give such a privileged place to duty and obligation. For such thinkers, our noblest ideal is to uphold established ways of doing things, to find genuine freedom in observing traditional duties, and to express our loyalty to each other through defending and preserving our historical ways of life. In such a philosophy, social order is fundamentally constitutive of the goals we must pursue.

In the past, these beliefs have given traditionalists a powerful voice on issues such as law and order in the community. They used to speak with intuitive appeal about many of the things that we hold dear and which frame our existence: safe, orderly and respectful communities; shared experiences of history; long established and cherished cultural practices, and so on. These are things that give depth and definition to our lives.

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Charles Taylor for the thrust of the argument in this section. See his *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge University Press, (1979) pp140 – 169.

Yet what has in the past sustained such thinking is also now its undoing. For in advanced economic societies, horizons of tradition have receded. The space for individual choice and personal development has widened. Globalisation has brought with it greater awareness of diversity of belief and practice. Some of the struggles of progressive movements have borne fruit in greater equality for women and ethnic minorities and less discrimination and prejudice against those whose sexuality or beliefs were not accepted in mainstream society. The duties and obligations of previous decades have been subject to critique and change.

Today, the moral agenda of neo-traditionalists is to unravel this social history. But the endeavour is flawed. It is premised on moral codes that have become obsolete and lacking structural support in society. We cannot turn the clock back to a bygone society which in many respects did not exist in the terms claimed for it, and even if it had, would be impossible and undesirable to reinvent. Contemporary life is simply too open, plural and democratic in the widest sense.

Traditionalists fail to distinguish between maintaining a strong commitment to reciprocity and social order, and manning the barricades against any social change. Consequently, they fail to provide people with the support they need to cope with that change, leaving those adhering to their beliefs stranded on the beach as the tide goes out. They cannot grasp how the state can help people to help themselves. They are caught in a timewarp of a past social order which stifled innovation, reinforced inequality and imposed hierarchical structures on people to the detriment of genuine self-determination and equality of opportunity.

Yet a libertarian response to this dilemma is equally problematic. Like the romantics, libertarians can describe very well what we should be free from – oppressive social norms, legal constraints on our actions, and so on. But they struggle to articulate what such freedom is for. Put another way, libertarianism can't help you decide whether a particular lifestyle has value or not. I can be free to choose, but to choose what, and why?

Take the example of drugs. Libertarians argue that mature adults should be free to use hard drugs as long as they do no harm to other people. Implicit in that argument is the belief that a life spent using drugs is valuable if it is a freely chosen one. But this goes against all our moral intuitions. We do not believe that every choice in life is as good as another just because it is a free choice. We judge a life spent using drugs as a wasted and damaged life, not an expression of genuine freedom. We ask ourselves about what is valuable and worthwhile in the choices we make.

Like the revolutionary who aims to reconstruct the entire social order in which he finds himself, the libertarian recognises few limits or context to his or her choices. And for that reason, the freedom won by liberation from all constraint has no content. It is empty.

### **The Possibilities and Limits of Negative Liberty**

How can progressives respond to these challenges, and escape the dilemma of a traditional social moralism that is out of step with the times, and a libertarianism whose consequences would be deeply destructive of social order?

To begin with, we have to return to the *good* reasons why progressives have contested prevailing notions of duties and obligations. We have never accepted that the established social order is just, and that the duties that flow from it are above criticism and change. We look at whether people's rights and duties meet our basic principles of equality and social justice. We reject the logic of equivalence established in traditionalist thought, that order = the existing social order = hierarchy and inequality.

To make such assertions, of course, does require progressives to draw upon the Enlightenment liberal traditions: the concepts and language of human rights, personal freedom, and justice. These are deeply embedded in our political culture and social structures and must be nurtured and protected. They are historic achievements of liberalism, which enable us to challenge oppression, inequality, prejudice and ignorance.

But for the progressive project to reconnect with the values and virtues of duty, social order and obligation, requires us to enrich this liberal tradition – or what we might term in shorthand, following Isaiah Berlin, as the theory of “negative freedom”. There are number of reasons for this.

To begin with, the discourse of individual rights finds it difficult to embrace notions of wider social well being. It cannot tell us much about wider social outcomes, such as social cohesion or justice. It can become highly procedural – a point I will return to later when I discuss the criminal justice system.

In part, this is because negative liberty theorists often neglect the essential foundations of individual liberty in the mutuality offered by the community. The wider community of which we are a part helps to shape our thoughts and actions, and we depend on the support of the others to achieve our goals. So we are not simply free “against” one another; we depend on the community for our freedom and the community is itself the result of the positive actions of free men and women.

Moreover, whilst individual rights always apply a correlate duty upon others not to violate those rights, they do not readily generate other-regarding virtues. Such virtues are important for both social interaction and our relationship to the wider democracy. The negative view of freedom can prevent us from viewing our membership of the political community as a positive good. On the negative view, the state is always external to the individual, rather than the embodiment of a democratic political community of which we are members. It is often seen simply as a threat.

That is why we need to return to my starting point, and utilise the insights of the Athenian tradition. We have to assert that our identity as members of a collective political community is a positive thing. Democracy is not just an association of individuals determined to protect the private sphere, but a realm of active freedom in which citizens come together to shape the world around them. We contribute and we become entitled.

This is a different view of freedom – one that generates civil virtues and duties. To be truly free, we have to take part. And to take part, we have to be educated and inspired. That is why I introduced citizenship education into the school curriculum, so that young people would be equipped with the knowledge, skills and dispositions for active citizenship. It is why we are introducing citizenship and language education for new citizens settling in the UK. And it is why we intend to ensure that all sections of society – middle class professionals included – do their jury service, a civic duty we have sought to protect, not remove from the jurisdiction of active engagement.

Thinking about freedom in this active, participatory way therefore gives progressives a stronger grasp on the loyalties and obligations that sustain democratic communities. A set of policies flow which promote, structure and reward active engagement with the political community of which we are a part. Civic duty and virtue enter our political vocabulary.

However, I'm not advocating a society in which everyone throughout their lives has to be formally engaged in political structures or community organisations. Active engagement can be as much about informal commitment and mutuality within the neighbourhood as about participation in formal processes. As much about wider civil society as it is about political democracy.

## **Beyond the Polis**

There are at least two big objections to this line of argument. The first powerful response is that active citizenship or “positive” freedom is all very well in small, self-governing communities like Ancient Athens, but it is impractical and undesirable in modern, complex and plural societies. In a globalised society of many different beliefs and practices, in which face-to-face communication is limited, and social interaction often highly impersonal, it is simply impossible to govern a community collectively on the participatory model.

Similarly, the modern liberal rights tradition also argues that it is vital to uphold individual or minority rights even when the majority

view of the community may be against them. And the same argument can be made for rights of individual privacy or rights to dissent and object.

These are important objections, and I take them very seriously. We don't live in small, self-governing communities any more. We live in large, plural societies, and we need political and legal systems that enable us to protect individual rights at the same time as we pursue democratic goals. I care passionately about privacy, and the protection of individual liberties. They must not be subject to the whims of politicians or the media. Even in democracies that do not have a formal separation of powers, there must always be a distinction between the legitimate realms of politicians and judges.

What this means is that people like me who argue in favour of positive freedom, participatory democracy and active citizenship, must also marry our beliefs about community well being to concepts of personal autonomy and rights before the law. We have to find common ground between communitarian and "negative" liberal arguments.<sup>7</sup>

That still leaves open the wider question of duty and order. I have shown how we can get a handle on civil duties and obligations. But what about the very basic issues of community life: crime, security, civility and decency? How can we tell a stronger story about those obligations and duties?<sup>8</sup>

7 To do justice to this debate would take far more space than I have here.

8 Recent debates about security and terrorism have highlighted the very real dilemma, and drawn out the paradox, that to protect our liberty we have to take preventative steps which, if we go too far, curtail the liberty we seek to defend. Preventative action can forestall the need for prosecution, but prosecution itself may not be possible in circumstances where the evidence necessary for a full criminal trial cannot be brought, or, as in the case of individual suicide bombers, is simply irrelevant.

## WHAT IS COMMUNITY FOR?

One way of addressing this question is to ask: what is community for in the contemporary world? Broadly speaking, I agree with the US sociologist, Robert Sampson's contention that:

"... we do not need community so much to satisfy our private and personal needs, which are better met elsewhere, nor even to meet our sustenance needs...Rather, local community remains essential as a site for the realisation of common values in support of social goods, including public safety, norms of civility and trust, efficacious voluntary associations, and collective socialisation of the young."

The basic point is that community in the 21st century has changed. We no longer know all our neighbours. We socialise with friends, enjoying our leisure time in different ways and in different places. We construct new communities of interest, rather than place. That doesn't mean community has disappeared, but that communities in today's world are different and meet different needs.

More specifically, we rely on the local community for precisely those things that I have argued the progressive tradition has struggled with – basic social order; decent behaviour; the socialisation of the young into community norms. These are the things that have come most "unstuck" in disadvantaged communities, whilst those who can afford it buy their way out of collective solutions in gated estates patrolled by private guards.

This is where we have to extend the logic of active citizenship still further. For a community to enjoy order and civility, in which young people and adults fulfil their mutual obligations, requires community "ownership" of those duties. Free and equal citizens can accept duties and obligations not simply because they exist, as traditions, but because they are the expression of the life of a

<sup>9</sup> Robert J. Sampson, *What Community Supplies*, p247.

democratic community to which all contribute, and which all have helped shape. Order flows from trust and consent; authority from a democratic recognition that its exercise is needed and justified.

In practice this can mean a whole range of things: tenants on an estate determining the priorities for tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, and running local facilities; young people getting involved in school forums and local youth groups; direct community involvement in offender rehabilitation schemes, and so on. The point is that order is not imposed from above, but comes from bottom up engagement in what happens in a community.

Ultimately, what makes this happen is what I call “community capacity”. Robert Sampson puts it more concretely:

“...community self organisation may be thought of as the ability of a community structure to realise the common values of its residents and maintain effective social controls. Social control should not be equated with repression or forced uniformity. Rather it refers to the capacity of a social unit to regulate itself according to desired principles, to realise collective, as opposed to forced goals.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Sampson op cit, p 253.

## ASSETS, CITIZENSHIP & COMMUNITY

If we want to achieve empowered communities in which social order derives from trust, belonging and genuine mutuality, then we have to pursue a comprehensive agenda for civil renewal.

A major building block of this endeavour must be a focus on the importance of asset holding in contemporary societies. Why? In the year 2000, 50 per cent of families had a net wealth of £600 or less and even more worryingly, 25 per cent were £200 or more in debt. The top one per cent of the population held over 20 per cent of all personal wealth.<sup>11</sup> Inheriting a house in the South East is now like winning the pools, whereas for families with no assets, there is nothing to pass down the generations.

Political theorists in the tradition I have drawn on in this text have argued that a citizen cannot truly be an equal member of the community if he or she is reduced to a state of permanent dependency on the support of others. If a person is simply reliant on income transfers, he is not genuinely free and enabled to participate. Thomas Jefferson, for whom democracy was inextricably linked to the widest possible spread of power and property, argued that “the true foundation of republican government is the equal right of every citizen in his person and property, and in their management”.<sup>12</sup> Concentration of wealth and power would corrupt and eventually destroy democracy, and the best foundation for government by and for the people was the participation of citizens in the active management of their affairs from the local ward to the federal level.

So it is vital that each has an asset stake. Conversely, an over-concentration of assets will undermine the political equality of all

<sup>11</sup> Figures quoted in Will Paxton (ed) *Equal Shares?*, London: IPPR (2003), p3.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Jefferson, letter to Samuel Kercheval, 1816, at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations>.

citizens, and strain the social fabric upon which the health of democracy depends.

## **Community Banking**

Wester Hailes, in West Edinburgh, like many deprived areas, knew that it had a problem with levels of financial exclusion. There were too many people struggling to manage their finances without even the most basic financial products; bank accounts, affordable credit and home contents insurance. But in Wester Hailes local people decided to do something about it. Local community based organisations paid for local people to attend a conference in America to learn from some innovative local banking schemes there. On their return, in a groundbreaking partnership with a major high street bank, they established Britain's first Community Banking Agreement.

The bank provides products and expertise but trusted community-based organisations are crucial in ensuring that the products reach the financially excluded. Since the scheme's launch over 1,000 new bank accounts have been opened and recently a savings and loans scheme has been launched in partnership with the local Housing Association.

However, the importance of individual asset ownership was overlooked throughout much of the last century by those who linked aspirations for equality, dignity and the dispersal of power to common ownership. Until thinking moved beyond the constraints of common ownership, policy development on this issue remained stuck. There was a clear failure to see how a fairer and wider distribution of assets could underpin our social justice aspirations and renew engagement with our democracy.

That has now begun to change. During my period as Secretary of State for Education and Employment, I commissioned longitudinal research which proved powerful evidence for the importance of asset ownership. It showed that people with assets, such as savings and

investments, are less likely to be unemployed or suffer poor mental or physical health, and are more likely to be politically aware.<sup>13</sup>

Subsequent work with the Institute for Public Policy Research took these arguments further, and contributed to the landmark announcement in the 2003 Budget of the new Child Trust Fund. These funds will ensure that every young person starts out in life with an asset stake and will help families save for their future. They mark a fundamental step forward in the development of a welfare state that helps people to help themselves, an investment or enabling state that I will say more about later.

I believe our next goal must be to look at how we can generate direct community control and ownership of assets, such as community centres and other facilities, where that is possible and appropriate. At the heart of this is the importance of recognising and where necessary unlocking assets that already exist in communities – land and buildings, skills and abilities, learning and experience, time and energy, and of course finance. We then all have a responsibility to find the best ways of making the most of those assets through thoughtful investment.

We need to start, as I argued in *Politics and Progress*<sup>14</sup>, with audit processes that identify existing assets in a community, and whether they are being effectively utilised, so that where appropriate, they can be transferred to community control or ownership. We also need to invest resources in building up asset control in communities. At the end of last year I launched the Adventure Capital Fund, a partnership between the Government and key organisations in the voluntary and community sector, which is exploring a new approach to investment in community activity. The Fund provides ‘patient capital’ – investment which recognises the long-term nature of community development and the importance of linking funding with support for organisational development. The response was overwhelming. Thirty eight applications totalling £11 million were received and I announced

<sup>13</sup> John Bynner & Sofia Despotidou, *Effects of Assets on Life Chances*, Centre for Longitudinal Studies, London: Institute of Education (2001).

<sup>14</sup> David Blunkett, *Politics and Progress*, op cit, p125.

in March the investment of £2 million in a fascinating range of community enterprises – from workspace development to waste composting, and from community safety to community development credit unions.

### **Action for Business, Bradford**

ABL in Bradford is using the £300,000 loan it received from the Adventure Capital Fund to help it purchase the Carlisle Business Centre (CBC) in Manningham, which it helped to conceive ten years ago and which it has managed since its completion in 1996. CBC comprises 100 offices, workshops and craft units plus conference, training and storage facilities for small businesses and community and voluntary organisations.

The Centre is a hive of activity in this multi-ethnic community, and taking over ownership will act as the springboard for a range of new initiatives and projects. The acquisition of CBC will secure the capital asset base of ABL, nearly triple its turnover and double its projected surplus. ABL will pay an interest rate of 1 per cent on the loan, and has also committed itself to a 25 per cent annual increase in its small grants budget from the income it generates, to support local community activities.

Of course we are evaluating this programme very carefully, but the early lessons are very encouraging and I have decided to make a further £4 million available to the Fund. The second round of investments will include a main focus on building capacity in black and minority ethnic community organisations, and encouraging growth in community-based service delivery in priority areas such as crime reduction, child care, education and training, and job creation.

## REFORM OF PUBLIC SERVICES & THE STATE

Renewing our communities also requires us to think afresh about the reform of public services. To start with, there are two big questions to address:

- What should be the balance between the powers and responsibilities of central government, and those of local government and other local statutory agencies?
- Who should own and control public services, and can new forms of ownership contribute to higher service standards, and stronger, more engaged communities?

The first question may seem technical, but it actually raises profound issues. One of the central criticisms of community based approaches is that they fail to embrace universal values that are important to us. Some communitarians argue that there are no values, such as liberty or equality, which can command universal assent. Instead, they argue that we should leave it to communities to decide which values to live by, and by extension, what services to provide to citizens, in what measure, and so on.

As I noted above, this can leave individuals and minorities exposed to persecution or oppression by the majority population or those holding political power. That is why any coherent political philosophy must, in my view, protect individual rights, and also respect and sustain pluralism and difference.

But there is another important argument here which is crucial to the debates on public service reform. That is whether empowerment of communities and the devolution of power to people in their localities will lead to inequality: to differences in outcomes that will violate our core principles of social justice for all. In other words, different communities will do things differently. Choices will be made. Service providers will have different

priorities. Some will succeed, others will fail. And that, ultimately, is what has been behind some of the criticism of Foundation Hospitals – that some patients will benefit at the expense of others, and our principles of distributive justice will be violated.

Of course, if you took this argument to the logic of its conclusion, you would centralise all power, and strive as far as possible for standardised outcomes. But on the other hand, it is also clear that we do not want an agenda for empowerment and devolution to lead to persistent inequalities and social injustice.

In my view, we have to marry our belief in community and the wider distribution of power to a continuing commitment to core principles of social justice. Implicit in my argument is the belief that when you put people in control, social justice will be strengthened not weakened and our society will get better. But this can not be a leap of faith. We need to be explicit that we care about social justice, and show that there are inequalities that we will not tolerate. Beyond that, we need to show how the relationship between the centre and the local, and between the state and those it serves, can be configured to ensure that we achieve our objectives.

First, therefore, I would argue that a commitment to a robust concept of equality of opportunity distinguishes Centre-Left governments. We can measure how good our society is by reference to that concept of social justice. One of my core arguments is that the distribution of assets, rather than simple income, is increasingly important to how we understand equality in life chances. Other assets such as educational attainment are also crucial. And consistent with my belief in the centrality of social order to progressive politics, I believe we need also to benchmark equality of opportunity by reference to the experience of crime and anti-social behaviour, which is a major determinant of social outcomes and quality of life.

The next set of questions then relate to how devolution and community empowerment can meet these tests of social justice. I hold the view that in 1997, it was absolutely critical for the new Labour government to drive change in key areas from the centre. Our public services were too weak and under-resourced simply to shoulder the burden of change and improvement without a

significant drive from the centre. Conversely, community capacity in many areas was devastated by the legacy of mass unemployment, crime, ill health and educational underachievement. The opportunity for people to reach their full potential had been seriously undermined.

We are in a different stage of the reform process now, although parts of the public sector evolve at different speeds and have their own histories and particular circumstances. The long term sustainability of the improvements we seek to service delivery, and the quality of life in our communities that these services support, depend both on devolving power and responsibility, and on building up the capacity of local communities to exercise control. More schematically, I believe our new agenda requires us to:

- define basic entitlements and rights to which all have a claim as a function of their citizenship;
- be clear about the obligations that go with such citizenship;
- ensure that information on performance is collected and made publicly available so that all citizens, service users and government agencies can see, clearly and transparently, what is happening in different public services in different communities;
- establish a basic minimum or floor below which central government will not allow standards to fall;
- specify how service providers can be held accountable for poor performance and removed if standards are unacceptable, which is fundamentally about democracy;
- and finally, actively promote the capacity of all communities to engage with the design, delivery and political accountability of public services.

So we need to forge a new relationship between state and citizen, recognising not just that the state cannot do everything but that it should be fundamentally recast: as an enabling state that empowers people to provide the solutions to their own problems. Local communities know better than anyone the problems that matter to them and have the energy, creativity and motivation to tackle them.

It is the responsibility of government to support communities in this endeavour, removing barriers to innovation and enabling local people to get on.

All this is urgent because there are worrying signs that people are retreating from active citizenship. We are all aware of the decline in the numbers of people voting in elections or being active in political parties. Many have referred to this as a ‘democratic deficit’. In a similar vein writers on social capital, such as Robert Putnam, have charted the decline in some forms of civic engagement.<sup>15</sup>

However, there are other indications that whilst there has been a decline in certain traditional forms of engagement, new forms are emerging at the same time. I might not always agree with them, but can not deny that single issue pressure group campaigning is alive and kicking – sometimes me! The Home Office’s Citizenship Survey shows that almost 40 per cent of people are engaged in some kind of civic participation, however small scale – that’s almost 16 million people. Clearly our fellow citizens are not all retreating into a purely private and selfish approach to life. Furthermore, 40 per cent of people believe that they can influence decisions affecting their local areas. So they have not given up on being actively involved in what happens in their neighbourhoods. What this evidence certainly does show is that there is no lack of willingness to be engaged in civic affairs. Equally interesting is that when we asked people about their views on rights and responsibilities almost everyone agrees with the broad principles which underpin a civil society.

15 Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, New York: Simon and Schuster (2000).

## **Barnsley Youth Council**

Late last year, in elections to the Barnsley Youth Council, 32 per cent of all the 13–19 year olds in Barnsley voted. This compared with only 24 per cent of the adult electorate who turned out in Barnsley’s 2003 local elections. The 13–19 year olds they elected come from a range of backgrounds and now have to represent the views of their peers to the local council. But this is not all they do. The Youth Council also remains proactive about consulting its constituents. Using a £50,000 budget and with the support of part-time youth support workers, it organises young people’s ‘speakouts’ and ‘youth summits’ on an ongoing basis throughout Barnsley. The great strength of the Barnsley Youth Council is that gives young people a voice and also seeks to engage them in a meaningful way. Building on citizenship education it seeks to build in our future citizens a sense that they can and should have an impact on their local communities.

What this all indicates is that people desire a civil society based on general and generally agreed principles of rights and responsibilities. That they are willing to be engaged in community affairs and be active citizens. However, they do not always regard traditional or existing institutions as satisfying this desire. As a result they are disengaging from some traditional forms of involvement but some are engaging in new forms. There are indications of a continuing desire for civic engagement but also a desire for reform and modernisation. We must work with them to re-invigorate, and if necessary re-design our existing arrangements in order to ensure that our public institutions and services are fit for the new century.

## **Community Interest Companies & Citizen Involvement in Public Services**

A good example of reform of public services to achieve these goals are the proposed new Community Interest Companies (CICs) which I launched with Gordon Brown and Patricia Hewitt in March 2003. CICs represent a new way to deliver improved public services, supporting social entrepreneurs seeking to pursue enterprise in the public interest, dedicating their profits to the public good with a watertight statutory lock on assets, and creating real opportunities for people in areas where they are needed most.

Within the Home Office's areas of responsibility I can envisage CICs adding real value to the way we deliver because they will involve the community in getting it right. They will add value because of the way they achieve their outcomes as much as what they achieve, by building the capacity of the community and re-investing in it. And that's not to say that the private sector doesn't have a role to play, of course it has. But the public value test should apply equally to them as to the community sector, and indeed I can see real merit in both sectors coming together to deliver some services, bringing together the best of both worlds.

Reform is also needed at the heart of Government. We need to learn from best practice – particularly in the best local government practice – and find new ways to build citizen involvement and participation into our human resources policy and in the training and development of civil servants. An enabling state needs to train public officials to engage with people and facilitate citizen involvement. There are now many well practised ways of doing this, from citizens' panels to community consultation exercises – but we need to systematise our research into what works best, and build that knowledge into how we work and structure government.<sup>16</sup>

Within the Home Office we have made a start. We are developing ways to better equip our staff to engage with communities and embed participation into our policy development and service delivery roles. We are engaging an ever wider range of stakeholders

<sup>16</sup> Gerry Stoker, *forthcoming*, 2003.

and reaching out beyond the usual partners. And we are changing the mix of staff we employ – bringing in fresh talent and ideas through open recruitment. We are looking for new ways for staff to link with communities and local organisations – through a new Out Of Office Experience for all staff as an expectation of their personal development, and getting our top managers ‘back to the floor’. Also we are ensuring staff contribute directly to the community through employee volunteering. We have to build on these foundations to structure citizen involvement and civil renewal into the heart of everything we do.

But we have to take this agenda across Whitehall too. Departments are already engaging a wider range of partners in their work than ever before but they need to go further, recognising the range of people and organisations who share their objectives and have a part to play in delivering them. In particular they need to reach out to the many voluntary organisations and community groups who are much closer to the problems which Government is seeking to tackle, and to involve them as strategic partners, valuing their expertise and knowledge and recognising their ability to devise new and different ways to solve difficult problems. Critically, Government needs to be prepared to resource them to do this and develop their capacity to make the contribution of which they are more than capable, providing they have the right kind of support. We must be prepared to take more risks and not to stifle initiative by excessively burdensome regulations.

## **Renewing Communities & the Public Realm**

Community empowerment also depends on a more fine grained understanding of what holds modern communities together. This is where social capital theory helps. It gives concrete empirical and theoretical content to ideas about community networks, the bonds of trust and belonging, and shared values amongst families, friends and communities. It shows just how important these ties and values are to individual well being – such as educational attainment, health or happiness – and to the community as a whole. Social capital theory claims that communities suffer less crime, anti-social

behaviour and family breakdown, when people know and trust each other, and interact in clubs, associations and voluntary groups.

That is why, when I re-launched the Home Office Active Community Unit (ACU) last year, it was to give a new impetus to our work to build stronger and more cohesive communities. Building capacity within communities is central to the Unit's work, enabling local people to develop their own solutions to the issues which most affect them. Volunteering is central too. Many people are motivated by a genuine concern to help others and to improve the quality of life not just for themselves and their families but for the wider community too. It is our job to support this voluntary effort and to widen the opportunities for people to get involved. This is an issue dear to my heart, as well as core business for CSV and others. Personal volunteering builds up confidence and skills. It raises personal esteem and self worth. It strengthens communities, and helps people learn and care about the wider society and democracy of which they are a part. And it represents, in as clear as possible a way, the value and importance of giving to others.

As I have noted already, we are also strengthening the contribution of voluntary and community organisations. These organisations have a crucial role to play in the re-invigoration of public life. They grow out of the determination of committed people to solve problems, press for change and ensure that all sectors of the community have a voice. They also have a distinctive role to play in service delivery, involving citizens from the start and reaching people who can feel on the margins of society. We want to boost the contribution these organisations can make and enable them to operate from more secure foundations. We are taking forward a programme of work to achieve this and to put in place the modern legal and regulatory framework they need. And we are taking the citizenship agenda into local communities through our work to develop training opportunities in citizenship skills for community leaders.

The ACU now has a much bigger remit than simply to administer grants to the voluntary and community sector, important though that is. Its remit is to lead across Whitehall in the development of community participation. It now has a stretching target to increase

voluntary and community sector activity, including increasing community participation, by 5 per cent by 2006. Its lead role in co-ordinating cross-Government action to deliver this target has been set out in a series of key policy statements.<sup>17</sup>

This work must also inform the development of our neighbourhood renewal policies. We are investing significant resources in the most disadvantaged areas, through our neighbourhood renewal programme and the New Deal for Communities. These policies are focused on tackling the issues that really matter to people in these areas – education, crime and anti-social behaviour, health outcomes, and so on. The challenge, as I see it, is now to ensure that funding and policy responsibility really gets into the hands of local people and community organisations as far as possible, so that they can design and deliver services for themselves. There is accumulating, robust evidence that where people are actively engaged in determining the future of a community, they are happier and more satisfied.<sup>18</sup> What is more, alongside a belief that the community is getting better, we may also begin to see rising house prices in areas in which people are heavily involved in regeneration and community development. For example, it's been reported that house prices are rising faster in Balsall Heath than in any other part of Birmingham, part of which may be attributable to the work of the local community forum. If true, that really would be a process of gentrification that actually benefited existing residents, not newcomers.

In taking forward this agenda, I also believe that we need to reinvigorate the public realm, in both the sense of physical public spaces, and the non-state arena of public debate and opinion formation.

17 HM Treasury (2002) *The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery – A Cross Cutting Review*.

Cabinet Office (2002) *Private Action, Public Benefit – A Review of Charities and the Wider Not-For-Profit Sector*.

HM Treasury (2003) *futurebuilders – An Investment Fund for Voluntary and Community Sector Public Service Delivery*.

18 Bruno Frey and Alois Stutzer, *Happiness and Economics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (2002).

The United Kingdom has a wealth of public spaces, many of them the legacy of the Victorian era. This was a period in which philanthropy, energetic civic pride and pioneering social improvement programmes combined to create squares, parks, public monuments, museums, libraries and buildings that were beacons of community self-worth, and often the focus for democratic activity as much as social interaction.

However, there is general agreement that Britain's public spaces suffered neglect and decline in the last decades of the twentieth century. Too often private wealth sat alongside public squalor. Sometimes disastrous city planning and misguided architectural innovation tore the guts out of historic spaces. Parks and city squares fell into disuse. People stopped using places that had become marred by graffiti, crime, litter, and more latterly, drug misuse. Elsewhere city and town centres became monopolised by pubs and clubs, effectively pushing out family and inter-generational mixed use.

Much has been done in recent years to try and reverse these trends, and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has recently launched a five year improvement programme, *Living Places – Cleaner, Safer, Greener*. It is clear that strong communities need public spaces that they value, take pride in, and use as fellow citizens. Architecture and the built environment are crucial here, building places that people want to use and share. So too are the arts and culture. It is no coincidence that throughout human history, the city states that have inspired so much communitarian thinking also left behind them towering artistic achievements.

The public realm is also a space of dialogue and debate. An active democracy needs an informed public, open to a wide range of views and news from a plurality of sources. I have written elsewhere about the role of the media in public life, and I will not rehearse those views here.<sup>19</sup> But I do want to stress one point: local media, whether newspapers, radio or local internet sites, are increasingly vital in my view to re-engaging people with what is

19 David Blunkett (2001), *Politics and Progress*, op cit, pp134-136.

going on in their neighbourhoods. We need to nurture a vibrant local media.

Moreover, dialogue and debate are vital to community cohesion. I believe that the key to making a success of race relations and community cohesion in the future will be real, practical action to bring people together. A big part of that agenda is a class one. Despite the fact that it has an outdated ring, I use the term “class” as shorthand for the clear inequalities that relate not only to socio-economic status, but also to the many obstacles to social mobility (including those created by housing and geography) that people experience. In addition to racial prejudice, certain ethnic minorities experience a similar lack of mobility to others from comparable socio-economic backgrounds. There is much further work to be done on this aspect of tackling inequality.

In addition, we need to focus better on concrete mechanisms which bring citizens together: integration in public spaces as much as workplaces; English language tuition so that all can share in social interaction and wider public debates; local projects that connect communities in small, but far reaching ways; and confidence building measures that enable people openly to discuss race and culture without fear of stigmatisation and attack. I will say more about this agenda in due course.

## WHERE NEXT?

### Police Reform & Accountability

The police are a vital civic institution. Historically, the office of the Constable was a key local civic position – the citizen in uniform. One of the great strengths of the police in Britain has been its commitment to public service and the way it has worked with communities.

We have done much to strengthen engagement between the police and public over the last six years:

- We have created local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), which bring together the police, local authorities and other partners and which must consult local people in drawing up local strategies for tackling crime and disorder.
- Local policing plans are now key public documents closely linked with Best Value, which requires police forces to consult people in reviewing the effectiveness of each of the services they provide. Police Authorities also now produce three-year strategic plans consistent with the National Policing Plan introduced under the Police Reform Act 2002, which sets out central government's strategic priorities for the police service and the framework within which their performance will be judged. Local policing plans are stimulating a bottom up approach, sensitive to the needs of the locality whilst feeding into the national framework.
- We have started publishing police crime data at Basic Command Unit (BCU) as well as force level to enable local people to compare their crime rates with other comparable towns and cities.

In addition, people's ability to contact the police is improving in many areas; for example through better telephone call handling, although there is still great variation in performance; and, importantly, we have introduced new, independent complaints procedures.

Confidence in local policing remains high in many areas – about three quarters of the public think that the police do a good job. They are still the most highly rated by the public of all the Criminal Justice agencies. But this confidence has declined over the last twenty years. And we must ask on what basis communities are making judgements about the policing they receive – whether levels of confidence are based on informed opinion of actual levels of performance.

I am also concerned that the accountability of the police remains opaque, at best, for most members of the public, and even to many who work in policing and crime reduction. And that opportunities for communities to become more involved in decisions about the way they are policed and participate in local action to tackle problems of crime and disorder remain limited.

The Home Office, working with the Association of Police Authorities (APA), has recently undertaken research with a range of people: of different ages, in different parts of England and Wales, with different backgrounds and ethnicity. The full results will be published in the autumn, but the initial findings reinforce the importance of civil renewal in this area.

- There is no widespread understanding of how the police are accountable. Some believe that they are accountable to the Home Secretary, others to Local Authorities, a few that the police are accountable to no-one but themselves. The truth is that accountability is shared. But almost no-one understands the current arrangements. For example, very few had heard of Police Authorities, let alone understood how they worked.
- And there was a general consensus that the public does not currently have a say in policing decisions.
- Worryingly, despite the investment which Police Authorities and Forces have made in public consultation over recent years, a major challenge exists in public engagement. Only a few participants wanted to know how to give their views on how the police force is run, mainly because they generally felt that no-one would listen to them.

I do not want to single the police out here. Many other public services face the same challenges in engaging the public. But given the vital civic role of the police, I believe that it is deeply concerning that people do not understand the current accountability arrangements and do not feel that they can influence how the police are run. In the past, we have seen how disconnection between police and communities has led to, at best, a mismatch between public priorities and police focus, and at worst, significant tensions between the police and those whom they serve.

So we are strengthening the current system. For example, the Home Office and the APA have again joined in partnership to run an action research project to help Police Authorities engage more effectively with their local communities. We are investing almost £1 million in this project over the next 3 years, and I would like today to invite Police Authorities to participate in this work.

Some of this funding will be used to set up 3 pilots to test, on the ground, more innovative ways of building constructive, high-quality dialogue and consultation between Police Authorities and the public. Alongside these pilots, we will establish a National Practitioner Panel to drive progress and spread learning in the area of consultation and customer feedback, and to build on what our recent research has shown us.

The Home Office and the APA are contacting all Police Authorities today to invite applications to be involved in this project. I am confident that together we can make significant progress in building and supporting more successful ways of involving communities in policing locally. But I also believe that we must be open to a radical long term look at these issues, working with Chief Constables and Police Authorities.

Other countries have a range of accountability mechanisms. In much of Continental Europe there are clearer systems of national accountability. In the United States, there is a range of local accountability mechanisms, including directly elected Sheriffs. We need to look at whether there is a role for more direct democratic engagement in setting the direction of local policing in this country. We must recognise, of course, a constructive tension

between national consistency in performance and local responsiveness of police forces.

I believe that there are four principles which should guide our consideration of these issues:

- i. That the political impartiality of the police and day-to-day operational independence is preserved, so that they act in the best interests of the entire community and inspire public confidence, and people are clear about the balance between the role and powers of Ministers and the independent operational activities of police forces.<sup>20</sup>
- ii. That accountability mechanisms should support the delivery of a more effective police force. There is considerable evidence that clear accountability mechanisms are good for effective performance, as the Treasury Public Services Productivity Panel highlighted last year. Other research has suggested that better community engagement can help public services target services better to reflect local needs and improve the quality of decision making.<sup>21</sup>
- iii. That local people are clear about who is responsible for tackling crime in their communities and can make a genuine impact on local priorities and contribute to holding the police and other agencies accountable for effectiveness. Of course, there are issues around tackling serious and organised crime and terrorism which require a more national outlook. But people are extremely concerned about crime in their area. For example, one survey found last year that people identified low crime as the most important factor in making an area a good place to live – 59 per cent said it was important, compared to 39 per cent who identified health and 27 per cent transport.<sup>22</sup> It is important that they have a chance to act on this concern. As part of this

<sup>20</sup> Readers should refer to my speech in Cardiff in February 2002 on this issue.

<sup>21</sup> Audit Commission, *Listen Up! Effective Community Consultation* (1999).

<sup>22</sup> MORI/Audit Commission *Quality of Life Indicators Project* (January 2002).

consideration, we must also reflect the accountability of CDRPs and Community Safety Partnerships<sup>23</sup>.

- iv. That people need understanding in order to effectively hold and use power. So alongside improving the mechanisms for influencing local policing, the public need better information on how their local police operate, including their effectiveness in tackling the problems that most concern them.

Building on these principles, I am today, as part of the civil renewal agenda, calling on the police, Police Authorities, CDRPs and others who care deeply about policing in this country to engage in debate about what more could be done to clarify and strengthen engagement and accountability.

I am open to a number of ideas. There are likely to be some changes that can be made in the short term. For example:

- I am keen to explore the wider dissemination of meaningful performance data. We have already started down this road with the publication, earlier this year, of the first police performance monitors. But the research which I mentioned earlier indicates that people are interested in performance at a very local level. We must do more to satisfy this demand. We need to consider how we get the relevant information out to communities in a form that is accessible, meaningful and will enable people to compare and contrast their local police's performance. The police should not be afraid of meaningful comparators, but equally we must be clear who is responsible for outcomes.
- I would also like to see more done to promote and better use the services of community and voluntary sector organisations involved in crime reduction work such as Neighbourhood Watch, Victim Support, tenants organisations and development trusts. I believe that by strengthening partnership working between the

<sup>23</sup> 376 CDRPs have been established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. They are key to engaging local agencies and communities in drawing up and implementing strategies to reduce crime and disorder in local areas. Local authorities and chief officers of police are jointly tasked with this function. Other public agencies, such as health, probation and education must co-operate in formulating and delivering strategies.

police and community organisations to achieve common goals, both can be strengthened as civic institutions and jointly promote community engagement.

- The visibility, locally, of police leaders and others responsible for tackling crime and disorder is important. I would welcome thoughts on how, in the short term, local police commanders at BCU level can raise their profile in the communities they serve. And similarly as regards Chief Constables and Police Authorities.
- Coupled with heightened local visibility, I am keen to explore further the empowerment of local police commanders through increased delegation.

In addition to changes which might be made in the short term, I am interested in exploring options for strengthening local accountability and engagement in the longer term.

Should, for example, police authorities have a directly elected element or even be entirely elected?

Within the context of work to explore greater delegation to local police leaders (BCU Commanders), I am keen to see whether more can be done to strengthen and clarify accountability arrangements at the local level. There might be a range of options here from extending and formalising local consultative arrangements, such as neighbourhood panels; to the introduction of BCU level plans and annual reports on achievement; to having a more formal overseeing local body with a democratic element, possibly directly elected. For any new arrangements or body, I would be interested to hear views on whether they should apply to the police alone, or both police and the wider crime reduction activities which are being driven by CDRPs.

I should note at the end of this section that we are also looking at the whole issue of how we widen the pool, and provide greater encouragement, to those capable of taking on senior leadership roles in the police service. As I have seen myself from visits overseas, this is a crucial area in terms of both providing new avenues for those with talent to take on senior management and

leadership roles, and for ensuring that we have the best possible quality at the top of the police service.

Overseas recruitment is taken for granted in other areas of public service, industry, and commerce, but appears to be considered as an aberration when it applies to the police service. What is worse is the fact that any kind of internal discussion to draw up proposals is immediately put into the public arena prior to any formal consultation and in a way that makes very difficult the sensible consideration of new ideas.

This is not a gripe. It is a general problem for government and good governance. The moment you consult informally you open yourself up to premature dissemination of the material in a way designed to dislocate the very consultation that stakeholders seek. This is something that we will need to address for the future, as it makes consideration of new ideas, the dissemination of new thinking, and the genuine dialogue that is necessary to gain consensus, very difficult.

## **Reform of the Criminal Justice System**

Civil renewal must also play a crucial role in our reform of the criminal justice system. People rightly put their faith in the state and the justice system to uphold the rule of law, and to uphold our shared values. But to be able to represent these shared values and to say that the justice system works for all, it must be rooted firmly in the society it serves.

It must be visible and representative of the people and it must work on their behalf – consistent, of course, with the legitimate and necessary separation of executive, legislative and judicial functions in a democracy.

People vote in order to make a difference to the world they live in, and that includes crime and justice. If they are to have faith in the democratic process, and to participate fully in it, they must see their will, embodied by democratically elected representatives and the legislation passed by them carried out.

I believe strongly that the political independence of the judiciary is vital to a healthy democracy. That is important to restate.

But independence does not mean that the judiciary should be divorced from the public; nor should it be out of balance with the legislature and executive. I want to reform the criminal justice system so that it delivers justice effectively for the good of our society as a whole, and I want the legal profession to do it with us.

We have of course been undertaking considerable reform of the criminal justice system recently. The proposals in the current Criminal Justice Bill will go a long way to create a more transparent, joined up system that commands the respect of the public it serves, by delivering faster and more effective justice for victims and the wider community.

But there is still more to do. While we are making good progress in improving the level of public confidence in the criminal justice system, we still have a way to go. Figures from the British Crime Survey show that fewer than half the people believe the criminal justice system is effective in bringing people to justice. A lack of faith in the system to administer justice inevitably leads to the reluctance of victims and witnesses to participate in the system, a breakdown in stability and order, and the potential for vigilantism.

I am concerned that, despite our recent efforts to redress it, the balance of justice is still tipped against victims. I want to do more to bring them into the focus of the system, rather than treat them as bit-players, which is why I want victims' representatives on the new Sentencing Guidelines Council, and why we have established a Victims Advisory Panel. It cannot be right that 40 per cent of witnesses want nothing further to do with the criminal justice system. And it cannot be right that so many victims have to go through the civil courts to obtain justice that could not be achieved in the criminal courts.

For confidence to grow, the system must be accessible and accountable to local people first and foremost, which means it should be open, transparent and firmly rooted in the community. Victims and witnesses are more likely to come forward and participate in a system which they feel listens and responds to them, values their contribution and works on their behalf.

The relationship between the government and citizens, embodied here by the principle of lay involvement in the criminal justice system, is at the root of our reforms to make it harder for people to avoid their civic duty of jury service and is underlined by our commitment to the magistracy in giving them greater sentencing powers. I want to see a more representative magistracy that can really be seen to reflect the community. Yet, it is insufficient to rely on jury service and the magistracy to be the bastions of lay involvement in a criminal justice system. We must engage individuals and communities more widely in the system so they no longer feel like impotent spectators.

But people are unlikely to feel that this vast complex judicial machinery is still relevant to them when it seems so far removed from their communities and the problems at the root of their concerns. When it is conducted in the costume and language of another world, and does not seem to secure the outcomes they want. That is why I welcome the recent debate initiated by the Lord Chancellor on the issue of modernisation of the judiciary. This modernisation can go further with greater accountability and openness over appointments and recruitment. This should ensure that, whilst individual rights and the due process of law are upheld, a gap does not open between the judiciary and the wider social good that it serves.

In addition, the Attorney General is looking at the way we can boost the profile of senior public prosecutors, so that they command the sort of standing they do in the US, and are much more visible to the communities they serve. We want to reinforce the idea that public prosecutors play a vital role on behalf of the community, and that they should be more proactive and accountable for their performance to the community. As the Attorney General has advocated, they should play a wider role in the whole justice process than they do presently, participating in crime prevention and rehabilitation, and taking a real interest in the results of their cases. That is why he has very helpfully proposed that prior to any more fundamental changes, he will discuss how best to lift the profile of the Crown Prosecution Service at a local level, including consideration of changing its name.

This year the CPS has been piloting new arrangements with the police which meant they provided advice at all stages of the investigation, helping to plug gaps in the evidence, advising on lines of inquiry, and getting the cases into shape before charge. The results have been dramatic; more convictions and guilty pleas, fewer cases discontinued, fewer wasted hearings. The key has been effective co-operation at a local level and a willingness to set aside the traditional roles and ways of working. We are interested in exploring how similar partnerships between other agencies, including local authorities, could help tackle anti-social behaviour.

It is all very much about local justice and engagement with communities and citizens. That is why, with the other criminal justice ministers, I am bringing the pioneering US community court model over here. It is about bringing the court and community together to address local problems effectively through crime prevention, victim assistance and community-building activities. Community Justice Centres, such as the successful one I was able to visit in Red Hook, New York, are a resource for the entire neighbourhood, dealing proactively in crime prevention. They also use their facilities to educate the local community on ways to reduce the risk of crime, how the criminal justice system works and the consequences of offending, as well as to re-engage young people and those at risk in preventative programmes.

The centres use a “problem solving” approach to the cases that come before them, providing a holistic response to each individual case. They tailor punishments and rehabilitation schemes to reflect the damage done to the local neighbourhoods as well as the individual, and design them to reduce re-offending and engage the perpetrator with their own community. Low-level offenders can be sentenced to paint over graffiti, clean parks and maintain public housing, providing visible reparation to the community.

In Red Hook, a team of volunteers based at the justice centre, began the work to reclaim public spaces in the community before it was up and running, undertaking neighbourhood clean-ups, and they now often lead on organising community sentences. They are also responsible for the annual community survey, which has shown

an approval rating for the justice centre exceeding 70 per cent compared with ratings in the low teens for courts in surveys done before the justice centre opened. Volunteers also accompany young people to clubs and other public spaces in the evening. The centre has become a force for change in the community that works to reduce crime, support victims and witnesses and transform the relationship between government and its citizens.

Having a relevant, effective, representative and accountable criminal justice system is vital in a flourishing civil society. Only then will communities feel that the system is working on their behalf and put their trust in it.

## **A new Centre for Active Citizenship**

The ideas I have been putting forward in this pamphlet offer a framework for policy development. Taking them forward will need a lot more thought and analysis. We need to engage those who are already thinking about these issues, in the universities, in local service delivery organisations, in think tanks and in local and central government, to help develop them further.

I have indicated what I see as some of the implications for the Home Office policy areas, but we need to think much more broadly about the practical implications for all areas of government and the delivery of public services. This will involve bringing together thinkers and doers in a partnership that can help drive forward change. We will need clear thinking, research and purposeful action brought together.

I would like to see a new Centre for Active Citizenship that can take on this role. This does not have to be set up in a special building or physical location somewhere, and should not just involve a limited set of people.

We need a centre – a consortium or structured partnership – that can draw in a wide range of people to work creatively together. We, in the Home Office, can help create such a vehicle for change but we will need others to help us. I hope that Ministerial colleagues will join in, and that the universities like Sheffield, Manchester,

Leicester and others who already have considerable expertise in this area will want to help give practical force to their ideas.

I propose to work with the Economic and Social Research Council to find ways of encouraging and enabling such support from the research community, building on their substantial existing programmes. I hope that think tanks will help develop this work, and that voluntary bodies and those involved in providing public services will want to engage in this process of reform.

In creating this centre of excellence we would be building on solid foundations – the work of organisations like the Community Development Foundation, the Scarman Trust, the Citizenship Foundation, and CSV itself with its many years of experience. Likewise, new bodies such as the social entrepreneur endowment trust, UnLtd. But also the work of groups like the Balsall Heath Forum, Royds Community Association and Ibstock Community Enterprises – to name but three – who have shown how far a good mix of innovation and nous can go.

To mark our commitment, I have decided to pump prime the Centre for Active Citizenship with £1 million.

## CONCLUSION

In this pamphlet I have sought to build on my previous policy thinking to outline a clear framework for civil renewal – one that can give definition and purpose to the next wave of government reform, and sustain us deep into the 21st century. Terms such as “civil renewal” and “active citizenship” may conjure up images of do-gooding or sitting in endless local meetings, and I am happy if need be to find a new vocabulary for this agenda. But whatever the terminology, the crucial policy imperatives are clear. We must aim to build strong, empowered and active communities, in which people increasingly do things for themselves and the state acts to facilitate, support and enable citizens to lead self-determined, fulfilled lives. In this way, we will genuinely link the economic and social, the civil and formal political arena, the personal with the public realm. I hope this pamphlet takes us one further step on that road.









